ABSTRACT

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| Title of Dissertation: | THE CRITICAL CULTURAL CYPHER: HIP HOP'S ROLE IN ENGAGING STUDENTS IN A DISCOURSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT |
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Hip Hop culture has been much maligned in the field of education for its disruptive role in the lives of youth.  As such, education has ignored a cultural force that has had a major role in the development of youth identity.  This study seeks to capitalize on the relationship between youth and Hip Hop culture through the engagement of high school students in a series of liberating intergroup dialogues with Hip Hop at their center.  Based on the Cultural Circles of Paulo Freire and the theoretical frameworks of Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory, the Critical Cultural Cyphers – a Cypher is a Hip Hop term that describes a site where valued knowledge is constructed – were designed to cultivate the participants' development of three areas: 1) the development of counter-narratives 2) the use of a language of critique and transcendence, and 3) the development of *consientização* or critical consciousness.

Employing the methodology of critical ethnography, this study engaged eight high school seniors through a series of formal and informal interviews, mainstream academic classroom observations, and their participation in the inter-group dialogues. Within the dialogue, the participants attempted to 1) negotiate and integrate their

constructions of definitions of Hip Hop culture, 2) identify problems within Hip Hop culture, and 3) develop individual and collective actions the group could take towards the resolution of the identified problems.

As the profiles of the participants are shared, the findings suggest that as the participants engaged themselves and the others in an interrogation of Hip Hop culture, the participants went through a transformation that changed the ways in which they interacted with their lived environment. The Critical Cultural Cypher is shown to have implications for educational research, teacher education, school administration, and classroom teachers.

THE CRITICAL CULTURAL CYPHER: HIP HOP'S ROLE IN ENGAGING
STUDENTS IN A DISCOURSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT


by


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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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DEDICATION

*For my mother,*

*I can see your smile and hear your laugh and this continues to guide me*

*For my father,*

*You have given me the strength to love which can overcome all obstacles*

*I miss you both*

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In my life, I have tried to take a piece of everyone that I have encountered and incorporate those small pieces into who I am today.  In this sense, I am all of you and you are all of me.  I want to thank everyone who has helped me reach a point in my life where it all is beginning to make sense – Thank you all.

I want to begin by personally thanking all that have moved on to another plane of existence, but still have time to visit me in my dreams: Grandma and Grandpa, Nana and Papa, Mom and Dad, and countless others.  You are my true inspiration.

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Finally, I would like to thank the teacher and all of the participants in this study. Your words and your stories are all important and I hope I have done them justice here. I am a better person today having met and worked with you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# List of Tables and Figures

**Chapter One:**

**Introduction**

From its onset, Hip Hop has been inextricably linked to critical thought. With

its roots in West African culture and the identity of the griot/bard (Keyes, 2002),

spreading through the Caribbean (George, 2000; Rose, 1994; Kitwana, 2002) up

through the Mississippi Delta (Woods, 1998) and re–membered[1] in the mid 1970's in

the streets of New York, early Hip Hop pioneers gazed upon their experience of

living in poor conditions and began a running dialogue with each other that took

many forms. Black and Brown urban communities were plagued by "shrinking

federal funds, affordable housing, [and] shifts in the occupational structure from blue

collar manufacturing toward corporate and informational services" (Rose, 1994, p.

31). Through dance, art, poetry and music, a critique of these systems of oppression

began in a language that those connected to the oppression could understand. And

understand they did. Today Hip Hop exists as a main feature of the soundtrack to a

new global and corporate culture, but embedded within Hip Hop is the critical

discourse upon which it was founded. This discourse is buried beneath corporate

control and uncritical thought, but it is still there.

As Hip Hop was being born, the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (2003) was

tapping into similar pathologies as were found in the streets of New York.  Freire

investigated his native land of Brazil, focusing his energies on the field of education

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[1] The concept of "re-membering" is one which emerged from the death, dying and bereavement literature and it "emphasizes the ongoing story of relationship… Drawing on practices of story telling, narrative legacy and rituals, these practices aim to keep relationships alive… In the flexibility of stories, relationships can even develop new qualities and enhanced dimensions." (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004) I am using re–member here as to play with the word remember: I am using it to mean both to recall and to make adjustments to the focus group.  The members of the culture are different as Freire emphasized rural Brazilian culture whereas I focus on Hip Hop culture, but the foundational concepts remain strong.

where he identified the problem of students being systematically relegated to the role of object rather than the more empowered position of subject. In other words, students were often disempowered by schools and were, as a result, not afforded the chance to actively construct their own realities. The movement away from critical consciousness reflects a pattern of systematic oppression/control prevalent in U.S. schools which has led us to a point where many students seek 1) their rights to be viewed as a subject (Freire, 2003), 3) the rights to their humanity, and 3) their education outside of the classroom (Dimitriadis, 2004). Hip Hop culture has been a space where the youth of today have found identity, humanity, and a place to develop their critical consciousness through the engagement of humanizing discourses such as art, music, dance or other creative expression.

Kitwana (2004) estimates that number of Hip Hop consumers in the United States has reached approximately 45 million people; roughly 15% of the entire population is actively consuming Hip Hop music. Factor in the fact that Hip Hop music is being used by countless corporations to promote products; it would not be a reach to estimate that a majority of people in the United States today are being influenced by Hip Hop music (Kelly, 1997). When focusing on youth culture, Cohen (2007) found in a national survey that 58% of Black youth listen to rap music every day, compared to 45% of Hispanic youth and 23% of White youth. Extrapolating those numbers further, they found that "only 3% of Black youth report never listening to rap music, compared to 19% of White youth and 12% of Hispanic young people" (p. 15). These numbers show that a significant majority of the youth today are at least connected to Hip Hop.

As educators begin to grapple with the growth of Hip Hop, they are finding ways to tap into Hip Hop's power and its potential as a tool for the development of critical consciousness. Hip Hop culture has begun to creep into the classrooms (as well as more informal sites of education) in three distinct ways. First, Hip Hop has found its way into after-school programs where the teachers are taking an entrepreneurial approach, literally teaching students to become participants in the Hip Hop industry by working with the students as they construct their own music and expressions (Anderson, 2004). Second, Hip Hop has been used inside formalized classrooms to scaffold subject matter at both the elementary and secondary levels (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Third, Hip Hop is used in classrooms to introduce and begin a critical analysis of systemic forms of oppression that pervert our society (Williams, 2005).

In this study, I investigated how Critical Hip Hop pedagogy (Williams, 2005) was used to engage students in a discourse of enlightenment, which helped to cultivate the development of components related to a consciously critical identity. Identity is a fluid term and its employment as a researchable variable is tentative at best (Blumer, 1969), but Sfard and Prusak's (2005) definition of identity as narrative helps move this research away from the investigation of identity as a stagnant construct towards the study of students as active agents who can take control of the construction of their own being. The "critical" component in a consciously critical identity lies with the students' ability to develop an understanding of how they interact with oppression in their lived reality. This critical identity is consciously and actively constructed through an interrogation of Hip Hop culture, which can be seen

as a collective discourse understood and influenced by youth culture in the United States.

Drawing on the literature of Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory, I attempt to develop a coherent understanding of the processes by which students develop a critical understanding of their own lives and how this understanding shapes their development of skills related to academic achievement in mainstream academic settings: the use of a language of critique and transcendence, formation of counter-narratives, and the development of consientização which translates loosely (loosely because there is no exact translation from Portuguese to English) to the development of the awakening of a critical awareness. In this introduction, I first look at the state of culturally responsive educational research and why this study is important. I then provide a brief introduction to both the Critical Cultural Cypher (The C³ Project) and the student participants in this study. I then look at the significance of this study in relation to education today as well as my development as a gendered, classed and raced researcher. Finally, I outline the chapters of this dissertation in order to give the reader an overview of the ideas to come.

**Purpose of the Study**

The education of students of color has long been a source of debate and consternation (DuBois, 1996). Black and Brown students continue to experience relatively limited success in an educational system that was originally designed for students from European backgrounds (Woodson, 1933; Shujaa, 1994). Issues of systematic educational failure and reform are being addressed on multiple levels. Reforms in education include the Federal Act *No Child Left Behind* and its associated

practices that have forced teachers to try to increase the amount of knowledge students' can regurgitate for high-stakes tests. Add to this the theoretical movements and practices that seek to address diversity through additive approaches without challenging the roots of marginalization (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995); generations of Black and Brown students are continuously lost in the system. Also, under considerable debate is the validity and authenticity of standardized tests that are being utilized, in many cases, as the only measure of school success (Malloy & Malloy, 1998), especially since research indicates that many Black and Brown students do not feel connected to schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students of color often find it difficult to see themselves in the instructional materials (King, 1990), find it difficult to see themselves in positions of power within the public K-12 educational system where 87% of the teachers are white women (Sleeter, 1996), and find waiting for them at schools, tests that do a better job testing their socio-economic level than they do what they have learned (Schultz, 1993). We are not at a loss for explanations of students' performance, which include genetic deficit models (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), cultural deficit models (Lewis, 1968, McWhorter, 2003; Ogbu, 1992), as well as more progressive cultural discontinuity models (Ladson-Billings, 1995), but many of these explanations, when placed under critical scrutiny, prove to be inadequate (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

K-12 education has not changed much in the last 100 years (Cuban, 1993) and still utilizes a model that strives to maintain education's dominant and decidedly middle-class, Eurocentric discourse (Banks, 1993; Murrell, 2002; Sleeter, 1996). When looking at students from a middle-class European background, it is

understandable that these students will succeed when using measures that are aligned with a Eurocentric cultural philosophy. However, many students, by virtue of their cultural affiliations, are finding themselves on the wrong side of the cultural hegemony that is prevalent within school systems. The discourse of mainstream academic culture poses that students' success is based on the merits of their work and is devoid of systemic advantages (Thompson, 2000). The domination of this discourse leads followers to reproduce the same societal stereotypes that are rampant today, which maintain the same oppressor/oppressed paradigm that is prevalent throughout the world (Crossley, 2005). This system oppresses its participants as they are aware of only one cultural possibility and only one correct way to be in a mainstream academic setting. This said, it is not too far a reach to deduct that all students across racial lines, gendered lines, and classed lines, by virtue of being participants in an oppressive system of education, are oppressed due to the lack of opportunity to construct multiple ways of knowing. One way of addressing this reproductive cycle of oppression is to engage students in a critical analysis of the system and its effects. The classroom is a logical location for such analysis because of the classroom's connections to knowledge and knowledge construction.

**Statement of the Problem**

The integration of Hip Hop into mainstream academic settings has faced many obstacles, namely commercial Hip Hop's use of misogynistic, homophobic, ultra-violent, drug- promoting and greed- supporting lyrics. If one were to look at the top selling and most popular Hip Hop artists, it would not be hard to find examples of negativity strewn throughout the music. Academics (McWhorter, 2003; Sowell,

2005) and journalists (Crouch, 2003; Malkin, 2007) have all piled on Hip Hop music for its negative impact on youth culture and, at times, it is easy to see why. Critics of Hip Hop music are quick to look at the achievement gap between students of color and White students and label Hip Hop as one of the primary factors for African American students' lack of success. Rap music specifically has been targeted as some say that it "retards black success" (McWhorter, 2003 p. 4). The criticisms of Hip Hop music are generally laid at the doorstep of the Hip Hop artists. While there is a responsibility that the artist holds in the creation of the music, what is rarely mentioned is that Hip Hop is now a multi-billion dollar industry, and the Hip Hop artists barely see a fraction of the profits from the sales of their albums. Any critique of Hip Hop must include a critique of Capitalism due to its success in the global economy. Artists today face a bottom line where corporations have found a successful formula for the promotion of Hip Hop culture to mainstream America, and artists face the tough choice of following the script or being replaced by somebody who will (Hurt, 2006). When the moral agenda is being enforced, it is often the artist who is used as a scapegoat for all of the ills plaguing Hip Hop culture, but we must begin to climb higher on the decision-making ladder to find culpability. What is needed is a systemic, critical, and complex look at Hip Hop culture to analyze its effects and influences on youth today.

**Research Questions**

Building upon my analysis of the literature, my classroom practice, and my cultural affiliations, I developed three sets of questions. Each question deals with a

different unit of analysis including: student understandings, school structures, and pedagogical reform and learning.

1. How do students' understandings of Hip Hop culture shape their lives, their identities, and their schooling?

2. How can Hip Hop be used in a school setting to help the students challenge systemic and structural domination?

3. How can Freireian methodology infused with Hip Hop culture be used to train teachers to better integrate students' lived culture into their pedagogical practices and curricular choices?

**Description of the Critical Cultural Cypher**

The Critical Cultural Cypher (The C³ Project) was a reconstruction of the work of Paulo Freire (2002).   In the Brazilian context, Freire (2002) wanted to design a project which would attempt to move participants from naiveté to a critical attitude and at the same time teach reading.  Literacy was the first step toward the main goal of the democratization of a culture.  In this sense, this research is delving into the concept of cultural literacy whereas the students are able to read, write and act as subjects upon their culture rather than having their culture act upon them as objects.

In The C³ Project, the role of teacher was replaced by a coordinator while the students, instead of pupils, were referred to as group participants. Lectures were replaced with a more humanizing dialogue, and units of study retained the terminology of learning units.  As a researcher, I took on the role of participant observer/researcher while an English teacher from Westside High School[2], in Southern California served as the coordinator of the Cypher sessions. In the Cypher

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[2] Pseudonym used

sessions, using a democratic dialogic method, learning units were explored for the purpose of either clarification of understandings/constructions or to seek actions resulting from the clarifications/constructions. The participants themselves brought forth the generative themes of these learning units. These themes were supported/schematized by both the coordinator and the researcher and presented back to the participants in the form of a dialogue. In other words, the coordinator and the researcher connected the themes to a more formalized language of critique and transcendence used to name and overcome certain forms of oppression. In this sense, the Cypher served as an arena in which culture was discussed as "a systematic acquisition of [valued] knowledge, and also the democratization of culture within the general context of fundamental democratization" (Freire, 2002 p. 81). In other words, this Critical Cultural Cypher became a place where the participants actively constructed knowledge that was valued by the participants and the coordinators of the circle.

In the Cypher sessions, my main role was to record the sessions and serve as an assistant to the coordinator. At times, I entered into the dialogue when I had some knowledge that the participants might have found useful or valuable. My interactions were consistent with the role of a participant-observer in the Critical Cultural Cypher. Participant observation is a research strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As a participant observer, I was able to cultivate personal relationships with the researched in order to gain access to previously inaccessible

cultural insights. I also had the opportunity to sit down with the coordinator of the Critical Cultural Cypher to debrief each Cypher session, which gave me the opportunity to explore and push the coordinator to reflect on and integrate liberating learning units.  As a participant observer, I was very conscious of my presence, and I am very aware that I cannot separate myself from the study. At the same time, I was able to guide my own participation in ways that allowed me to gain the confidence of the participants, which gave me access to valuable and otherwise inaccessible information.

This format, as a whole, was in stark contrast to a classroom setting even though it ironically took place inside of a classroom. The Cypher sessions, in the very same setting as a mainstream academic class, provided a space where knowledge was actively constructed with contributions from participants, coordinators and researchers all standing on equal ground as learners.

**Description of Participants[3]**

*Brian[4]*

It's like a throne that he don't even own

He won't sit down give him a crown he just throws it around

It's like a joke he's like a king but he don't do a thing

He don't want the diamonds, want the gold or want the jewelry

He don't want the room and he don't want the loot he's in it for the sport

Runnin circles 'round his competition on the court

He appreciates your support but he ain't beggin for it

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[3] Each of the songs that introduce each participant was chosen by participants as a "theme song" from Hip Hop culture that represented who they feel they are.
[4] All participants' names are pseudonyms.

And you can love and you can hate it

But you can't ignore it, you can't be that ignorant

Warrior Pt 2 – Lloyd Banks (2004)

Brian grew up in an apartment on the fringe of Westside City with his older brother, father, mother and his grandparents all living in the same apartment. Brian's parents are into real estate and are pretty successful, affording him a private school education growing up. Brian is a first generation Asian-American (his father is from Hong Kong and his mother is from China) but says that he "fits in more with Hip Hop culture than Asian culture." Brian went on and said that "Asians are always really traditional like they only care about their image but not what they really are. Where black people or their culture tends to be like what they really are and not what society wants them to be" In school, Brian is successful but can often be found in the back row of his Advanced Placement courses sleeping. His teacher says that he "considers [the AP Economics course to be] one of the hardest classes on campus but [Brian] is doing well on the tests and the outside work. The teacher's philosophy is that if Brian is doing well, "[he is] not gonna disrupt him, but [he] would like him to be more engaged."

*C.J.*

What'chu gon' do when I bend the block

Pull up on that ass in a brand new drop

Speakers on blast with tremendous knock

TV's in the dash, rims just won't stop

You need to be down with a pimp like me

I ain't turnin down nuttin but my collar ya see

I'ma leave you with my number you should holla at me

Cause I'm a baller can't nobody hustle harder than me

Oooooh

     U and Dat – E40 (2006)

     CJ is African American who lives in a neighboring city which he considers "very low class".  He lives with his mother who is a bus driver for Westside city, which allows him to attend Westside High.  His father was a gang member who was incarcerated most of his life and though his father is not currently incarcerated (and living in Arizona), he rarely has contact with him.  CJ considers himself a hustler which to him "means making money; anything to get money.  If it's to pimping a hoe or selling a rock, you're making money even if it's illegal, you're making money." While CJ has stayed away from the illegal side of hustling because he didn't want to disappoint his mother, his street smarts have helped him survive in and out of school. CJ has average grades but he credits his successes in school to both his mother and a teacher that he had his sophomore year who taught history "in a way that you can totally understand it; in a way that you can learn history and I understood it and now I want to get a B.A. in history."  When speaking about Hip Hop, CJ says that "Hip Hop is the world to some people. Some people worship Hip Hop so you can say Hip Hop is a religion, a religion for everybody. [It] Don't matter what race you are, everybody can be in it and everybody can feel it."

*Cyrus*

Even though I'm thirsty for money, in the worst way

I ain't go cry if I don't go platinum, on the first day

Watch me, get my hustle on with the friendly competition

Y'all got papers but I got the latest edition

      I Don't Wanna Party Wit U– DJ Quik (2000)

      Cyrus is from a town outside of Westside city.  He grew up in a small apartment with his mother and his father, but they soon moved because the family kept getting robbed.  After moving into a house and starting at the local elementary school, Cyrus was involved in many verbal and physical altercations.  "They used to…take my chocolate milk at lunch and stuff and poor it all over my pants.  I'd get bullied and at one point, I got tired of it and I started taking weapons to school in my pants."  Still the fights didn't cease and Cyrus began to seek protection in the gang culture.  Though Cyrus is Mexican, he was jumped into a predominately black gang when he was in Middle School.  "They used tell me don't worry about it. You a nigga just like us."  Through the racial confusion, the deaths of some of his closest friends, and his discovery of Hip Hop, Cyrus began to see the gang culture as a one- way ticket to jail or death.  Cyrus credits Hip Hop with saving his life as he turned away from his life in gangs and towards Hip Hop music. As an emcee, Cyrus claims to have moved away from what he considers negative Hip Hop and now considers himself a very political rapper. He gains his inspiration from his past choices and looks to show that people can change their lives.  To that point, when his parents were divorced Cyrus moved to Westside city with his father so that he could have a fresh

start at a school and so he wouldn't be confronted with his gang member status on a daily basis.

*Daisy*

Last year was a hard one, but life goes on

Hold my head against the wall learnin right from wrong

They say my ghetto instrumental, detrimental to kids

As if they can't see the misery in which they live

Blame me, for the outcome, ban my records - check it

Don't have to bump this but please respect it

I took a minus and now the hard times are behind us

Turned into a plus, now they stuck livin blinded

      Krazy – Tupac (Makaveli) (2006)

Daisy was the president of the Hip Hop club on campus, and as a White female from the suburbs of New York City, she raised many eyebrows on campus due to her race and gender. Daisy's mother and father were divorced when she was eight, but she split time between her mother's apartment in New York City and her father's house in the suburbs. It was during this time that she remembers discovering Hip Hop. Struggling with her weight and self esteem, she recalls "I was diagnosed with depression and by nine [years old] I was on Prozac which was really bad… I didn't really understand what I was doing. I was suicidal and in therapy every Tuesday but it just never did anything for me… I used to watch Yo' MTV Raps but I use to watch it on the low because my dad had a problem with Hip Hop because he was scared of the whole east and west coast war the nineties." After middle school, her mother moved

her and her sister to Georgia and here she fell in love with Hip Hop. "That's when I saw Tupac [Shakur], and that's when I realized that Hip Hop could do big things. I was attracted to it. It meant a lot to me it really changed my life. {Crying as she is telling the story} I cried. It meant a lot to me I got this feeling. I wanted to be apart of it. I realized I could do that. These issues that Tupac was mentioning in [his song] *Changes*; I didn't see any of that until I came to Georgia. The awareness of that music can bring people together."

***Destiny***

Aye Yo... You don't have to love me… you don't even have to like me… but you will respect me… you know why cause I'm a boss

I'm bossy

I'm the bitch[5] y'all love to hate

I'm the chick that's raised the stakes

I told young stunna he should switch to BAPE's

I'm back with an 808 cause i'm bossy

> Bossy – Kelis (2006)

"I don't like the lyrics but the chorus is cool," said Destiny, an African-American young woman who lives in Westside City with her mother. Her grandmother was a Westside City resident who always kept a house in the city. While her mother worked nights, Destiny stayed with her grandmother who had quite an influence on her upbringing. Destiny's father was part of the Nigerian mafia and

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[5] Hip Hop anthropologist, Marceylina Morgan (2003), argues that female rappers like Rah Digga and Lil Kim use the term "bitch" to denote a strong sense of their sexuality and empowerment as women who have control over how they choose to be represented.
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was deported back to Nigeria before she was born.  Destiny considers herself a miracle baby because when her father was returning to Nigeria, her mother had an abortion, but she was a twin and she survived the procedure.  This has brought her to a place where she tries to live life to the fullest.  Her lifestyle has brought her experiences that she feels separates her from the typical high school student.  "I feel like, at times, I'm higher then a lot of people up here. Not higher like 'I'm the shit'. Higher like where I'm trying to go and where they're trying to go. I'm on a whole different path then them. I feel like when a lot of people when they leave here [Westside High] they ain't gonna know what to do. I  know before I graduate what I'm gonna do… I want to be the next female Johnny Cochran."  Destiny is a fan of Hip Hop and she believes that, "Hip Hop is a form of a lot of things. I think Hip Hop is music, voice, expression, appearance, dance, poetry, I mean I think it's like world wide and for some people I think it's a way of life."

### *Mia*

Ms. Hill, you got skills, that's a gift, it's real

Get ill, what you spit got the power to uplift the heel

I wish I could talk to Lauryn

I mean excuse me, Ms. Hill

And let her know how much we love her is real

The industry was beating her up

Then those demons started eating her up

She needs a savior that'll bleed in a cup

       Ms. Hill – Talib Kweli (2005)

Mia categorizes herself as a Chicana and though she is "not a hardcore feminist," she doesn't like "how the woman has to be delicate or has to be fragile." She states that "that it is not fair that guys [are] respected when women are like the backbone of everything." In school, Mia is a participant in the Westside High School AVID program (Advancement via Individual Determination which is a program at Westside High School that takes students who have between a 2.0 and 3.0 GPA and assists them in college preparation). She lives in Westside City in an apartment with her mother, grandmother, older sister, her twin brother, and a younger sister. Mia often talks about being overwhelmed by her responsibilities of work and home and that these responsibilities cause her to want to give up everything and became a helicopter pilot surveying the California freeways for the local news. "Ever since I was a little kid I saw the helicopters that reported the news and I wanted to fly the helicopters... I could fly celebrities around: that would be fun." The irony is that she recently found out the rimless glasses she wears (and eyesight that causes her to where the glasses) have prevented her from enrolling in flight school. To deal with what seem like daily frustrations of life, Mia turns to Hip Hop to help her escape her realities and express her deepest feelings. Rarely does Mia perform, but when she does, people are amazed that her words actually come from her.

*Mike*

All I need is one mic... That's all I ever needed in this world, fuck cash

All I need is one mic... Fuck the cars, the jewelry

All I need is one mic... To spread my voice to the whole world

> *One Mic* – Nas (2001)

Mike is an African American emcee with ties from across the nation. His junior and senior years at Westside High were the first time since elementary school that he was enrolled in the same school two years in a row. Mike has been back and forth between California, Illinois, and Georgia most of his life. With his father not playing a significant part in his life, his mother tried to make things work and ended up traveling much of the time between family and relationships. Mike considers himself "a class clown and that ends up showing up in [his] grades." Mike embraced the lack of stability in his life and took things from every place he lived. Mike has an older brother (by nine years) who serves as a mentor and a father figure. Mike is an emcee and a poet who performs in shows all around Southern California. Explaining Hip Hop's role in his life, Mike explains, "Hip Hop is one-third of my life. Hip-Hop I guess you can say what do I live by sometimes the things that happen in Hip Hop are the things that I live by. Hip Hop for me is who I am. I dress Hip Hop, I talk Hip Hop, and I'm about it, the whole culture of it. I respect it. I always talk about the older figures in my life my mom, my dad, my brother; Hip Hop is another figure in my life who I look up to."

*Nasa*

I'm takin' out this time

To give you a piece of my mind

Who do you think you are?

Baby one day you'll be a star

But until the late thang, I'm the one who's crazy

Cause that's the way you're makin' me feel

I'm just tryin to get mine, I don't have the time

To knock the hustle for real

　　　Can't Knock the Hustle – Jay-Z feat. Mary J. Blige (1996)

　　　Nasa is the son of a renowned poet who came to the United States in the early 1980's, fleeing Iran and the Shah's regime.  Nasa lives in a neighboring city, with his father (who has lost his vision and is now legally blind) and visits his mother frequently.  Nasa's father's vision has had a big impact on his life as he remembers, "getting on the bus going preschool, and I'd have to help him on the bus. I mean I always had to help him with groceries; I'd go with him. I'd always have nightmares sometimes about like what would happen if someone put a gun to him what would he do? What would he do?"  As he got older, Nasa began to rebel, having been caught stealing from a teacher's room at school.  His suspension from school was only the beginning of his battles with authorities as he recalls money was always an issue in his life.  Nasa was caught stealing four more times by various authorities, the most severe coming when he was arrested after stealing from a department store.  In the middle of his difficulties, Nasa discovered Hip Hop and with his father's background as a poet, began writing his own rhymes.  Battling people on the streets for money was one way he survived and thrived.  In school, Nasa was successful early on as he realized that, "I can put 10 percent of time into school and get straight A's. I wasn't mature I would get in arguments [with teachers] but I see through that [the teacher's games]. It's a glass door to me."  Nasa's success in school continued through high school until he began to have success in Hip Hop.  When asked if he values the words

of people in Hip Hop more than the word of people from schools, he replied, "Hip Hop is more important than me then school."

**Social Location of Researcher: Raced, Classed and Gendered**

Increasingly, ethnographic researchers are being called upon to make their own positionalities explicit (Guba, 1996). My understandings of race, class, and gender were all forged in the same fires of my educational process. I was blessed to have the opportunity to grow up in an area that was hospitable to diversity and diverse perspectives, but being raised in an area like this, the lessons about racism and classism are often missed until one has the opportunity to critically reflect on one's own experiences.

My father was a Black man from Hope, Arkansas who moved to Santa Monica, California when he was seven years old. In Santa Monica, he distinguished himself as an athlete where he earned a scholarship to play football at the University of the Pacific. He then continued his excellence on the field and was drafted to play professional football, which he played for five years during which time he met my mother. My mother was a White woman from Toronto, Canada, who ended her schooling at the age of thirteen after reaching the 8th grade, where her familial responsibilities forced her into the work force early. When my father's professional career ended, he and my mother moved to Venice, California where they bought an apartment complex, and this is where I entered the picture.

Born into a middle class lifestyle, I don't recall my first encounter with race as I was too young. I was two years old and my mother told me that I was outside playing with some of the children who lived in my parents' apartment building. I

came in from outside and my mother asked me where I was and I exclaimed to her in

my best African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Baugh, 1999), "Mama, we

be playin in the yard." My mother, shocked that I was picking up the language of my

environment so quickly, reportedly looked at my father and said, "We have to move."

My father's ability to "bifurcate" (code switch between AAVE and a more standard

English) was a quality my mother always returned to when reflecting on my father's

being, and the thought that AAVE would be the foundation of my language

development was too much for her to handle. Within the year, we had sold the

apartment building and moved to the middle class area of Santa Monica, California,

which was about 2 miles away.

Over the course of my schooling years, race, class, and gender were never

overtly discussed. Being raised in the post-civil rights era of the 1970's and 1980's by

parents who were not of the same race, systemic racial issues were almost hidden as

they attempted, by all accounts, to normalize their own inter-racial relationship. Race

and class issues though, were not hidden from me as I remember asking about such

topics as racial conflicts they faced in West Virginia and America's issues with

communism, but the majority of the conversations were centered on my own personal

abilities to overcome all odds. I knew from an early age that I was black and that

would cause some minor problems in my life, but as a whole, successes and failures

would be to be attributed to me and my ability levels outside of any systemic critique.

Oppression was a personal obstacle and I could overcome.

In school, I was an average to above average student. My mother would tell

me that the only thing between me and straight A's was myself. Athletically, I

excelled, and dreams of following in my father's footsteps as a professional football player filled my head. In high school, I never had any problems with authority figures (teachers, coaches, police, etc.) and I had thought and was told that this was because I was "such a good kid." Looking back, it probably had more to do with my parents' social capital than it did with my affect. I had such high esteem; I felt that I could personally overcome the prejudices of my friends' parents. "Just let them (parents) meet me and they won't be prejudiced anymore because I will show them that we are not all like that," I would say to my friends when they revealed to me that their parents held prejudicial beliefs. I considered myself the model of African American life. I was part of the Dubois' Talented Tenth. And then came college.

During my first two months in college, I was pulled over by the police eight times for numerous random violations, none I consider greater than my crime of Driving While Black (DWB). I began to realize that I wasn't in my hometown anymore where the police knew me and more importantly, my father, who was a highly respected member of the community. In college, away from this protection, I was just another black kid. I began to see my race take a primary role in my courses and how my teachers treated me. In Santa Monica, my mother was an employee for the school district and was instrumental in handpicking my teachers, which insured I would get teachers that believed in my ability. In college, many of my English professors exclaimed with surprise in their voice that I read so well. Angered by the consistent and frequent desires by the academic community to reduce me to a black athlete, I longed to return home, to a place where I felt my race was not significant. When I finished college, I had the opportunity to return home to teach at the high

school where I graduated and I felt that I was home; until I began talking with my former teachers.

I left college with a degree in social psychology and no formal training in education, which has turned out to be one of the greatest influences in my development as an educator. Armed only with my belief that all students can learn, the students appreciated my beliefs and rewarded me with a desire to learn. My pedagogy left a lot to be desired as I relied exclusively on a pedagogy of recitation borrowed from collegiate lectures. I brought this pedagogical strategy to my classes, and I was quickly confronted by scores of students whose hands were sore from two straight weeks of note taking. Knowing that I did not know any other strategies, I asked the students how they learned best, which initiated my induction to a Freireian role as teacher/student. Through my desire to learn from the students and adjust my pedagogical style to fit each of my classes, the students began to trust me with some of their issues outside of my classroom, which involved many of my former teachers. As I investigated the problems that the students were bringing up to me, I began to see that many of the teachers that I had believed treated me fairly and without bias, were actually practitioners of oppression. My middle-class upbringing afforded me privileges that lower-class students did not possess. My mixed race and light skin afforded me privileges that many of the African American and Latino students did not possess, as I began to see the effects of these privileges on those who were without. The students in my classes had many of the same abilities that I possessed, but their culture and their characteristics were often obstacles in the expression of their abilities. I began to see how the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the teachers

themselves were often obstacles in the students' attempts in education. It was only later that I learned how I was an obstacle regarding issues of gendered and hetero-normative oppression.

My introduction to gendered and hetero-normative oppression came when I attended a student- run and student- led conference regarding confronting oppression at the level of gender and sexual orientation. Having been involved with previous student- run conferences regarding racial oppression, I was a natural choice for the student organizers who were looking for adult facilitators to assist in achieving the objectives in a productive way. I was apprehensive in regards to my participation because I had just recently come to see myself as systemically oppressed. My oppression was part of my identity. I had never considered my role in society as an oppressor and it was not something that I was looking forward to. I quickly realized that it was a necessary step in my progression as an educator. In the conference the voices of the marginalized and oppressed were privileged and the dominant voices were systematically and purposefully silenced. The women and the members of the LGBT community entered into a dialogue about their experiences as marginalized groups in this society, which brought to light the issues of individual and systemic discrimination. As I now reflect on my experience at the conference, I see that many of my beliefs and assumptions held much power and used in a situation like the classroom, easily led to the oppression of others.

Oppression and the ability to oppress are within most people, dare I say everyone. Everyone attached to the system of education must begin to critically reflect on their own role in the perpetuation of oppression at multiple levels. It is not

enough to claim to fight for social justice without searching within ourselves for the multiple forms that oppression can take. Raced, classed, gendered and many other forms of oppression cannot be separated from each other in order to privilege one form of oppression over another. In the words of Lorde (1983) "There can be no hierarchies of oppression." Social justice comes from within each individual attached to the oppression. In this study, I am looking to oppressed people themselves for liberation. Education as a system is in dire straits as many students are being left behind in their search for liberation. We all have a responsibility to continue our search for pathways that lead to a more humanizing system of education.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is important because it challenges the beliefs that traditional forms of schooling are the best way to educate students today. Specifically, The Critical Cultural Cypher was able to challenge the role of the student in relation to traditional power structures of traditional classrooms. This project was able to show that when the direction of the sessions was determined by the participants, it was done responsibly and with great passion. This project privileges student voice and places student perspectives at the center of the debates about the links between schooling and inequality. Finally this project challenges the beliefs that maintain that Critical Theory in general and the work of Paulo Freire specifically, are not applicable due to regional, temporal and philosophical differences.

This work forces us to consider the student perspectives and their impact on liberating pedagogies. At the same time, it shows the power within existing theories like that of Freire and Critical Theory, which are shown to be extremely relevant and

accessible when it comes to practically addressing the needs of students. Another consideration lies in the ways in which we as educators look at the evolution of the classroom in relation to student culture. The structure of the classroom has, in large part, been stagnant for the past 100 years, but the ways in which students interact with the world is drastically different.  Advances in technology and philosophy have brought us to the point where our classrooms must evolve or continue to face the problems of student apathy and resistance.

**Outline of Dissertation Chapters**

Chapter two begins with an introduction to the life and work of Paulo Freire paying close attention to his theoretical influences on Critical Theory.  I then move to an analysis of three theoretical frameworks that are used today to challenge oppression and inequity in society and in schools: Critical Social Theory, Critical Race Theory and Multiculturalism and show how these theories do not sufficiently address the evolving landscape of education today. I follow this with an introduction to Hip Hop culture looking at the social, economic and political influences that helped to shape Hip Hop as it has come to prominence as a social force. Finally, I look at the theoretical evolution of the Critical Cultural Cypher through the primary units of analysis for this study: a language of critique and transcendence, counter-narratives and *consientização*.

In Chapter three, I describe the methods. In particular, I explain the critical ethnographic approach. This is followed by an analysis of the methodology that guided my study and the research methods that I used to ground it in a research context.  I then provide a description of the focal site of Westside City and focus

attention on various aspects of Westside High School as well as introducing the coordinator of the Cypher sessions, Ms. Stevenson.  This section is followed by an introduction to the strategies that I used for the selection of the participants in this study as well as the techniques I used to collect data.  Further, I discuss my coding and the methodology that guided my analytical chapters.  I conclude with a reflection on my social location as a researcher.

Chapters four, five, six, and seven comprise the analytical components of this project.  In chapter four, I begin by introducing the participants and their lives through their stories.  This chapter provides the reader with the stories that shaped the lives of the participants, helping them to become the people they were as they entered the Cypher.  Chapter five is a detailed description of what happened inside of the Cypher sessions as we critically analyzed Hip Hop culture, the problems with Hip Hop culture and actions that individuals can take to address those problems.  Chapter six is a re-introduction to the participants after the Cypher sessions as they take time to describe the impact the Cyphers had on their lives in and out of the classrooms.  Chapter seven provides a conclusion to this study by offering implications of the study for teachers, teacher educators, researchers and school administrators.

**Chapter Two:**

**Review of the Literature**

This chapter is an introduction to the literature that shaped and influenced this project and myself as a researcher. In this chapter I will introduce the work of Freire focusing specifically on the aspects of his theories that led to the development of the Critical Cultural Cypher. Because Freire's work can be traced back to the origins of Critical Theory, I will revisit Critical Theory and some of its theoretical constructs including Critical Social Theory, Critical Race Theory and Multiculturalism, bringing attention to their impact on the field of education. I will show how this work does and does not address the current educational landscape, which is heavily influenced by Hip Hop culture. Any exploration into Hip Hop culture must begin with a broader look at popular culture and its imprint on the field of education. Continuing, I will describe the historical, political, social and economic impact of Hip Hop culture on society, and I will address the controversy that Hip Hop causes in society today. This will lead me to look at Critical Hip Hop pedagogy. Finally, I will explore the theoretical foundations of the Cypher by using these frameworks.

**Paulo Freire: the man and the methodology**

Any exploration into the work of Paulo Freire must begin by investigating not only his word, but how he lived his life as a commitment to the principles he espoused. In Freire's formative years, he often reflected on the poverty of his own youth and his surroundings, searching for ways to address the disenfranchisement of poor people. At this same time he was introduced to Marxist philosophy, which gave him a critique of the systems of power that maintained an asymmetrical power

relationship between poor and privileged people.  Taking his Marxist influence and his background in German Philosophy combined with his deeply religious beliefs, he began to fight against inequality in the field of education.  His revolutionary literacy work in rural Angicos challenged the military dictatorship to the point that he was expelled from his native home.  A year after being expelled, Freire (1970/2003) wrote his classic text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he detailed parts of his framework.  The heart of this liberatory literacy framework is found in his problem posing, dialogical approach. Freire (1970/2003) problematized what he termed "a banking concept of education" (p. 72) in which teachers simply deposited information into the minds of students.  In this sense, he argued that typical classroom teachers viewed their students as blank slates and as such, they felt their job was to "deposit" rather than "draw out" knowledge. This approach ignores students' prior knowledge, skills and interests and constitutes a form of oppressive dehumanization, according to Freire. Oppression was evidenced in an educational setting by marginalized people's tendency to subjugate their own experiences to the privileged responses that held value in the eyes of the dominant class that governed the educational system (Freire, 2003).  Some teachers, in Freire's view, represented the cultural hegemony of the dominant society. The hegemonic dominance of the privileged class's way of being, thinking, and doing was seen as a problem that Freire was seeking to resolve through a problem-posing methodology, which "is the antithesis of the technocrat's 'problem solving' stance" (Goulet, 2002, p. ix).  In other words, teachers are taught not to profess to possess answers, but to look within themselves and their own experiences to solve posed problems.  Another key aspect of this approach is that educators

should have the utmost deference to and respect for the existential situation of their

students.  Educators must not place their own experiences in the center.  The

problem-posing method, according to Freire, allows teachers to move their students

toward *consientização* – a critical consciousness which is not only a goal, but a

method which serves to humanize both the oppressed and the oppressor by providing

both with a more democratic and liberating method of exchanging knowledge.

Students who possess this critical consciousness possess the ability to not only "read

the word" but they can also "read the world" through a critical lens (Freire, 1998b).

While speaking around the world about education and liberation, Freire was

invited out of exile and was appointed by the government as Minister of Education in

São Paulo, Brazil, where he oversaw two-thirds of the nation's literacy program.

Freire's literacy program, which he dubbed a "Cultural Circle", was used to move

participants from objects to subjects in their learning.  A subject is someone who "has

the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and

transform [their] reality" (Freire, 2002, p. 4).  This is in opposition to an object that is

subjected to the choices of others and is forced to adapt to prearranged circumstances.

Because illiteracy was a significant problem in Brazil, Freire linked literacy to the

mission of the cultural circle along with *consientização*.  In the beginning of the

process, the cultural circle was not used to develop literacy in the traditional sense of

the word (reading and writing), but to develop cultural literacy, a process through

which participants would identify issues that impacted their daily lives. Through

dialogue, the participants and the coordinator of the cultural circle *together* would

either "clarify situations or seek action arising from that clarification" (Freire, 2002,

p. 42). The topics were presented to the participants using visual aids and through the dialogue, they would formulate actions that could be taken to address the empowerment of the individuals within the group.

The process of *consientização*, though, does not end with the completion of the cultural circle because regardless of the transformation of the participants within the circle setting, the participant is still connected to a system of oppression: formal education is one such system of oppression. When read in Portuguese, Freire defines the oppression within education as a virus and the people as the host. This virus is within everyone connected to the system and the only way to eliminate this virus is for the oppressed to engage the oppressors in more humanizing joint practices (Correa, 2004). This is the only way to virtually unplug from the system and redefine your self. But, unplugging is sometimes a violent[6] and gradual process.

As Stokes (1997) points out,

Freire makes clear that consciousness of oppression, alone, does not create freedom; and education, alone, does not transform society. The means to liberation, however, require an understanding that is 'steeped in the dialectical movement back and forth between consciousness and world' (p. 205).

The back and forth that Stokes (1997) talks about involves another process that is essential to Freire's framework, which is the joining of critical reflection and action through praxis described by Heaney (1995) as the cycle of "action-reflection-action which is central to libratory education" (p. 10).

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[6] I am using violent, not to represent a physical confrontation, but violent defined as acting with or marked by or resulting from great force or energy or emotional intensity.

**Grounding Paulo Freire: Critical Theory and its Theoretical Frameworks**

Looking at the foundation of Freire's work, it is evident that Freire leaned heavily on Critical Theory. In fact, one of the main criticisms of the work of Freire is that he borrowed much of his theory from other sources (Taylor, 1993) as Freire's work is echoed in a number of places. While Freire did borrow heavily from other sources as he built his theoretical framework, it was in the organization of the various concepts that set Freire apart from other educators (Schugurensky, 2002).

Critical Theory, by definition, looks to understand and unpack the origins, functions, and production of oppression that can be found embedded within societal structures (Held, 1980; Horkheimer, 1972; Jay, 1973; Marcuse, 1964; Schroyer, 1975). Continuing, oppression is a widespread, if not unconscious, use of political power and domination to maintain an inherently unjust system. The impact of this oppression and the act of moving one's self out from under oppressive conditions was central to Freire's application of Critical Theory in education. He argues that oppression is not a "closed world from which there is no exit, but is a limiting situation that can be transformed" (2003, p. 49). Oppression is something that can be overcome, and education is a place for the development of liberating tools. Education, then, can be used as a tool "to generate societal and individual transformation" (Lynn, Williams, Park, and Benigno, 2006, p.91). The action of theorizing and acting upon a critical reflection is reminiscent of Freire's (2000) notion of praxis.

McLaren and Giarelli (1995) write that "Critical Theory's purpose is to reassert the basic aim of the Enlightenment ideal of inquiry; to improve human

existence by viewing knowledge for its emancipatory or repressive potential" (p. 2).

Freire also saw, through a classed analysis, that liberation can only be achieved

through the humanization of the processes by which its members are educated.  In a

similar manner, Apple (1990) asserts and acknowledges that knowledge is not neutral

and is used by schools in educational settings as a cultural weapon to subjugate the

masses through the reproduction of cultural norms and ways of being.  Freire echoes

this thought when he calls for a more humanizing educational process without which

liberation of the mind and body from oppressive constraints is not possible.  Here, I

want to explicate how this battle for liberation continues in the schools where Critical

Theory's educational application of Critical Pedagogy looks at how teachers can

become cultural workers (Freire, 1998).

### *Critical Pedagogy*

I am using the term critical pedagogy to refer to the critique of the methods,

applications, and organization of educational theory and curriculum that maintains

oppressive learning contexts and environments. Giroux (1999) writes that critical

pedagogy at its center argues that "school practices need to be informed by a public

philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in

which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students

becomes the defining feature of schooling" (p. 1). Many scholars (Anyon 1997;

Kozol, 1991; Rist, 1970) have detailed the lack of hope and the despair that runs

rampant in classrooms across the nation, most of which are situated in urban areas.

Critical Pedagogy confronts the inequity of schooling as a system.  Giroux (1999)

illuminates four facets of critical pedagogy that demonstrate how schooling as a system is challenged.  Critical Pedagogy:

1.  works to blur the lines between disciplines paving the way for interdisciplinary knowledge to better address the students it is supposed to serve;

2.  directly challenges the system of schooling and its role in the maintenance of forms of subjugation including but not exclusive to the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity;

3.  challenges the cultural hierarchies that besmirch popular culture and its role in knowledge construction;  and

4.  highlights the uses of language as tools through which cultural domination is maintained.

Thus, with Critical Pedagogy, it is the responsibility of the educator to foster environments that promote action and critical reflexivity (Freire, 1998a) which, in turn, fosters an understanding how curriculum is linked to politics (Keesing-Styles, 2003). In addition, critical pedagogues give serious attention to issues of power and the struggles that have historically shaped the voices, meaning, and experiences of marginalized groups (Ball, 2000). In the schooling context, this can lead students to understand and believe in the transformative power of critical reflection and dialogue. Thus, students learn how to perceive themselves in the world, differently, and in turn, develop the capacities to accomplish their goals.

Following, I will look more closely at three critical frameworks that, like critical pedagogy, examine and develop this critique of domination, each in its own

distinct and succinct way – Critical Social Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Multicultural Education – and each with its own foray into the field of education. Critical Social Theory can be seen as an innovative way to advance critical emancipatory knowledge while Critical Race Theory and Multicultural Education provide new insights into the ways that we can construct a more humanistic pedagogy.

**Critical Social Theory**

Critical Social Theory (henceforth CST) "is a multidisciplinary knowledge base with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge" (Leonardo, 2004 p. 11). CST weds Critical Theory and a broader theoretical framework which includes elements of sociological theory, cultural theory, and race and ethnic theory, and includes theorists like Calhoun (1995), Morrow and Torres (1995), and Collins (2000). In the field of education, Freire is seen as one of the fathers of CST as he worked towards the spiritual growth of students in the face of oppressive and debilitating social, political and economic regimes (Leonardo, 2004).

Historically, CST's connection to the field of Critical Theory is unmistakable as The Frankfurt School's revision of Marx – who reacted to the ideological domination and positivist foundations of the Enlightenment period – is at the center of its ideological beliefs (Agger, 2006; Crossley, 2005). Marx's ideological critique of positivism—as a particular knowledge system—challenged the belief that historical structures of domination and oppression (racism, sexism, etc.) were inevitable and unavoidable (Marx, 1967). Critical Social Theorists look at systems as a "horizon of possibilities, constrained but not determined by the past and the

present" (Agger, 2006 p. 6). This view has major implications both theoretically and politically. Theoretically one can identify many different issues at play when it comes to the perpetuation of racist or sexist systems and structures. On the other hand politically, what can be done if one cannot identify the specific cause of a problem because it seems too complex? Critical Social Theorists believe that systems are complex and though questions and critiques are more frequent than answers, they, according to Outlaw (2005),

> seek to reconstruct through reflective understanding, the development of historical forms of understanding and their groundings in the social order, to reveal how they misrepresent actual social relations and justify forms of oppression that are in reality historical (p. 17).

In other words, practitioners of CST attempt to understand societal ways of being and how that could lead to or promote forms of oppression.

There has been a recent resurgence in research coming from a Critical Social perspective which has led to the reformulation of thought regarding the use and application of CST into a multitude of areas including education. Across disciplines, Agger (2006) found that there are seven general tenets of Critical Social Theory that bind this thought together and make it applicable under the CST umbrella. CST: 1) opposes positivism, 2) recognizes domination and subordination but can envision a future free of such, 3) purports that domination is structural and systemic, 4) believes that the structures are reproduced through people's false consciousness, 5) focuses on lived culture, 6) believes the bridge between domination and agency is dialectal, and

7) opposes the notion that liberation can only be traversed through the sacrifice of lives and time.

### *Critical Social Theory in Education*

In the field of education, Critical Social Theory has been used to privilege ways in which criticism could be used as a way to cultivate students' ability to question, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge in the interest of emancipation. Leonardo (2004) highlights the different applications of CST in education. In education, CST: 1) promotes criticism as the defining aspect of a quality education, 2) puts criticism at the center of its knowledge production which pedagogically speaking shifts the focus from knowledge transmission to knowledge construction and transformation, and 3) exposes and develops a language of critique which exposes the contradictions of social life.

CST in education foregrounds the role criticism plays in the development of an education in which students can deconstruct oppressive regimes and then reconstruct knowledge in the interest of emancipation (Leonardo, 2004). Critique is introduced into education as a linguistic discourse that exposes contradictions in the students' understanding of their own social, economic and political world in an attempt to understand the nature of oppression. Oppression, on whatever front (gender, race, class, etc.), is "real and formidable". Giroux and McLaren (1995, p. 32) remind their peers "that many current trends in critical pedagogy are embedded in the endemic weaknesses of a theoretical project overly concerned with developing a language of critique." One theoretical answer to Giroux and McLaren's concern lies in CST's promulgation of a language of transcendence which assumes the possibility

of a less oppressive condition. When engaging CST, it is necessary to see the possibility of establishing alternative realities in the construction of the future. This less oppressive condition counters the fatalistic beliefs that lead many to claim, "That's the way it is and I can't do anything about it."

CST distinguishes between criticism for the purpose of foregrounding one's own political, social or economic agenda and ideology critique, emphasizing discourse development as a key component of quality education. Criticism is a tool and is used to open dialogue to multiple perspectives. It would be very easy for an educator to misconstrue the nature of CST, thinking that it gave them license to criticize all that they find disagreeable. Rather, critical dialogue is a methodology of CST through which meaning is constructed with others, like students. Education is not a one way process.

Within the classroom, CST utilizes the Freireian methodology of problem-posing for opening up problems and considering multiple solutions. This methodology places the onus of critical thinking on the students. This is directly antithetical to the "banking method" of education in which information is "deposited" into the minds of the students for the purpose of regurgitation at a later date (Freire, 2003a). According to Freire (2003), the methodology itself becomes an act of love as the spiritual growth of students is developed by nurturing not only their consciousness of their lived world, but the development of problem solving methods that can be applied to other areas of their lives.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) began as a legal discourse through which the inequities of societal systems of power were interrogated through a racialized lens (Delgado, 1995).  CRT is also a theoretical approach that allows for the exploration of other types of subjugation based on other categories of difference like gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, and religion (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lynn, 1999, Solórzano & Yosso; 2000). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced this discourse to the field of education as a way to begin to analyze the nature, form, and function of racism in the U.S. educational system; a system which they found to be as inherently destructive as the original CRT scholars found the legal system. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) continued with the delineation of five themes that frame CRT's application in the field of education.  CRT: 1) highlights a centrality of race and racism as well as its intersectionality with other forms of subordination, 2) challenges the hegemony and dominant ideology that is engrained within society, 3) possesses a commitment to social justice, 4) highlights the centrality of experiential knowledge in developing understanding, and 5) relies on an interdisciplinary perspective.

CRT seeks to analyze systems that maintain racialized inequity in a way that places the emphasis on the governing dynamics of the systems themselves. As such, it positions the individual who is living within a given system of oppression (i.e. racism, gender bias, classism, etc.) not as deficient, but as an agent of social change, encouraging them to work toward both the rectification of the systemic problems and liberation from oppressive systems.

The use of counter narrative is not exclusive to CRT, but the counter narrative has become a staple of CRT's application. A counter narrative creates space for alternative explanations that are valued and respected because the counter narrative emanates from the experiences of the marginalized populations (Delgado, 1993). Solórzano and Yosso (2001 p. 475), identify four theoretical, methodological and pedagogical uses for counter narratives:

1. They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice.

2. They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems.

3. They can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position.

4. They can teach others that by combining elements of both the story [narrative] and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone.

Freire (2003) said, "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" (p. 88). Saying this, there is a theoretical connection between CRT and Freire as there is strength in the use of the counter narrative. Here, the dominant narrative is the story or the telling-of-the-story that constructs the oppressed as abnormal, and the counter narrative is the story that allows the oppressed to normalize their own constructs. By presenting an alternative definition or a counter

narrative, someone who is oppressed does not necessarily reinforce the presence or the influence of the power/dominant narrative. The use of the counter narrative acts to open the power of self-definition to the oppressed as well as someone in a dominant position.

### *Critical Race Pedagogy*

Lynn (1999) defines Critical Race Pedagogy as "an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies mostly on the perceptions, experiences, and counterhegemonic practices of educators of color" (p. 615).  Critical race pedagogy can be traced back to two genealogical roots: Critical pedagogy and critical race theory. Having discussed Critical Theory and Critical pedagogy in the earlier sections, I will focus this section on developing an understanding of Critical Race Theory and its influence on Critical Race Pedagogy.  Critical race pedagogy was founded, first and foremost, on the emancipatory potential of teaching, keeping social justice goals central to the education of Black children (Lynn, 1999). As Critical Race Theory has evolved, many different centralities of interest have had their turn as a focal point of this particular critical framework. This is evident by the proliferation of points of departure which include, but are not exclusive to gender in FemCrit, Whiteness in Critical White studies, sexual orientation and hetero-normativity in Queer Theory, Asian ethnicity in Asian Crit, and Latino/ Chicano issues in Lat-Crit Theory.

Returning to Critical race pedagogy as racialized discourse, it is important to understand how this form of teaching underscores the role of race and racism, which can be used as an analytical tool to unveil the race-neutral, color-blind, culture of

schooling, i.e. in curriculum, classroom practice, and in access to curriculum, instruction and assessment (Denzin, 2000; Lynn, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Critical race pedagogy builds on the connection between students and their communities by explicitly foregrounding the students' lived reality, placing that lived reality in the context of academia. Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002), for example, use critical race pedagogy to develop the critical consciousness of teacher educators using Paulo Freire's (2003) problem posing methodology which is described in an earlier section. Without being forced to look for the "right" answer the students are free to construct their own story of a solution, or in the terminology of Critical Race Pedagogy, their own counter-narrative.  This freedom is important in that students, when able to use their own unique experiences to construct viable solutions, their lived experience, in a sense, becomes valued capital in a system that previously attached little worth to the tools that the students brought from their home culture. This counter narrative is different from the "master narrative that shapes the beliefs of society and perpetuates privilege that is in a sense 'normalized'" (Montecinos, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race pedagogy, while rarely cited for its work with younger students, can work within the educational context as both teachers and students work to become social agents of change by undergoing the process of "reading their worlds" or coming to understand their own personal experiences in the world (Freire, 1998b).

**Multicultural Education**

Critical race pedagogy is necessarily borne out of the larger field of Multicultural Education (Banks, 1973).  As an extension of the Civil Rights

Movement of the 1960's, Multicultural Education "frames inequality in terms of institutionalized oppression and reconfigures the families and communities of oppressed groups as sources of strength" (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). While not a theory in the sense of CST or CRT, Multicultural Education can trace some of its theoretical roots to Critical Theorists. Multicultural education has in a sense unpacked the origins, functions, and production of oppression within schooling as a structure, and it has found three core principles (Bennett, 2001) that are needed to address the changing landscape of education, in order to better address the evolving demographic of students:

1. Addressing of the systematic silencing of students by embracing multiple diversities,

2. Eliminating structural inequalities within the schools and the systems that govern the schools and finally,

3. Developing in students and teachers a critical consciousness which better prepares students to understand the world and how it functions as a system and to search for the origins of oppression within.

Multicultural Education is not itself a theory of investigation as much as it is an answer from Critical Theorists who interrogated education and found it wanting. For example, King (1992) used Marx's conceptualization of ideology and what counts as valid knowledge to analyze California textbooks and their coverage of slavery and the middle passage and found that textbooks do a poor job demonstrating the role of African American live in the U.S. today. Lee (1991) analyzed cultural communities and found that there are cultural practices that teachers can build upon in the teaching

of literacy if they are willing to re-think what counts as valid and acceptable forms of knowledge. Hilliard (1992) found that behavior style of African American and Latino youth often precludes teachers from utilizing effective teaching methods because of their unfamiliarity with the modes of being. Banks (1993) analyzed types of knowledge and found that when many when non-European children begin school, the discourse that they possess is not valued. The essence of Multiculturalism lies in its goal to find ways in which society can include the multiple perspectives of a population that is becoming more diverse. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) found that the main difference between Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy is more semantic than substantive.

***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), also referred to as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 200l; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Villegas, 2002), is an important development in Multicultural Education. Gloria Ladson Billings (1995) has labeled her pedagogical strategy for dealing with the educational principles of Multicultural education, *culturally relevant pedagogy*. Culturally relevant pedagogy as originally defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) "must meet three criteria: 1) an ability to develop students academically, 2) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and 3) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (p. 483).

In reflecting on the concepts that define culturally relevant teaching and their effects on the development of students, there are many obstacles that need to be overcome in order for culturally relevant teaching to be effective. To develop students

academically, one must critically understand the effects of culturally-laden curriculum and assessments which have the effect of marginalizing students whose lived culture is not that of mainstream academic culture (Bennett & Harris, 1982; Katz, 1999). Supporting cultural competence falls directly in line with this critique in that the educational system is rapidly narrowing its curricular goals and systemically ignoring the students' home culture (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Deyhle, 1995; Lee, 1991). The development of critical consciousness among K-12 students is actually impeded by the systematic relegation of their lived culture due to the hegemonic privileging of many aspects of a mainstream academic culture including, but not exclusive to knowledge representation, the reproduction of class and social systems and epistemological privilege (Apple, 1977). This cultural mismatch is problematic because the development of critical consciousness, or Freire's *consientização*, is antithetical to a prioritizing of rote memorization which is the privileged method for helping students face the challenges of high-stakes testing. This can put teachers in the unenviable position of having to choose between teaching for consciousness and teaching for academic learning, as dictated by the school system.

Looking more specifically at the development of critical consciousness, the ability of the students to give voice and name both their reality and their lived oppression is a crucial component. However, when this oppression results from the actions and beliefs of the teachers and the educational system itself, this causes a tragically ironic situation. According to Freire, critical consciousness is reliant on the complete empowerment of the students to define their reality and everything that lies within it, including the teachers' actions and beliefs. But when teachers are being

threatened with their professional lives for straying away from prescribed and dictated curriculums, the question is, what incentive does a teacher have to be open and honest? After all, the direction that education is currently heading with governmental mandates like No Child Left Behind (henceforth NCLB), it is not the teacher working with the student; education becomes the teacher's constructions versus the students' constructions as both are caught up in an oppressive system.

**Limitations**

All of the theoretical and pedagogical frameworks that I have introduced explain and attempt to respond to how groups of marginalized and oppressed people function in and out of schools today. Through these frameworks, learning communities are systematically deconstructed; locations of devaluation are challenged; and hopefully (but only sometimes) less oppressive communities are reconstructed by teachers and students. The first limitation addresses the difficulty in using theory to address practical problems. Race, class and gender boundaries, through theoretical constructs (like those mentioned earlier), are either blurred or are shifted entirely, making new categories of analysis that can be difficult to locate and define if using only understandings drawn from earlier conceptualizations. For example, using all CRT, CST or Multicultural Education, understandings race, gender and class could be challenged by looking at information that might have been less privileged. This new information could help teachers and students more accurately define and explain their lives in and out of schools. After the new information is used and new and more accurate definitions and explanations emerge, their new definitions may be hard to locate in any existing theoretical framework because they would be

fresh and organic. The old ways of defining are more readily available and can be used as foundations for developing new ways of understanding. This is a broad problem with using theory to guide practice. Theory is constantly and consistently emerging through the use of theoretical constructs, but it is difficult to stay current given the systemic constraints of making new information public. The primary difficulty in using theory is that it is, by nature, an abstracted understanding of how things work (or should work). It is usually not directly applicable to practice – a bridge has to be built from the theory to the practice. That "figuring out" of how to operationalize theoretical ideas is difficult especially when those theories do directly map onto other, more localized understandings.

Let us begin to consider the ramifications and impact on these theoretical frameworks if they are to continue to be used as tools to achieve liberatory objectives. Society is ever evolving and one needs to question whether these theoretical and pedagogical constructs have the capability of evolving with society. One example might take place in a classroom where a teacher and students look at race and how race is used to marginalize groups of people. This classroom of people might begin to define race differently than a particular theory. The teacher then must privilege locally constructed definitions over definitions that might have come from outside the community. This teacher and these students might find it difficult to develop a locally-relevant definition of race when using theories that are derived from the conditions of other locales.

The other limitation that I focus on is the directions in which specific theories have developed since their initial formulations. The theoretical frameworks

mentioned above all began with radical hopes, but some practitioners may have lost some of the focus that made the theories powerful. Multicultural education was stripped of its revolutionary origins as liberal educators usurped its name and turned Multiculturalism into celebrations of holidays and fallen heroes (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Critical Race Theory has continued to focus on what race is and what race is not (Villenas, Parker & Deyhle, 1999) but CRT theorists pay little attention to the actual evolution of racial classification from a youth's perspective. Finally, Critical Social Theory purports to work towards developing a language of critique (Leonardo, 2004), but it often times fails to recognize the valuable and functional language of critique that already exists among youth.

My overarching critique of each of these theories lies in their disconnection to youth culture. After analysis, I find that the relationship between the theorists and the theorized (the youth) mirrors that of Freire's subject-object dilemma where the youth are being acted upon. In this relationship, theorists engage youth predominantly for intervention rather than dialogue. Much of the time that theorists spend formulating courses of action is spent in the solitary confinement of academia and not with the youth themselves. If they do spend time with the youth, it is often done by speaking to youth rather than speaking with the youth. The youth of today have established their own ways of being that are valued by their communities. For an academician to come into schools and conduct research without an understanding of the youth and their perspectives is disrespectful and will often be met with resistance by the students. Any investigation of youth has to begin with a dialogue with the youth where all parties involved will be listening and learning (Cook-Sather 2006, Fine,

2005; McIntyre 2000; Mitra, 2004). One avenue that we can take to begin the journey to finding better ways to communicate with youth and to understand their culture is through an investigation of popular culture. Popular culture is often a site where the youth find a metaphorical home and today, popular culture can give us a hint about how we can better engage those we care so deeply about.

## A brief history of popular culture[7]

Scholar and poet, Arnold was known as one of the fathers of literary criticism where he introduced a methodology of objectivity. He was also one of the first to look at the difference between High culture and popular culture (Dolby, 2003). Arnold (1865) put forth a definition of culture as the best that is known and thought in the world. This perception of culture distinctly shaped the way cultural hierarchies were developed. Born into a privileged class, Arnold's position was taken from his own world view as a scholar and an aristocrat. Because of his position and influence as a scholar, his definition was also privileged. Implicit within Arnold's definition was a privileging of his own role as a definer of culture, since he himself was the critic whose words mattered most. Characteristic of his privilege, and privileged Whites in general, he believed in his own genetic superiority over people he deemed lower class (e.g., poor, black) and because he had power in society, he was able to maintain his power through definition of what is. Herein begins a cycle which reproduces superiority generation after generation. As a critic, it was his role to dictate to the world what he believed to be the difference between what he termed

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[7] The beliefs, traditions, habits, and values controlling the behavior of the majority of the people in a social-ethnic group. These include the people's way of dealing with their problems of survival and existence as a continuing group. (International Technology Education Association, 2004)

"high culture," the culture of the elite, and "popular culture," the culture of the

masses, and because of his privileged position, his word was law. To ensure his

progeny's privileged position in society, he defined high culture as everything that he

possessed and that the working class should strive to attain a *proximity* to high

culture, but they never could *become* high culture. It is not just beliefs about culture

but power – the power to benefit from their culture and to control the game – that

define the standards of value.

This stance and definition of culture has had substantial critiques, but the

theorists are less than unified in their positions. Dolby (2003) used the terms anti-

populist and pro-populist to describe two positions taken. The anti-populists take the

perspective that the popular movements (movements embraced by the public) are ripe

areas for critique and criticism.  This perspective has been adopted by theorists like

Adorno, who found comfort in the philosophy of the Frankfurt School of critical

theory (Jarvis, 1998) because of its critique of systems that maintain structures of

domination. Popular culture's influence and definition are not only pervasive but

inescapable:

> Nowhere can we point to an example of a free human being; yet the
>
> judgement [is] that the human beings are free, because it deploys an emphatic
>
> concept, carries an implicit prescriptive truth along with its descriptive
>
> incorrectness (Jarvis, 1998, p. 66).

The anti-populist critique of belief in human freedom attempts to point out that many

ideas held by the masses of people are often incorrect.  The anti-populist often take

the position that cultural beliefs, values and customs are often wrought with

inconsistency. The pro-populist takes a different approach. Pro-populist thought can be found in the more recent works of Dimitriadis (2004) and Fisher (2003). The aim of the pro-populist is to deconstruct the actual hierarchies that maintain the privileged position of "high culture" by promoting the culture of the working class. In his book *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice,* Dimitriadis (2004) established not only the relevance of Hip Hop culture, but put it on a level plane with canonical culture as a site for pedagogical relevance. Fisher (2003) looked at what she terms African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities[8] (ADPLC's) as sites for the development of literacy in urban communities. This is another example of finding value in popular culture's ways of being.

Both positions have been critiqued for "oversimplifying and distorting the relationship between popular culture and society" (Dolby, 2003 p. 261). The level of determinism in the anti-populist's argument is problematic and excludes or ignores claims of agency for the working class. It poses members of oppressed cultures as passive recipients of defined culture which does not avail itself of any concept of liberation. The critique of the pro-populist view is that the concept of the working class is stable and fixed, but changes in cultural identities provide the pro-populists a level of instability in the ever- evolving populations that the pro-populists do not take into account. The theoretical framework of postmodernism would provide another challenge to both positions in that it proposes that meaning and culture are constructed at the both individual and societal levels, a perspective that does not

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[8] Fisher describes in her work two open mic poetry settings which "recall the feeling and communal centrality of jazz clubs and literacy circles of the Harlem Renaissance" (Fisher, 2003 p. 362).

allow for sweeping definitions of culture. Whether taking the pro-populist, anti-populist, or postmodern position, popular culture is a location for the development of a language of critique which will be explored in the following sections.

*Popular Culture and Schooling*

The development of a cultural hierarchy in the 19th century has had, and will continue to have, a significant impact on education as a system. Multicultural educator Banks (1993) mentions "mainstream academic culture" when speaking about the disconnect between students' home culture and the culture that governs the schools. Because there are many distinct cultures with significant differences, it is easy to make the jump into a discussion of value and Bourdieu's (1977a) notion of cultural capital, which he states is the valuation and commodification of culture. About this, Apple (1993) states:

> The conception of cultural capital assumes that the fundamental role of educational institutions is the distribution of knowledge to students, some of whom are more *able* to acquire it because of cultural gifts that come *naturally* from their class or race or gender position. (p. 308)

Certain cultures and cultural practices in our society hold value while others are deemed deficient. Using a racialized analysis, many of the cultural values from the "darker side" of society are seen by some in society as barbaric and antiquated (West, 2003). Some epistemologies, (or ways of thinking about knowledge) and value systems within oppressed groups, such as valuing the needs of community over the needs of the individual, clash with the beliefs of more powerful groups and, hence, they are seen as illegitimate and garner less support (Asante, 1987; Shujaa, 1994).

Individual oppression, which Pincus (2000) defines as "the behavior of individual members of one race/ethnic/gender group that is intended to have a differential and/or harmful effect on the members of another race/ethnic/gender group" (p. 31), is not difficult to address. Institutional oppression occurs when individuals in positions of power use their individual beliefs to have a differential impact on another. Structural oppression is perhaps the most hidden. Structural oppression is when the policies of the dominant race/ethnic/gender group are posed as neutral, but in action, have a differential and/or harmful effect on members of subordinate groups. In the field of education, the impact of standardized tests, taxation allocations and their contributions to school funding, and curricular decisions that privilege some knowledge over other knowledge, all would arguably fit under the umbrella of structural oppression. Oppression at the institutional level and structural level, which deal with the policies of institutions that have a differential and/or harmful effect on marginalized populations, are much more insidious because of their lack of accessibility.

Looking specifically at music and the construction of cultural values, Lawrence Levine (1988) considered the functions of prejudice in the early 20th century. After investigating "why," Levine looked at "how" a culture develops into an ordering tool in many aspects of the social environment in the United States. This is important because it shows how Hip Hop as culture can be used as a tool of exploitation and oppression by those with the power of definition.

Levine's report (1988) looked specifically at what the "low" in his lowbrow (culture) vs. highbrow (culture) discussion looks like in practicum. According to

Levine, to become cultured was to leave a life of disorder and become more refined: to assimilate to European aristocratic standards. Today, in most aspects of our highly cultured society, the goal of many powerful people is to possess the capabilities of blending in with European aristocracy. A person's proximity to "higher" levels of cultural capital translates into power, be it economic or social. There are, though, pockets of resistance in society today where one's distance away from this ordered way of being is more valued than a relative closeness to it. For example, many people in the African American communities are cautious of people that locate themselves in proximity to power levels because of African Americans' history of negative experiences with institutions of power, such as government, schools, and law enforcement. Many people who belong to cultures that are distanced from the power levels, by imposition or by choice, often take an oppositional approach to the standards of culture held by those actually in power and more passionately identify with their own culture. This is done often times because people have had a history of encountering people who had a close proximity to power levels. Marginalized communities have often found, through experience, that to achieve a proximity to power, the people seeking the proximity are often forced to sacrifice their feelings about the community to maintain those positions. Bourdieu's (1977b) conceptualization of habitus is a word which he defines as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions" (p. 82-83), helps to theoretically ground this conceptualization. Habitus is an "individual" internalization of a sub-cultural value system rather than a macro feature of a system or culture. The

habitus of oppositional cultures that are distanced from privileged places in the social hierarchies, actually allows social structures to reproduce unchallenged.  By aligning themselves in opposition to the oppressive social structures, people from marginalized communities have no say in how the structures are governed. If we take school as an example, people from marginalized communities such as  African American, Latino, and south-east Asian, do not get involved in watchdog organizations like the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) because of a distrust of the organizations.  This leaves schools to reproduce the same oppressive structures that engendered the mistrust in the first place.

Looking at the concept of culture and its impact on education, and keeping Pincus's (2000) concept of structural oppression in mind, it is my argument that some of the policies and procedures in education are aligned with dominant cultural values. This in turn, despite its on-the-surface neutrality, has a differential and/or harmful effect on members of subordinate groups. There is also a history behind this line of thinking, which popular culture scholars have addressed, and it is relevant to this discussion.

### *Popular culture as a pedagogical site*

Generally speaking, pedagogy is seen as the art and science of educating children, but as I am using it, pedagogy refers to the study of the methods, application, and organization of educational theory and curriculum to create learning contexts and environments.  In the field of education, the inquisition of popular culture has been led by scholars, evoking the spirit and beliefs of Arnold, who felt that popular culture is in effect poisoning the minds of our children. They prescribe

middle class cultural literacy as the antidote (McWhorter, 2003; Hirsch, 1988). Other scholars, led by Giroux (1988), have taken a more inclusive and pro-populist view of popular culture and have seen popular culture, as Dolby (2003) states, "as a critical site of struggle over meaning and, most vitally, as a *pedagogical* site" (p. 264 author's emphasis). The youth today are becoming more connected to popular culture with the advances in interactive media (e.g., cell phones and web based information) and technology based communications (e.g., myspace.com, friendster.com, facebook.com).  As youth become more connected, educators need to introduce a language of critique into the students' worlds for use not only in school but in analyzing Hip Hop culture as well. The development of a language of critique is an important step in students' transition from being passive objects that are acted upon, to critical subjects who are instrumental in constructing their own worlds.

Yosso (2002) combines the writings of Paulo Freire and the literature in the field of CRT to establish a Critical Race Media Literacy. Yosso brought together 35 Latino(a)/Chicano(a) community college students to analyze media images. Yosso's work is important because she found that not only did the curriculum actively challenge students to question the seemingly debilitating images that the media presented, but also motivated the students to take action to change some of the portrayals presented. Students saw a reality outside of the one they currently lived and that their individual actions could have dramatic consequences towards the construction of a socially just future.

The literature on popular culture and education, though, falls short as the youth of today have begun to rally around a specific aspect of popular culture: Hip

Hop. Hip Hop culture has grown from its roots in a single borough of New York City into a world wide cultural movement that has been recognized in its breadth and depth by the United Nations (KRS-One, 2003). Hip Hop is an important site for understanding those youth who are under its widespread influence.

**An Introduction to Hip Hop: The Birth of a Culture**

The question is often posed, "What is Hip Hop?" Mainstream America mainly uses controversial and commercial rap music, often heard on the radios and on the music television channels, as a complete representation of Hip Hop culture. Hip Hop is, in fact, a culture complete with its own system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that Hip Hoppas[9] use to cope with their world and with one another. Ethnomusicologist Keys (2002), in looking for the historical roots of Hip Hop, traced the origins back to the West African tradition of the bard/griot that would be the designated consciousness of the tribe. George (1998), on the other hand, traced the origins of Hip Hop to the beginning of the civil rights movement in the New York borough of the South Bronx. He found that the birth of the modern Hip Hop era led many to connect with the hypnotizing beats of the DJ, the mesmerizing lyrics of the Emcee, the fantastic moves of the B-Boys/Girls (the Break dancing elite), and the intricate recordings of the Taggers/Writers (Graffiti Artists) (Chang, 2005).

Around the beginning of the 1970's, Urban America was heavily into the Motown Sound, which was largely Rhythm and Blues (R&B). But as the music industry began to exploit the talents of the urban community for their own profits, the Motown Era evolved into the Disco Era, in which a sped up, watered down form of R&B became popular. As quickly as it arose, the disco era began to fizzle. It left

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[9] A Hip Hoppa is someone who is an active participant in Hip Hop culture (KRS-One, 2003)

many in the Burroughs of New York City searching for a sound and, more importantly, a cultural expression and cultural representation that matched the intensity of their lives (Chang, 2005). Hip Hop began to take shape as a culture of resistance when the authorities (police, older generations, etc) took a stand against the youthful practitioners. Hip Hoppas were routinely harassed and arrested by police (George, 2001; Kitwana, 2002; KRS-One, 2003; Rose, 1994), but through the perseverance of seminal figures in Hip Hop culture such as Kool Herc, Africa Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash, Hip Hop culture began to take root in the South Bronx and then moved beyond it. In 1979, Hip Hop culture became legitimized with the establishment of Sugar Hill records and the release of the first hit rap record *Rapper's Delight* by the Sugar Hill Gang. People began to discover the roots of Hip Hop in four essential elements: Graffiti Art, Break Dancing, Deejaying, and Emceeing, and it is at this intersection that the world began to receive a taste of the future generation. All in all, it was these four aspects of the Hip Hop culture that provided the foundation for the multi-ethnic/generational/faceted culture that we call Hip Hop today.

Hip Hop began to attract national attention and sustained such attention when Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin began Def Jam Records, whose first major group, Run-DMC, became the first rap act to reach platinum status in record sales[10]. The flood gates then opened, and Hip Hop became recognized by record executives for its profit potential. A series of emcees (rappers) were signed including LL Cool J, The Fat Boys, Kurtis Blow and KRS-One. KRS-One was one of the first Hip Hop emcees to gain widespread recognition in the 1980's for his unquestioned connection to the

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[10] one million records sold

streets. His story, which is widely known throughout Hip Hop culture, took him from a homeless shelter, where he teamed up with DJ Scott La Rock to form the group *Boogie Down Productions* (BDP), to being a Hip Hop scholar. Scott La Rock was subsequently murdered following BDP's first record release. Afterward, KRS-One continued to emcee, unfurling consciousness – critiques of systemic oppression – in rap music where he earned the nickname "The Teacher". KRS-One has more recently turned his attention to the legitimization and formalization of Hip Hop as a respected culture, which he states is broken up into "nine essential elements, Deejaying, Breaking, Graffiti art, Emceeing, Beat boxing, Street fashion, Street language, Street knowledge and Street entrepreneurialism[11]" (KRS-One, 2003).

This is a place where many positivists would seek to define Hip Hop in a way that operationalizes a framework for Hip Hop but as Potter (1995), who investigated Hip Hop and the politics of postmodernism asks, "Can Hip Hop be defined? Or is definition of a kind of death, a refusal of the change that any evolving artform [culture] must embrace?" (p. 25). Potter captures the political difficulty of definition, explaining that:

> Hip Hop is all too often conceived of by casual listeners as merely a particular style of music; in one sense they are right, though the question of style has far more political significance than they may attribute to it. (p. 26)

Throughout history, the ability to define has held political significance. One outcome of the postmodernist's apprehension to define is that the power to define resides in the hands of the individual or group. Cultural critics (Chang, 2005; George, 1999),

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[11] "Taking something in its raw state (no loans from the bank, no help from parents) and trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents". (KRS-One, 2003)

scholars (Kitwana, 2003; Rose, 1994), and actual participants in Hip Hop culture (KRS-One, 2003) have all moved away from a postmodern discourse and taken their turns attempting to construct a working definition of Hip Hop culture, but scholar Tricia Rose's definition (1994) is one of the most comprehensive definitions of Hip Hop culture. She defines Hip Hop (as) "a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experience of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community" (Rose, 1994 p. 21). Here, Rose captures the complexity of Hip Hop as an experience which addresses the resistant strain that binds Hip Hop to the history and the context of Blacks and other marginalized people living in America today. From here, I focus on both the past and the present, looking deeper into social, economic, and political influences within Hip Hop culture.

**The Social Influences in Hip Hop**

*Gender*

> *Separate the girls from the women and the winnin'*
>
> *Always knew the thrill was worth it from the beginnin'*
>
> *Baby what's the deal I'm hurtin' 'em how I'm livin'*
>
> *I gotta conquer it all, now the world's my mission'*
>
> *–Eve: "Satisfaction" (2002)*

Gender plays a significant and rather dubious role in the development of Hip Hop culture. In one sense, women have been integral to the development of Hip Hop culture. Rose (1994) highlights the role Sylvia Robinson played as the founder of the rap group the Sugar Hill Gang and the conception of the first rap record ever

marketed and sold, "Rapper's Delight" (1979). Rap artists like Roxanne Shante, Queen Latifah, and Salt n' Pepa were present and substantial in the early days of Hip Hop and were responsible for bringing concepts like feminism into Hip Hop culture (Rose, 1994). However, Hip Hop though has a dark side in relation to gender as well. Hip Hop culture is seen by many as a location for some of the most blatant examples of misogyny in popular culture. Women in songs and in videos are objectified and disrespected by many, which provides opportunities for many outside of Hip Hop culture to question its inclusion in a field like education where 87% of the teachers are white women.

Keyes (2002) locates women within Hip Hop culture as "Daughters of the Blues" in that the women face similar conflicts and issues to the women who made their living within the Blues culture. The struggles of women in Blues culture bears a striking resemblance to the trials of the women of Hip Hop including, but not exclusive to, the struggle of women to establish feminist discourse within a patriarchal order, the objectification of women as sexual prey, and identity issues that glorify a mainstream typography of beauty.

Noticeably absent from Hip Hop culture is a deep, complex, and critical understanding of the problems related to issues of gender. It is often pointed out by social commentators (Malkin, 2007; McWhorter, 2003) that Hip Hop culture has a problem with misogyny, but this is often done for the sake of criticizing and is not part of a more progressive critique of ideology. Rose (1994) points out that:

> In the case of critical writing on male rappers, nonsexist and pro-women
>
> commentary about women and gender are virtually non-existent. Instead

discussions of sexual references in male rappers work are limited to considerations of the nature of rap's sexism. Similarly, critical commentary on female rappers rarely confronts the ways in which some of their work affirms patriarchal family norms and courtship rituals. (p. 147)

Rose attempts to reposition the women of Hip Hop as part of a dialogic process with a male dominated field instead of placing them in opposition to men. Hooks (2000) talks about people asserting their own dominant masculinity by emulating the patriarchy of dominant culture. Hip Hop is intimately and inextricably linked to societal influences. In order to sustain material success it is connected to a capitalist system and as such cannot escape patriarchy. It is, in many ways, forced to replicate domination in order to succeed. Hip Hop is far from an independent culture and is not in the position to support itself, but within a system that values capital over culture and people, oppression will remain. To return again to CST's language of transcendence and CRT's establishment of counter-narratives, Rose actively constructs a reality of the present which empowers herself to shape the future's construction.

### The Criminalization of Hip Hop culture

*Black fathers, black mothers, black brothers*

*handcuffed to each other, goin upstate in black buses*

*– Mo Black (Canibus): Blak iz Blak (2000)*

From the beginning of Hip Hop culture, the police specifically and authority in general, were set as antagonists in the struggle for humanity (George, 1999; KRS-One, 2003; Rose, 1994).  In order to power their parties in the parks of New York,

party planners would use streetlamps as a source of electricity for their equipment. The disregard for the laws of the land that outlawed the theft of electricity was only a part of a larger distain for authorities in general. The youth of New York, angered by the conditions of their lived environment which included the loss of some 60,000 homes in the Bronx and the forced relocation of many ethnic communities into modern day ghettos (Rose, 1994), felt as if they were forced to make due with the little resources available to them and they would survive and thrive by any means necessary. This stance often put them at odds with the police and led many the originators of Hip Hop to become quite familiar with the penal institutions.

The criminalization of Black youth culture continued in 1982 with the Reagan Administration's "War on Drugs". While many remember the first lady Nancy Reagan's pleas or the television commercials explaining what "your brain on drugs" looked like, public policy regarding the focus of illegal drug usage shifted from rehabilitation to punishment. Kitwana (2002) focuses on the Crime Bill of 1984 and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 as initiatives that were part of the administration's efforts to show that they were tough on crime. The injustice began with the implementation of what are known today as mandatory minimums in the sentencing of drug offenders. The drug of choice in the Black Community was crack cocaine which carried a mandatory minimum of five years in prison for the possession of five grams. The drug of choice in the White community during that same time was powder cocaine and in order to reach the mandatory minimum of five years one would have to possess nearly one hundred times the amount of crack cocaine. This unjust legal system caused many in the legal profession to begin exploring ways in

which the legal system created and perpetuated injustice. Critical Race Theory was one such movement that explored the inequity within the legal system, but even with an increased scrutiny from within the system, the inequity continued to emanate from the highest offices in society. This targeting has continued with laws like "Three Strikes" (mandatory life sentences for three time violent or drug offenders) and "Juvenile Crime Control" (youths can be tried as adults).

**Economic Influences: A Critique of Capitalism and Materialism**

> *Hip Hop used to be the language of rebellion, these cats aren't rebelling.*
> *That's why they're posing for pictures with Donald Trump because they love*
> *the system; they bought into the system; they ARE the system.*
> *–Saul Williams: "Saul Williams" (2004)*

In the previous section looking at social issues impacting the development of Hip Hop culture, I stated that Hip Hop formed in opposition to the power structures that they felt subjugated their quest for humanity. That seems so long ago now because the Hip Hop of today has moved into the realm of big business, where rap musicians are capable of investing millions of dollars to purchase sports franchises[12]. The progress from rebel to participant is interesting in that Hip Hop has constantly been forced to re-define itself in the eyes of the business world in order to receive an invitation to the corporate table (Negus, 2004), but now that its seat is secured, Hip Hop has become comfortable. Hip Hop is comfortable towing the corporate line that promotes the corporate agenda, which celebrates capitalism and materialism.

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[12] Rap Artist Jay-Z in 2004 purchased a share of the National Basketball Association franchise New Jersey Nets.

In looking at one aspect that contributed to Hip Hop's current level of comfort in promoting the corporate agenda, Kitwana (2002) states, "Corporate mergers, particularly in media and entertainment have redefined public space" (p. 9). And while these corporate mergers have taken Hip Hop culture and placed it forefront in the public eye, it is only through a critical analysis that the corporate agenda can be seen as exploitative rather than progressive. Poet and cultural critic Saul Williams (2004) laments the transformation and reflects, "Hip Hop has become republican."

Kitwana (2002) reveals a critical piece to this puzzle of Hip Hop's transformation into a propaganda machine for capitalism. Young African-American and Latino(a)/Chicano(a)'s can now see themselves in successful roles and with the new domination of Hip Hop culture in the media and entertainment, but without the language of critique, the youth would be receiving a distorted view of their own reality. The individuals that they see "constitute a very small elite" (p. 12), but because they are dominating the airwaves, it might give young African American and Latino(a)/Chicano(a) people a false sense of entitlement and security, thus serving the purpose as a pacifier for the culture, creating a culture of consumers rather than activists. The myth of the American Dream has finally reached the inner cities, and Hip Hop stars like Sean "P. Diddy" Combs and Sean "Jay-Z" Carter have taken their place right beside Andrew Carnegie as mythical figures that pulled themselves up by their boot straps and made it despite the odds.

**The Political Influences in Hip Hop**

*There is a point where radical political discourse meets the demands of the marketplace and the two merge. The space between the points where radical*

*political discourse can critique dominant culture and dominant culture*

*becomes financially viable through the selling of the contrary discourse is the*

*only space for a reasoned understanding of contemporary political culture.*

*(Boyd, 2004 p. 327)*

Negus (1996) spoke of Hip Hop having to consistently re-invent itself to secure a seat at the corporate table, but lost in that analysis is the adherence to the status quo in relation to African American and Latino's having to strive to a defined level of high culture. Returning to Gates' concept of the signifying as postmodern methodology, Hip Hop has continuously reconstructed its identity, but for what means? Does Hip Hop end its resistance because the economic demographics of Hip Hop come close to the economic demographics of the world, with the top 225 individuals having more wealth that 48% of all human beings (West, 2003)? Does Hip Hop bask in the successes of the few while leaving others behind? Being that Hip Hop is in its infancy as a culture, KRS-One (2003) suggests that the number one priority for Hip Hop is the coming to voice and speaking for itself instead of allowing others to speak for it. This coming to voice is a political process. This process has already had, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the development of Hip Hop.

Hip Hop came of age during the Reagan Administration. I have already touched on the administration's criminalization of Hip Hop culture as a social influence, but Ards (2004) adds to this as she states, "for many activists, the creation of hip-hop amid social devastation is itself a political act" (p. 314). Ards has a point in that the mere survival of Hip Hop culture through the devastation is an act of

rebellion and resistance, both political acts. Hip Hop survived to thrive in the late 1980's and early 1990's, when Reagan left office and Rap music became a source of activism.

Rap groups Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions began to look at the communities and critically reflect on the trials and tribulations of urban areas. The groups came up with different assessments and different strategies for confrontation of the problems of the streets, but both groups, through rap music, voiced in a political way their possibilities for their construction of the future. Public Enemy's (1989) recording of "Fight the Power" was the lead song on Spike Lee's soundtrack to the movie *Do the Right Thing* (political in its own right). Public Enemy's critical reflection led them to an understanding that a problem with the urban communities is that the community has embraced its role as objects to be acted upon:

*People, people we are the same*

*No we're not the same*

*Cause we don't know the game*

*What we need is awareness, we can't get careless*

*You say what is this?*

*My beloved lets get down to business*

*Mental self defensive and fitness*

Public Enemy put out a call to action for urban communities to begin to understand the inner working of life in the inner city. This meant coming to consciousness about the powers that were acting upon them and developing a disciplined strategy and a strategy of discipline in order to "Fight the powers that be." Boogie Down

Productions, a duo that consisted of Hip Hop scholar KRS-One and his Deejay Scott La Rock, faced a situation in which Scott La Rock lost his life in a drive by shooting. This led KRS-One in 1991 to establish the Stop the Violence Movement, which pulled together some of the biggest stars in Hip Hop culture. They recorded a song called *Self-Destruction.* KRS-One to address the issues of Black on Black violence that was ravaging the community at the time and took action to change this. Using a language of transcendence, both groups communicated with their communities in a method that was understood by the communities.

A political challenge facing Hip Hop culture is the unification of grassroots activists within Hip Hop and the monetarily successful commercial rap industry (Kitwana, 2004). Since 2001 rap mogul and pioneer Russell Simmons has organized a summit consisting of rap industry insiders, prominent politicians, religious leaders, and scholars. Missing from this exchange were the grassroots organizers in the Hip Hop community itself. Missing its roots, the summit missed its theoretical mark spinning into a conversation relating to free speech and ways to further develop the rap industries profit-earning potential. Missing was the cultural critique and the development of discourse aimed at empowerment.  Unification has happened in Hip Hop culture, if only sporadically, but many times with powerful outcomes. Kitwana (2004) identifies five specific instances where the activists and the industry have come together: 1) The Haitian Refugee Crisis of 1997, 2) the Trial and sentencing of Mumia Abu-Jamal, 3) The Million Man March 4) The Million Youth March and 5) The East coast/West coast conflict. In all of these events/movements, the rap industry

came together with the grassroots organizers to form a united front, connecting to masses of rap music fans and opening them up to a language of transcendence.

**Hip Hop Today: The Commercialization and Gangsterization of Hip Hop**

Hip Hop always seems to be embroiled in a political controversy due to the patriarchal, misogynistic, materialistic, violent lyrics some Hip Hop artists use in their music. Current songs receiving a bulk of the media's attention, both commercially and politically, are lightening rods for controversy. I will use current Hip Hop artist MIMS (2007) as an example:

> This is why I'm hot, catch me on the block
>
> Every other day, another bitch, another drop
>
> I'm into drivin cars, fresh up off the lot
>
> I'm into shuttin stores down, just so I could shop
>
> If you need a bird, I could get it chopped
>
> Tell me what chu need, you know I get 'em by the flock
>
> We into big spendin', you see my pimpin' never drag
>
> Find me with different women that you niggaz never had
>
> For those who say they know me, know I'm focused on my cream
>
> Playa you come between, you better focus on the beam
>
> I keep it so mean, the way you seen me lean
>
> And when I say I'm hot, my nigga this is what I mean.
>
> – Mims (2007) *This is why I'm hot*

In this song alone we see examples of misogyny and the commodification of women (Every other day, another bitch, another drop), drug references (If you need a bird, I

could get it chopped), and rampant materialism (I'm shuttin stores down, just so I could shop). The song is called "This is why I'm hot" and as he describes in his song, the lyrics represent elements that have been staples of commercially successful Hip Hop in the new millennium. Songs that include lyrics laced with misogyny, materialism and drug references are the best selling and most popular Hip Hop songs in the nation, and as such, this song has also topped the Billboard Rap Music Charts 15 straight weeks.

Issues of misogyny have long been a concern of those within Hip Hop culture (Rose, 1994; Watkins, 2005). Women have been targets of abuse, which has caused many women to question their continued support of Hip Hop music. At the same time though, a Hip Hop artist like Snoop Dogg (Calvin Broadus), while always having commercial success, found that when he entered into the world of pornography, he was able to find a new commercial legitimacy. He was seen to have gained a new level of authenticity as before his porn movies he only acted like a "pimp" on his albums, but with his foray into adult entertainment, people were able to see him living this life. Maybe or maybe not coincidentally, soon after Snoop Dogg was cast in supporting roles in major motion pictures reprising his role as a pimp (Watkins, 2005). Hip Hop artists are often times rewarded by the entertainment industry for their misogynistic lyrics and behaviors which serves to sap any sense of urgency for the artists to address these issues.

Violence has also been a best-selling feature of Hip Hop since the mid 1980's (Quinn, 2004). As the Gangster Rap movement became commercially viable with the group N.W.A. (Nigga's with Attitude), the record industry has continued to find ways

to support the music and the artists who display some of the rugged characteristics of their 80's forefathers. While N.W.A. is often seen as revolutionary for their illumination of the African American experiences in the inner cities across the U.S., groups that followed did so with less of an eye on the issues within the community. The artists in turn were focused on the financial rewards that they could receive for promoting the hyper-violent lyrics that have stoked the industry decision-makers fortunes.

Those in charge of the Hip Hop industry have reached a point where they have found ways to capitalize on the deepest and darkest desires of the consumers. Hip Hop is being used to cater to these hedonistic needs, but this is nothing new. Black people in America, both male and female, have long history of being exploited for entertainment purposes (e.g., sexual, violent, deviant) beginning with slavery. Hip Hop is continuing to serve a similar purpose. Hip Hop group Little Brother, named their album (2005) *The Minstrel Show* as a critique of the Hip Hop industry's limited view of what music should be and is made. Artists today are, as I stated earlier, faced with the choice of performing the music the industry wants them to perform, or they may face professional ostracism. The Hip Hop industry is run by five corporations that control retail, four major record labels that make albums, and three major media outlets that determine the radio station play-lists (Chang, 2005). Together these corporations control the content of what Hip Hop is released to the public. With such systemic issues at the heart of the problems in Hip Hop culture today, we need to begin to educate students not only about the dangers of marginalizing lyrics, but also

about the inner-workings of the Hip Hop industry and its role in the Hip Hop that we hear today.

**What is needed now? Towards a Critical Hip Hop Studies in Education**

Across the nation on college campuses world wide, schools are beginning to bring Hip Hop onto campus. According to a 2005 survey by Stanford's Hiphop Archive, more than 300 courses in Hip Hop culture are now offered at colleges and universities across the country (Harmanci, 2007). In the fall of 2007, Howard University will now offer a minor in Hip Hop (Richburg, 2006). Colleges and Universities have the freedom and the autonomy to be current, but in K-12, teachers and administrators are bound by curriculum standards that do not allow for much deviation. Again I will make the argument that we as a society of educators need to run towards Hip Hop and not away from it, if we truly care about our children and their future. The integration of Hip Hop culture and music into the classroom could go a long way in helping students critically understand and combat their fears, making the task of learning, not only more enjoyable, but more productive as well. As Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) found, "teaching Hip Hop as a music and a culture of resistance can facilitate the development of critical consciousness in urban youth" (p. 89).

Hip Hop has seen its introduction into the classrooms at a very limited level, and many times it has been used to perpetuate the same hierarchy that continues to oppress students. Hip Hop is often used to provide a scaffold bridging Hip Hop culture and mainstream academic culture without challenging the aspects of mainstream academic culture that are oppressive (e.g., cultural mismatches and

curricular choices). Freire (2003) speaks to an education based in the lives of the

students as one of the fundamental tenants of a humanizing education If we are to

begin to address the humanity of all students, we must begin with the students'

culture and move outward to the world as they read it. An investigation into students'

lived culture reveals that Hip Hop in its nine essential elements (Deejaying, Breaking,

Graffiti art, Emceeing, Beat boxing, Street fashion, Street language, Street knowledge

and Street entrepreneurialism[13] [KRS-One, 2003]) does better to define the

experiences of youth today than any other medium (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade,

2002). That said, the integration of Hip Hop into the classroom not only makes sense,

but it is necessary to combat the plague that is education today.

What is needed now is the integration of Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture

into the classroom fused with a critical interrogation of oppression, which could begin

the process of re-humanizing the educative process. *Embedded* in Hip Hop are the

beliefs and values of the youth today. I say embedded because many critics of Hip

Hop only choose to see the superficial, corporate-driven expressions of Hip Hop and

immediately move to condemn Hip Hop as an immoral influence that is ruining the

moral fiber of society (McWhorter, 2003). If, though, we look beyond the

significance of Hip Hop as a corporation, to the values and beliefs that began with the

originators of Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop represents an authentic voice of youth

culture (Mahiri, 1998). Today, we have a unique opportunity to tap into the humanity

of children by engaging their voice in authentic dialogue, on their terms, which has

transformative potential.

---

[13] "Taking something in its raw state (no loans from the bank, no help from parents) and trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents". (KRS-One, 2003)

Michael Eric Dyson (2001) spoke to the critical process of reflection in his exploration of the life and legacy of one of Hip Hop's biggest icons and most influential artists, Tupac Shakur. Tupac unconsciously took the Freireian process of reflection from the journals and other westernized educational models, put a beat behind it, and "reflected out loud" so that Tupac's reflections were the basis for not only his music but more importantly for this study, his exploration of his identity. Critical Hip Hop pedagogy would look at the process through which reflection could be utilized as a tool for self exploration.

Integrating Hip Hop in the educational system provides the opportunity to shake people's foundations by injecting the system with a shot of humanity. The students' identities and the narrative that describes the students' identity are often inauthentic in that they are often constructed without the participation of the students themselves. In opposition to this process, the counter-narrative empowers the students as they engage in a critical dialogue about the themes which have been previously identified.  This examination leads to the exploration of an authentic identity which is in contrast to the dominant identity often prescribed to them. Exploration of this counter-dominant identity through dialogue leads to Freire's *consientização*, which serves to humanize both the oppressed and the oppressor. With this, I am attempting to provide the space for students to construct a narrative that is representative of their culture and being that highlights the development of counter narratives, a language of critique and transcendence and *consientização* and that again represents the development of the awakening of critical consciousness (Freire, 2002). These three components are the foundations which lead to the acquisition of a consciously critical

identity through which students of tomorrow could be equipped to revolutionize instruction.

**The Construction of a Hip Hop Identity**

Defining identity as "a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14) opens the concept of identity up to the point where individuals *can* exert some semblance of power in the way that their own identity is constructed and defined, depending on who is telling the stories. Identity as narrative works to provide individuals opportunities to construct their own counter-narratives, which would hold as much or more power than the original narratives constructed by outsiders (e.g., the media, scholars, critics). In making conscious the possibility of developing their own counter-narratives, people are able to take a more activist role in their agency as a person. One of people's first acts could be to choose Hip Hop music as the soundtrack of their identity, and Hip Hop as their culture.

Hip Hop can be seen as an expression of identity which emerges from an oppressed people. Rose (1994) states:

> "Hip Hop emerges from complex cultural exchanges and larger social and political conditions of disillusionment and alienation. Graffiti and rap were especially aggressive public displays of counterpresence and voice. Each asserted the right to write – to inscribe one's identity on an environment that seemed Teflon resistant to its young people of color; an environment that made legitimate avenues for material and social participation inaccessible." (Rose, 1994 p. 59-60)

Hip Hop is cultural production in a coded and subversive methodology used to deconstruct the identities that are forced upon Hip Hoppas by mainstream society. In other words, Hip Hoppas actually produce culture, but they do so in a way that only Hip Hop can understand. This can flesh out the difference between those who are Hip Hop and the casual fan. It is used as an identifier when judging who is an insider and who is counterfeit. These identifiers serve a dual purpose as both a Hip Hoppa's tool to judge authenticity of Hip Hop and Hip Hop's construction of an alternative identity that more represents how they want to be viewed.

> Hip Hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built environment. Alternative local identities were forged in fashions and language, street names, and most importantly, in establishing neighborhood crews or posses. (Rose, 1994 p. 34)

While this alternative identity is often in response and thus shaped by the master narrative that is used by mainstream culture, this counter-narrative can be seen as a more authentic view into the lives of these Hip Hoppas.

**The Evolution of the Cypher**

This section is a detailed description of the Critical Cultural Cypher, from its theoretical conception to its practical application. Beginning with the Cultural Circles of Freire (2002), the model for the Cyphers was established. I then linked some of the powerful theoretical constructs from Critical Social Theory, Critical Race Theory and Freire's work to Hip Hop culture. In the following sections, I look at how the

theoretical constructs are already in place and utilized in Hip Hop culture making their inclusion in this project not only convenient but necessary as well.

### A Language of Critique and Transcendence in Hip Hop

*Thinkin how they spent 30 million dollars on airplanes*

*when there's kids starvin*

*'Pac is gone and Brenda still throwin babies in the garbage*

*I wanna know "What's Goin' On" like I hear Marvin*

*No schoolbooks, they used that wood to build coffins*

   - *Hate it, or Love it The Game (2005)*

African Americans have a long history of signifying extant language structures for the use of critique and transcendence (Gates, 1988; Lee, 1991; Mitchell-Kernan, 1973).  During a time when slavery was a legal system of labor, slaves sang spirituals based in biblical verses, which held alternative meanings to the literal interpretation of the words so as to disguise their communication patterns from slave masters.  Blues artists' use of language continued the tradition of using music to critique systemic oppression.  Woods (1998) describes the "transcendent social agenda inherent in the blues tradition" (p. 208) as an essential component in not only the success of the blues but in its health as well.

Hip Hop Artists have continued this tradition of critique and transcendence as evidenced by The Game's (2005) song *Hate it, or Love it,* from which the verse above was taken.  Here, The Game turns his critical eye towards the government and identifies what he considers a misuse/misappropriation of federal dollars considering the plight of the communities from which he arose.  This critique turns to a song

about an individual's ability to transcend despite the circumstances when he (The Game) and rapper 50 Cent continue with the chorus:

> *Hate it or love it, the underdog's on top*
>
> *And I'm gon' shine homie until my heart stop*
>
> *(Go 'head envy me, I'm rap's M.V.P.)*
>
> *(And I ain't goin nowhere, so you can get to know me)*

Another Hip Hop artist takes on the global problem of blood diamonds from the African country of Sierra Leone. Kanye West's song *Diamonds from Sierra Leone* helps make critical connections between beliefs, values, and understandings of Hip Hop's practitioners and the events that are the site of some of the worst atrocities the world has seen.

> *Though it's thousands of miles away*
>
> *Sierra Leone connect to what we go through today*
>
> *Over here it's a drug trade, we die from drugs*
>
> *Over there they die from what we buy from drugs*
>
> *The diamonds, the chains, the bracelets, the charms(es)*
>
> *I thought my Jesus piece was so harmless*
>
> *'Til I seen a picture of a shorty armless*
>
> *-  Kanye West (2005)*

Here West reflects on his actions and practices and makes some startling reflections that not only moved him to write about this, but is now influencing the world through his music. It is important to point out that the critique is not only a critique of a large system followed by personal and individual transcendence, West here applies his

critique on himself and his culture, and the following transcendence can be seen as young people influenced by his powerful words reconsider their purchases. West continues:

> *And here's the conflict*
>
> *It's in a black person soul to rock that gold*
>
> *Spend your whole life tryin' to get that ice*
>
> *On a Polo rugby it look so nice*
>
> *How can something so wrong make me feel so right?*

The use of a language of critique and transcendence is not only essential to the continued applicability of Hip Hop as a tool for understanding the Hip Hop community, it is foundational. Hip Hop, as I stated earlier, was founded on such critique and the hope found in the lyrics of the emcee, the moves of the b-boy/b-girl and the pieces of the taggers, will continue to inspire for years to come.

**Use of Counter Narratives in Hip Hop**

The counter narrative can address, even explicitly, the constructions of the dominant narrative, which we see in some of the new Hip Hop artists' lyrics, Kanye West for example. In the song "All Falls Down," West employs this power of definition as he creates a counter narrative outside the existence of the dominant narrative of the young black man as a "materialistic squanderer" with the lyrics:

> *Man I promise, I'm so self conscious;*
>
> *That's why you always see me with at least one of my watches*
>
> *– Kanye West: "All Falls Down" (2004).*

Here West, separate from the dominant narrative, tells his story of why. He is able to critically analyze his own life exposing some of his self-perceived deficiencies with an amazing critical analysis. He then, later in the verse, turns his critical analytical tool on his self-identified racial and classed group:

> *It seems we living the American dream*
>
> *But the people highest up got the lowest self esteem*
>
> *The prettiest people do the ugliest things*
>
> *For the road to riches and diamond rings*
>
> *We shine because they hate us, floss cause they degrade us*
>
> *We trying to buy back our 40 acres*
>
> *And for that paper, look how low we a'stoop*
>
> *Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coop/coupe*
>
> *– Kanye West: "All Falls Down" (2004).*

I am not saying that this song was created to be a counter-narrative inside of Hip Hop, but for me, this is an example of an artist within the Hip Hop culture using a counter narrative to critically analyze his environment. In no way am I claiming that this artist has developed a critical consciousness. At the same time I am not claiming that he has not. In another song West begins a verse:

> *I got a Jones like Norah for your sorror'*
>
> *Bring more of them girls I've seen in the Aurora*
>
> *Tammy, Becky, and Laura, or'a Shirley*
>
> *I'm tryin' to hit it early, like I'm in a hurry*
>
> *– Kanye West: "School Spirit" (2004).*

Here, West reverts back to the dominant narrative that objectifies women. Taken together, using CRT and CST, teachers and students can use these two songs together as an opportunity to see the contradictions, and the brilliance, within us all. West turned a critical eye towards Hip Hop and saw the role capitalism and materialism played in the identity development of some of the most monetarily successful people in Hip Hop culture. Eleven songs later he then speaks of trying to sleep with and conquer as many women as he can in a short time frame. Critics of Hip Hop culture have a singular focus on the negative and it is West's second song that leads many to discount Hip Hop as everything but progressive and worthy of study by students (McWhorter, 2003). This type of analysis is fruitless and will not have any kind of impact on the lives of students today. Kanye West was nominated for 10 Grammy Awards, winning 3 including best rap album and has sold well over 2 million records. The critical insight and oppression of women, paired together, could be posed to students as a problem. This problem which has no correct answer, will allow the students to investigate more than West; they will be forced to look within themselves for answers. After all, West did sell 2 million albums.

Another example of Hip Hop culture as counter narrative can be seen in the artist Lil' Kim's work in her song, "This is Who I Am" (2003):

> *I am who I am, you just can't change me*
>
> *No matter what you do, you can't take the hood out me*
>
> *People been around me for years, don't know shit about me*
>
> *Dedicated, like Muslims makin' selat[14]*

---

[14] The term Selat as used here is in reference to the Muslim practice of making a connection with the Higher through prayer five times a day

*People steady try to make me into somethin' I'm not*

*That's why I had to cut the grass, so I could see the snakes*

*Copped the house on the hill so I could see the lakes*

*What you thought? I'm a girl, couldn't make it alone*

*Time to turn the heat up and get back in the zone*

   – *Lil' Kim "This Is Who I Am" (2003)*

Lil' Kim has filled a unique place in Hip Hop culture whereas she is at the same time lauded by some feminists for taking back the sexuality that the patriarchal system has co-opted and criticized by some feminists for perpetuating the same oppressive images of women that have kept them oppressed for years (Perry, 2004). Regardless of how she is viewed by people, Lil' Kim is a woman who is explicit in her attempts to define herself for herself.  In this song, Kim challenges the dominant narrative on several fronts.  Her defiant lyrics, "You can't take the hood out me" scream in the face of the assimilationists who claim that African Americans need to give up some of the values and cultural beliefs that make it difficult to become financially and socially successful in the United States (Elder, 2000).  Lil' Kim turns the heat up on the dominant narrative that claims that a woman needs a man to succeed in life by citing her success as a single woman who has reaped the rewards of her success within Hip Hop culture.  These examples of counter-narratives are strong examples of people challenging the dominant views of individuals through their own stories.

**The Development of Hip Hop's Voice as *Consientização*:**

The development of critical consciousness directly coincides with the development of student voice in that the students must learn to name their lived oppression, but when this oppression lies within the actions and beliefs of the teachers, a tragically ironic situation is faced. The hidden curriculum as defined by Bennett (2001) consists of teacher attitudes and expectations, the grouping of students and the instructional strategies, school disciplinary policies and practices, school and community relations and classroom climates. While these are not the only areas in which voice can be developed, the hidden curriculum is nevertheless important for the students to recognize. Without analyzing this area, their interpretations are incomplete and could lead to a misdiagnosis of the locus of the problem. For example, a study by Bennett and Harris (1982) showed that without a critical analysis of the teacher's beliefs, the students who might have been disciplined for other than academic reasons (i.e. the teacher's prejudices) could attribute their suspensions and expulsions to their own perceived academic shortcomings or their own inability to perform a certain task. Critical consciousness is therefore reliant on the complete empowerment of the students to define their reality and everything that lies within it, including the teachers' actions and beliefs. Therein lies a problem because many teachers are currently being threatened with their professional lives, and the question becomes, what incentive does a teacher have to be open and honest?  This situation could and often does lead to an educational system where the teacher is not working with the student; it is the teacher who is often pitted against the student.

One of my main contentions is that Hip Hop gives voice to a population that is rarely heard. This giving of voice has historic relevance. Rose identified New York's transformation to a post-industrial marketplace as a location in which this giving of voice helped Hip Hoppas express their frustration with their place in a "new" New York. "Hip Hop gives voice to the tensions and contradictions in the public urban landscape during a period of substantial transformation in New York and attempts to seize the shifting urban terrain, to make it work on behalf of the dispossessed" (Rose, 1994, p. 22). This not-so-subtle form of resistance allowed Hip Hoppas to express their distaste for their forced experiences, and this expression has been one of the ways in which Hip Hop has connected with people around the world. Their expressions (and the power of their expressions) and their ability to make their voice heard strike a chord with people frustrated by their own silence. "Rap's global industry-orchestrated (but not industry-created) presence illustrates the power of the language of rap and the salience of the stories of oppression and creative resistance its music and lyrics tell" (Rose, 1994, p. 19). The content also speaks to the masses of oppressed people for the same reasons:

> "The cries of pain, anger, sexual desire, and pleasure that rappers articulate speak to Hip Hop's vast fan base for different reasons. For some, rappers offer symbolic prowess, a sense of black energy and creativity in the face of omnipresent oppressive forces; others listen to rap with an ear toward the hidden voices of the oppressed, hoping to understand America's large, angry , and 'unintelligible' population." (Rose, 1994, p. 19)

Bakari Kitwana, former Executive Editor of *The Source* magazine focuses his attention beyond the essential elements of Hip Hop (the music, break dancing, graffiti, dejaying, style and attitude) and instead looks at "new attitudes and beliefs of young blacks" and the sociopolitical forces that have shaped a generation of Black youths with birth years from 1965-1984, which he calls "The Hip Hop Generation." Kitwana (1999) identifies the deaths of two figureheads in Hip Hop music, Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace (Notorious B.I.G.) as the "coming of age" of the Hip Hop generation. This coming of age did not happen because those in the Hip Hop generation were forced to deal with the losses of its two biggest stars in the span of six months forcing many to reassess their own lives and actions. These deaths marked an acknowledgement and a consciousness of the very existence of a culture that was distinct from generations in the past. This identification and sense of self is important to the establishment of the argument that those included in the Hip Hop generation have a distinct identity to be formed and that Hip Hop itself is deeply embedded in their identity formation. The implications of a Hip Hop identity and consciousness are crucial to the establishment of a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy in classrooms and schools today where much influence over identity formation is exerted.

**Significance of the Literature to the Study**

The process of weaving together a body of literature for the purpose of advancing one's cause is an arduous task, but one that is necessary for the advancement of one's theoretical foundations. Through this tapestry of literature, I find that I am warmed by familiarity of thought which complements my feelings and

beliefs.  This work is revolutionary in that the culture of the students is being privileged in an attempt to forge inroads in the ways in which we address the very process of education for marginalized youth.

Theorists George (1998), Rose (1994), Mahiri (1998), Kitwana (2002), and Chang (2005) all show how Hip Hop culture has been chosen by many of the students of today as a defining characteristic of their identity.  Whether viewed on television or walking down the street, Hip Hop's influence is inescapable.  In this chapter, I wanted to introduce many people who might be unfamiliar to the origins of the culture and the mindset of those within the culture. These are our students.  To know and understand a part of their lives, which they deem significant, is to better serve their diverse needs inside and outside of the classroom.  Over the years, we as educators have thought long and hard about how to best serve the students and while each students is different, today students from across the United States (and dare I say across the globe) can be tied together by a culture that is unique in that it speaks many of the themes that they face as youth (marginalization, empowerment, identity).

Educators such as Ladson-Billings (1995), gave us progressive theoretical frameworks from which to draw upon in the education of our youth, but even Ladson-Billings could not have imagined the impact of Hip Hop culture on the youth of today.  I am not saying here that Ladson-Billings's work needs to be ignored, just that it needs to be re-read with Hip Hop culture in mind.  Many of the pedagogical practices that we have identified would still work to educate the Hip Hop generation. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy read as Hip Hop Culturally Relevant Pedagogy would be an extremely powerful tool in the education of the students.

When reading the powerful theoretical constructs of Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory, it is important to keep at the top of one's mind, the people the theories are aiming to serve. When re-visiting Michael Apple's powerful critique *Ideology and Curriculum* it is important to do so through the eyes of Hip Hop culture. When Apple (1990) calls us to question "the knowledge and symbols schools and other cultural institutions overtly and covertly give legitimacy to" (p. 15), we now must think of how one de-legitimized Hip Hop culture and the impact of the choices upon the students that have chosen Hip Hop culture to be part of their identity. Every day, students go to school, and they are told that their ways of being (Hip Hop) are not appropriate within the walls of the schools. "Pull your pants up", "Tuck in your shirt", "Take that off your head" are the commands, but "Your culture is not legitimate" is what is heard. When Williams (1976) states that schools act as agents of selective traditions and cultural incorporation, we need to think about which traditions now apply and how Hip Hop is currently disenfranchised. Hip Hop is this generation's counter-narrative: its critique of society and its role in it. When we make Hip Hop a principle in Bell's (1992) Principle of Interest Convergence, we will get to a point where educators can work *with* Hip Hop in an attempt to educate students. Again Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory both have much to offer, but the traditional starting points have begun to change, and this work hopefully begins to redirect new work.

This was the approach that I took in the development of this project. I re-read Paulo Freire's work and approached it from inside of Hip Hop culture. I think this is what Freire meant when he said to Macedo, "It is impossible to export pedagogical

practices without reinventing them… recreate and rewrite my ideas" (Macedo & Freire, 2001, p. 107).  What you will see in the upcoming chapters is my attempt at reinventing, recreating and rewriting Freire.  This is Paulo Freire through a Critical Hip Hop perspective.

**Chapter Three:**

**Research Design and Method**

**This is what I want to know about**

Over the course of the past 40 years, Hip Hop culture has become a significant part of American culture. As such, high school students—many of whom struggle to meet the demands of school— are involved in the process of continually defining and redefining Hip Hop culture. Numerous studies have begun to explore the links between popular culture and schooling (Dolby, 2000; Giroux, 1989; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell & Andrade, 2002; Morrell, 2005). However, few studies have explored the particular ways in which students make sense of their own experiences in Hip Hop culture *and* in school. Even more important, very little attention has been paid to how students understand and think about this link. This study explored how Hip Hop could be used to engage students in a discourse of enlightenment.  Specifically, The C³ Project looked at the ways that Hip Hop was able to be used to illuminate marginalization and oppression within the culture the students were so connected to. This research also looked at the potential for Hip Hop culture as a curricular foundation from which students can begin to explore their lived culture and to build specific skills crucial to mainstream academic success.  Finally this research examined the link between critical consciousness development and the participants' participation in Hip-Hop culture.

To achieve this development and understanding, I conducted a critical ethnography to engage and observe eight students.  This process began with in-depth ethnographic interviews followed by seven meetings of a weekly focus group (A

Critical Cultural Cypher). In addition, I spent time observing students in (classroom observations and informal interviews) and out of school (spoken word and open mic performances) as a way to better understand their worlds from their own perspectives. The Cypher sessions were followed by more in-depth ethnographic interviews which helped me gain more insights into participants' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors related to Hip Hop culture and their experiences in the Critical Cultural Cypher. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do students' understandings of Hip Hop culture shape their lives, their identities, and their schooling?

2. How can Hip Hop be used in a school setting to help the students challenge systemic and structural domination?

3. How can Freireian methodology infused with Hip Hop culture be used to train teachers to better integrate students' lived culture into their pedagogical practices and curricular choices?

**Critical Ethnography: A Research Strategy**

Hip Hop at its origins is a culture of resistance (KRS One, 2003), so when looking for a methodology that would theoretically match the power and purpose of Hip Hop culture, critical research stood out as a construct that was similar in design. McLaren (1994) explains that critical research is designed to engage and serve marginalized communities. Throughout the world, Hip Hop has become the vehicle through which marginalized communities have communicated with those living a more privileged life (Mitchell, 2002). This shows there is a natural connection

between Hip Hop culture and the research designed to serve marginalized people who are looking to share their experiences.

For this project, I employed the methodology of critical ethnography to accurately record and explain the actions of the participants in this study. Masemann (1982) defines critical ethnography as studies "which use a basically anthropological, qualitative participant observer methodology but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy." (p.1) Masemann's definition does define, but it does not explain the power and the philosophies behind critical ethnography. An analysis of critical ethnography must begin with by deconstructing what is typically meant by "critical". The term "critical" is used by many in research communities to describe a questioning or challenging of unequal power structures. This is important because in this project, I am placing into question, the role of students lived culture (Hip Hop) as subordinate to the cultural hegemony that mainstream academic culture holds in schools (Banks, 1993). The analysis of critical ethnography would then continue with an exploration of ethnography. Thomas (1993) referred to critical ethnography as conventional ethnography with a political purpose, so looking at traditional ethnography, Creswell (1998) sees it as the "description and interpretation of a cultural group or social group or system" (p. 58). This is typically done by examining the customs, beliefs, and values of participants using the methods of participant-observation (Carspecken, 1996; Duncan, 2000; Quantz, 1992), formal observations (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and ethnographic interviews (Patton, 1990; Wainwright, 1997), all of which I discuss in detail later in this chapter. Carspecken (2003) provides a more

nuanced look at critical ethnography as he explains that, "Critical ethnography must make the effort to disrupt the traditional power of the researcher by making as many features of the research as possible open to equal negotiations between all those affected by the project." (p. 1036).   In answer to this charge, I made sure that built into the framework of this study were opportunities for participants to define and dictate how the learning units would be covered.  My power as a researcher to define and control was ceded to the participants in order to gain further access to their culture and to learn from their choices.

The next question becomes why someone would choose critical ethnography as a methodology.  Thomas (1993) describes the purposes of critical ethnography as "a way of applying a subversive world view to the conventional logic of cultural inquiry" (p. vii).  Quantz (1992) further explicates purposes of critical ethnography when investigating the impact of critical discourse on culture.  He suggests that "culture is an ongoing political struggle around the meaning given to actions of people located within unbounded asymmetrical power relations" (p. 483). "In critical ethnography…," he went on to say, "…the group's construction of culture is a complex activity that must always include oppositional relations with potential group formations as defining forces, not just interactive forces, in the construction of cultural patterns" (p. 484). For the purposes of this study, I looked at the ways in which the participants constructed Hip Hop culture as well as their constructions of Mainstream Academic culture and the obstacles the participants faced because of the their choice of definition.

When looking at my work, I see three critical ethnographic works that impacted my decision-making and strategy formulations. The first was the work of Bourgois (2003). Bourgois is an anthropologist by trade who entered into a barrio in New York City where for three and one half years he spent time in the streets, in crack-houses and in the homes of people in the community. I was intrigued by this work because of the access to his "friends" that he earned in his time. Knowing that I was only going to be on campus for approximately one school year, I kept Bourgois in mind when developing relationships with my participants. Bourgois spent much of his time in the field visiting and befriending families and attending parties and other social functions. As I entered the field, I too attended social functions like open-mic nights where the participants would be performing in an effort to build a measure of trust between myself and the participants. Another critical ethnography that impacted my work was that of Dimitriadis (2004). Dimitriadis followed two teens and studied the role that rap music played in their lives and their identity formation. Dimitriadis's choice of Hip Hop culture as a site of analysis helped me identify Hip Hop culture and its contentious relationship with mainstream academic school culture as a site of study. Finally it was with Morrell (2004) that I found a lens of analysis that helped to deepen my appreciation for critical research. Morrell followed a group of high school students as they were participating in a university sponsored program that helped them develop critical research skills and more. Morrell's work helped me frame my study and my work as a challenge to traditional forms of schooling.

**Description of Methodology**

When looking at critical ethnography as a methodology, it is easy to focus exclusively on the methods that are utilized to gather the data, but methodologies reflect implicit and embedded philosophical, epistemological and ontological beliefs. It is here that I will begin to outline my paradigmatic framework.

My journey towards my current understanding of the concepts of truth and reality began as I started teaching psychology at the secondary level. Through my interactions with students, I began to look back at my experience as a high school student, and I began to see alternative narratives describing my own experiences. My reality was different from how I had originally defined it due to my new experiences as a teacher. I began to see the fallibility of my construction of reality.

This shift allowed me to begin a deeper investigation into the concept of reality. It was at this point that I was introduced to Freire's (2003) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I began actively revolutionizing my own teaching practices by listening to the experiences of the students in my classes and at the same time changing my methods of accessing knowledge and what is knowable. My students were becoming the voices with which I was entering into a dialogue, which was helping me to recognize my own humanity/epistemology while at the same time becoming connected with theirs. Through this dialogic process, we began constructing our visions of what reality meant by critically analyzing the present. This process allowed me to see the students that were being treated in my eyes unfairly, and many of them shared similar racial characteristics. The more I looked at my students, the more I looked at myself. The two could not be separated though they existed apart from each

other on the time continuum. My students were facing some of the same experiences that I did when I was in school, and I began to see myself in them. I saw my new reality through a racialized lens, and my experiences on both sides of the educational table allowed me a unique perspective into the world of education.

My epistemology and views on the relationship between the knower and known were being shaped by the lenses through which I looked at education, and this led to a belief that people were inextricably tied to their own value constructions. This stance aligned me with the critical theorists. Guba (1990) delineates the difference between the critical theorists and positivists in the critical theorists' rejection of value freedom – the belief that one is free to choose one's own values without influence from societal structures. I too began to see peoples' epistemological positions being mediated by their own value constructions, which are very subjective. This was another major shift for me and my paradigmatic construction away from a positivist framework.

With my epistemology somewhat situated with the post-modern subjectivists – in that values mediate inquiry and the two cannot be separated as Weber argues (in Schweizer, 1998) – and my preferred methodology leaning away from the experimental and manipulative of the scientific method and towards the dialogic and transformative, one major question remaining for me was, "Does reality exist outside of individuals?" This question of reality took me outside of my school context and led me to analyze my spiritual beliefs in order to gain an understanding of my ontology. I believe in a reality outside of human construction, which is in contradiction to the post-modernist/radical constructivist (Schweizer, 1998). But, because of the

fallibility of human beings, I do not believe that that reality can be studied. In this stance, I differ from the positivists. Trochim (2002) explains a middle ground between positivism and post-modernism in the paradigm of post-positivism in the desire to come to an understanding of the question of reality. One of the founding tenets of post-positivism is its belief in critical realism which states that "the goal of science is to hold steadfastly to the goal of getting it right about reality, even though we can never achieve that goal, because all measurement is fallible" (p. 3). I believe in an existence of a world beyond human understanding. Here I lean more towards the world of the positivist in that there is a reality outside of human constructions. According to Guba (1990), an ontology of a critical realist, an epistemology of a subjectivist and a dialogic/transformative methodology most closely align an individual with the paradigm of the *Critical Theory,* which itself is a label that could be construed as limiting. Lemert (1993), though, theorizes that through definition, a person can achieve a more clear understanding of one's existence. I have a clear understanding of my positionalities as a critical theorist.

Once the paradigmatic question is answered, the question that drives this research revolves around how students are controlled. Control and power are exercised through the creation of narratives that are formed under the guise of realities. That is to say that the people who are most influenced by alternative narratives are those who buy into the concept of a singular reality. For example, a student who was led to believe that there is a singular truth – that there exists one indisputable fact – could be presented with a narrative that describes a person or a group of people possessing a flawed characteristic. Because they were led to believe

in an indisputable truth, that student is more likely to believe that marginalizing

narrative is in fact reality and not open for debate.  This is how power and control are

perpetuated in some instances. Since epistemologically I believe that knowledge is

mediated through each person's own value system, the engaging of the oppressed in a

dialogic methodology would facilitate my desire to aid the transformation of the

consciousness of the people who are being controlled.  Critical ethnography allows

for an authentic dialogic process, especially in how Trotter and Schensul (1998)

describe participatory action research as the means *as* an end rather than a means *to*

an end.  This process lends itself as a process within which the oppressed are actively

transforming their own existence rather than waiting for the researcher to come in and

"sav[e] the natives".  This process of empowerment is essential to critical theorists

(Trotter & Schensul, 1998) in that, as stated above, power is exercised through the

social construction of narratives that become construed as reality and thus influence

peoples' identities. But through the construction of counter-narratives, development

of a language of critique, and the awakening of critical awareness or *consientização*,

the people are able to speak for themselves, defining themselves using their own

empowered views of themselves.

**Description of the Focal Site**

When I began looking for a focal site, I thought of two places for this study:

New York and California.  New York is recognized as the birthplace of Hip Hop

culture while California represents the symbol of Hip Hop's growth and successes.

Hip Hop over the past 20 years has grown increasingly diverse because of the

connections that Hip Hop culture engenders through its music and the people that

represent it.  Both New York and California have always been among the most racially and socio-economically diverse states in the union (US Census, 2006) and because of Hip Hop culture's growing diversity, I felt that the focal site needed to be racially diverse so as to match the diversity in Hip Hop culture.  The State of New York's demographics come close to matching that of the United States: 60% White, 17% Black, 16% Hispanic, and 6% Asian. This compares with California's racial demographics which show that 43% of inhabitants are White, 35% Hispanic, 12% Asian, and 6% Black.

Ultimately, I made the choice to base my study in California because I was able to secure a school site known for possessing a racial diversity that came close to matching the State's demographics and a socio-economic history that was just as diverse. This was important because I wanted a diverse group of students to serve as participants in this study and when looking at schools, most today are not representative of the state's populations.  This diverse group could serve to show the study's applicability to other locations with similar populations.

**Selection of the Focal Site**

I chose Westside High School for three main reasons: 1) its racial/ethnic demographics better match state-wide demographics than most schools in California, 2) its history of relationships with major research universities: as the school is situated around a number of universities it has provided a site for numerous research projects, and 3) the willingness of an administration and a teacher who desired to work within my program. Westside High School is a large public high school that serves over 3100 students in grades 9-12. Students are divided among six small

learning communities which are each run autonomously with their own principal, vice principal, two counselors, and two teacher leaders. The small learning communities came into existence four years ago, and the impact of the programmatic changes has yet to be determined but, by and large, Westside High School is considered a successful school. The school had a dropout rate of less than 1%. The school district spends approximately $8300 per student, well above the state average of $7100. The state of California ranks its school on an Academic Performance Index (API) that compares schools in the state. The Westside High received an API score of 8, which means that the school is in the $80^{th}$ percentile of the schools in the state, and compared to the 83 other schools that also scored an 8, the school then received a Similar Schools ranking of 3. When you combine these two numbers, Westside High School is roughly in the $83^{rd}$ percentile of all 834 schools in California.

The teachers at Westside High School reflect the state's overall teacher population. At Westside High School 92% of the teachers are fully credentialed as compared to 94% for the state. Six percent of the teachers are teaching with an Emergency Credential compared with a 3% state average. The teachers in the school on average have 12 years of classroom teaching experience with 10 of those years teaching in the Westside school district. Only 6% of the teachers at the school are in their first year. The average class size is approximately 30 students per class which is slightly above the state average.

Westside High School is located in Westside City, an upper middle class city in Southern California. Though census data report that the Westside City High School comes close to matching the state's racial demographics, the city itself is

nearly 80% white (US Census, 2006). The majority of non-white students enrolled in

Westside High come from outside the district through permits granted by the school

district. Of those that do live in Westside City, most are concentrated in a 10 square

block area called the Sepulveda Corridor[15] which historically has been riddled with

crime.

The student population at Westside High School is extremely diverse and

closely reflects the state's population in terms of race and ethnicity. Fifty-one percent

of the students are categorized as White, not Hispanic. The next highest demographic

group in the school is the Hispanic/Latino population which comprises 31% of the

student body. Ten percent of the students are categorized as African-American and

7% of the students are categorized as Asian. One twist that I found in the school

demographics is that the school has a significant Middle Eastern population that is not

recognized by the state's demographics. This did not go unnoticed by Middle Eastern

students, who were very vocal about their lack of representation in the school's and

state's demographics. People of Middle Eastern descent are categorized as White/Not

Hispanic, but in this post 9-11 nation, there are significant differences in the ways in

which these populations are treated and Westside High School is no different. The

school has a program that deals directly with perceptions of race in society, and the

director of the program estimates that the Middle Eastern population would number

anywhere from 10-15%.

Westside High School is located in an extremely affluent area, but the city has

its pockets of lower income areas in which reside the majority of the city's African-

American and Latino populations. Thus, the number of students participating in the

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[15] Pseudonym Used

Free and Reduced Lunch Program is significantly lower than the state's average. The school has approximately 24% of its students participating in the program compared to a state average of 51%. Also the school categorizes only 8% of its students as English Language Learners, with Spanish (74%) being the dominant language spoken by ELL students followed by Farsi (5%), Korean (3%), Mandarin (3%), Hindi (2%) and French (1%).

As we examine the Academic Performance of the school by racial demographics, a slightly different picture is painted than the one that portrays the school as one of the top 200 high schools in America as rated by *Newsweek Magazine* (Kantrowitz, 2005). The API scores are taken out of a maximum score of 1000. On average, White and Asian students at Westside High scored 833 and 864, respectively. In stark contrast, the African American students scored 638 and the Latino students scored 680. This disparity reflects what school officials call a "Two School Phenomenon" which roughly means that the school has two separate schools functioning within the same walls. While the policy of "tracking" students was outlawed by the state of California, the school continues to serve two separate populations: White/Asian and Black/Latino. The White and Asian students are typically enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and rarely venture outside of those classes. The African American and Latino students are placed in the "regular" courses based on their test scores and often find themselves trapped in less rigorous courses for their entire high school career. The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) results show a disparity in the basic academic knowledge that the racial groups possess. Ninety-seven percent of White students and 96% of Asian students

passed in the year 2005.  This can be compared to the 77% passing rate both African

Americans and Latinos.  Using the exit exam results, it is easy to see the lack of

representation of African American and Latino students in Advance Placement and

Honors courses, but for some, test scores were not to blame.  Speaking with some

parents of African American and Latino students, students were actually encouraged

in 9th grade to avoid honors and AP courses in their freshman year while they

acclimated to High School even though some had participated in honors courses

throughout middle school.  Most of the disparity according to school officials is due

to the lack of preparation of students from low income families, but an administrator

on campus did acknowledge that the staff needed to do a better job addressing racism

at the individual, institutional and structural levels.

**Description of the Facilitator**

      Ms. Stevenson is a sixth year teacher in the English department at Westside

High School.  Born and raised in Mississippi in the late 70's and early 80's, Ms.

Stevenson was brought up around the time of Hip Hop's explosion onto the American

scene.  A graduate of Southern California universities, Ms. Stevenson has a

Bachelor's of Arts in English Literature and Master's of Education in educational

leadership.

      Ms. Stevenson had been at Westside High School her entire six year teaching

career where she taught a variety of subjects, all in the English Department.  Her

current course load at the time of this study included a 12th grade English elective,

Harlem Renaissance, and a 12th grade Advanced Placement course. In her Harlem

Renaissance course, Ms. Stevenson often used Hip Hop culture to bridge 1920's

African American culture and the African American culture of this current

millennium. Since receiving her Master's Degree, Ms. Stevenson had taken on a

variety of administrative duties. During the year in which this study was conducted,

she served as House Teacher Leader. She also served as one of the school's vice

principals during a summer school session during the previous year.

Ms. Stevenson identifies herself as African-American or Black depending on

the day and on the audience. Influenced by the culture in the southern United States

where her family is still located, Ms. Stevenson possesses a sensibility that she finds

absent from the rapidly moving Los Angeles culture. As a casual Hip Hop Fan (Mos

Def, Lauren Hill, Jay-Z), "approximately 25% of the music" she listened to would be

characterized as Hip Hop. She finds that Hip Hop is a "window into the worlds of the

students and [her] knowledge of Hip Hop has allowed [her] to connect to the students

in ways not available to many disconnected teachers." She was planning to return to

the south, where she is already looking for an administrative position, in the year

following this study.

**Description of the Sample**

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe purposeful sampling as a "key decision

point" in a qualitative study. The participants for this project were selected using what

Patton (1980) refers to as snowball or chain sampling where the researcher identifies

people of interest. Those people lead the researcher to others and the chain begins to

grow. In this study, I began by looking for people who were actively participating in

the four foundational elements of Hip Hop culture (George, 1999; Chang, 2004,

KRS-One, 2000): Emceeing, Dejaying, Break Dancing, or Graffiti Art. I called these

people *Active* Participants in Hip Hop culture. The remainder of the participants, I would consider *Passive* participants, which I defined as a person who is a participant in Hip Hop culture through the remaining elements of Hip Hop culture: street fashion, street language, street knowledge, street entrepreneurialism/trade and business. Ms. Stevenson and I began by connecting with the president of the Hip Hop Club on the school's campus in my search for Active participants. Once I found one participant I then consulted with that participant and with the president of the club and was able to identify subsequent participants. The passive participants were not difficult to locate due to the abundance of potential participants in the school population.

When I had 16 potential participants representing both active and passive participants, I then filtered the participants using two primary filters to narrow my population to my desired sample of five members within each category. The first filter I used was gender as I felt it important to have a sample representative of Hip Hop culture. Tricia Rose (1994) looks at the role of women where she cites some significant but rare contributions of women to Hip Hop culture. Because of the scarcity, but significance of women in the history of Hip Hop culture, I thought it would be important to have at least one female participant in the Active group. I would then strive for a gendered balance (two males and two females) in the passive group which would mirror Hip Hop's Passive audience.

The second filter I used was racial demographics. Because of the rich diversity at Westside High School, I thought it would be powerful to include participants that were representative of the school's different racial categorizations. Hip Hop has moved beyond its roots in the African American and Latino

communities and has sprouted up in suburbs all around the world. Understanding the evolution of Hip Hop culture, I wanted a sample of youth that would reflect the growth of the Hip Hop community and at the same time, stay true to its roots and origins. By including a representative of each of the Non-African-American and Latino demographics represented on campus (White, Asian-American, and Middle Eastern) and filling the rest of the slots with African American and Latino students, I would again achieve the diversity that I was looking for which could match the demographics of Hip Hop culture. Once I went through the two filters, I came up with eight students: four active and four passive participants that were representative of Hip Hop culture at Westside High School.

*Table 1. Ethnic Identity and participation levels of Project participants*

| Name | Ethnic Identity[16] | Active or Passive participant in Hip Hop Culture | Director or Receptor of Hip Hop Culture | Level of Participation in Mainstream Academic School Culture |
|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Brian | Asian-American | Passive | Receptor | High |
| C.J. | African-American | Passive | Receptor | Medium |
| Cyrus | Mexican | Active | Director | Medium/Low |
| Daisy | White | Passive | Director | High |
| Destiny | African-American | Passive | Receptor | Medium |
| Mia | Chicana | Active | Receptor | Medium/High |
| Mike | African-American | Active | Director | Medium |
| Nasa | Middle-Eastern | Active | Director | Medium/Low |

[16] I used designations that were in accordance with how the students self-reported

Originally, when I formulated my selection criteria for the participants in the project, I wanted to have people in the group that were actively participating in Hip Hop culture.  As I stated earlier, KRS-One (2003) defined nine essential elements of Hip Hop culture, four of which were foundational: Emceeing, Graffiti Art, Break-Dancing and Deejaying.  I constructed a group entitled *Active Participants* which included all participants who were involved with at least one of the four foundational elements.   I then took the remaining five elements (beat-boxing, street language, street culture, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism) and called them *Passive Participants*.  By privileging the foundational elements over the other important additions to Hip Hop culture, I compromised my groups, and Daisy was the one person who exemplified this mistake.  Daisy was more active in Hip Hop culture than most of the other participants though she did not participate in the foundational elements.  She is a living example of the growth of Hip Hop culture.  She is a white woman from the suburbs of New York who grew up with Hip Hop, and she made an active choice to make it her life.  Daisy describes her feelings here:

I remember being a little bit hurt because I don't feel like a passive person. The passive person is the one to sit there and listen to everything. They don't speak up. I mean I write, but I don't deejay, I don't emcee, I don't beat box, I'm not a graph artist, but I surround myself with that everyday. I guess I was just hurt because I don't feel like I'm one of those you know. Because I get really upset when kids call me "wigger" because I listen to Hip Hop and I wear an Akademiks shirt one day out of the week or something. Because

honestly I'm not trying to be anybody, you know people will say that I would

try to be black. I appreciate Hip Hop music, that's what it comes down to. The

language, the music, the culture, everything about it and for you to tell me, for

somebody to tell me that I'm not included in the culture because of the color

of my skin!?!? So that's why I'm not, I don't feel like, when I think of passive

I'm thinking of *Malibu's Most Wanted* with like this white kid who wears like

FUBU and listens to Hip Hop. He would have been an active participant

because he emceed.

Daisy's reference to *Malibu's Most Wanted* came from a movie that was a parody of

a white emcee who attempted to force himself into Hip Hop culture by mimicking the

stereotypes of Black people.  Daisy was correct.  Malibu's most wanted would have

been labeled an active participant in my original formulation.  So I asked Daisy to

help me with my dilemma, and after fifteen minutes of dialogue, we came up with the

terms Directors and Receptors of Hip Hop culture.

For the purposes of this study, Directors and Receptors are a much more

authentic way of labeling the two groups of students that had clearly formed in the

Cyphers. Directors are those who take an active role in the promotion, the defining,

and the integration of Hip Hop culture into their ways of being.  These are people

within Hip Hop that actively integrate Hip Hop in its nine essential elements into their

lives by choosing to pursue a future in the Hip Hop industry.  Daisy, Mike, Nasa, and

Cyrus were clearly Directors who have all made Hip Hop culture a priority in their

lives and their futures.  The concept of Receptor is more complex.  As I stated earlier,

everyone in society is connected to Hip Hop culture to varying degrees.  Some people

listen to Hip Hop music every day whereas some try to avoid Hip Hop like a trip to the dentist.  With Hip Hop culture being used so actively as a corporate tool for advertising, even people that make attempts to avoid Hip Hop find themselves being affected one way or another.  Receptors also vary in the degrees in which they recognize the impact of Hip Hop culture in their lives.  An introductory interview with Destiny provides a great example.  Destiny was asked how Hip Hop impacts her life personally and she responded,

> It doesn't really do too much to me. I mean I like the beats; some songs I sing.
> I'm more of a slow song person cause it seems like it has more meaning to it.
> But like Hip Hop now, I mean it's cool.  I listen to it.  Like I said, I dance off
> of it.

Destiny didn't believe that she was impacted by Hip Hop culture, though she listened to it everyday, knew the words and the dances to many current songs, and had numerous ring-tones linked to her cellular phone that played Hip Hop music.  To explain the varying degrees of Receptors in Hip Hop culture, I constructed a quadrant diagram that can explain four different categories:  Conscious Hip Hoppas, Unconscious Hip Hoppas, Conscious Avoiders, and Unconscious Avoiders.  At one end of the continuum is a Hip Hoppa who is a person who seeks out and identifies with Hip Hop culture while at the other end would be an Avoider who is someone who purposefully avoids any contact with Hip Hop culture.  Conscious and Unconscious describe the differences in awareness of the influence of Hip Hop culture on one's self or society.  All of the Receptors in The C³ Project would be categorized as Hip Hoppas to different degrees because of their interest in Hip Hop

culture.  The participants varied in their degrees of consciousness about the effects of

Hip Hop culture.  Mia's level of awareness about the impact of Hip Hop culture on

herself and society was different from Brian, C.J. and Destiny.  Therefore going into

The C³ Project, Mia would be considered a Conscious Hip Hoppa while Brian, C.J.,

and Destiny would be considered Unconscious Hip Hoppas.

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Awareness of Influence of Hip Hop Culture



No Awareness of Influence of Hip Hop Culture

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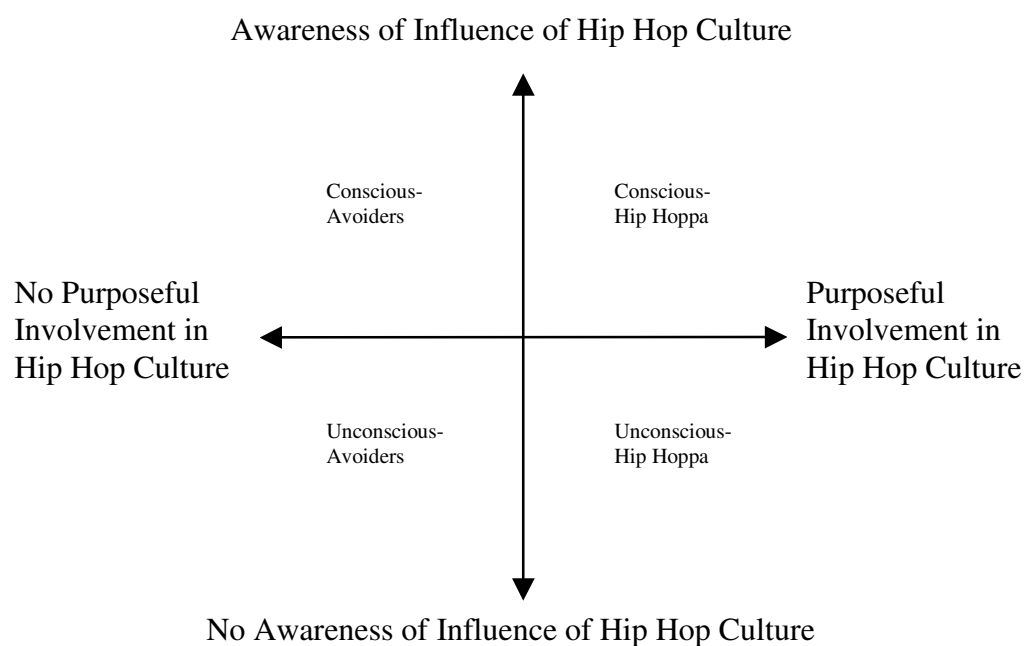
**Figure # 1 – Receptors of Hip Hop Culture**

This formulation is not without its problems.  For example, some may feel

that all of the categories of Receptors are actually influencing the direction of Hip

Hop culture because consumers have power over what gets produced, and people tend

produce what others will consume.  Others may feel that the Directors have no real

power because of their lack of financial resources and lack of ability to reach an

audience without assistance.  While all labels are somewhat problematic, for the

purpose of this study these categories appropriately explain the participants' levels of engagement with Hip Hop culture.

Finally, I looked at the participants levels of participation in mainstream academic culture by identifying the types of courses each participant was enrolled in. Brian and Daisy were both enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses in social studies. Both of these participants excelled in different ways. Brian, according to his teacher, received high test scores, but his participation in class was minimal. Daisy was a "hard worker" that kept up with the massive amounts of reading in her classes but found it difficult to make connections between the material and how she lived her life. Mia was enrolled in AP courses at the beginning of the year, but she switched into the lower level courses as she was finding it difficult to balance her work schedule, her home life, and her schoolwork. In her courses she was very successful, and her teachers characterized her as a model student.

All of the other participants were enrolled in mid-level College Placement courses. Destiny, C.J., and Mike were mid level students, meaning they averaged approximately 75-80% on their tests and projects in their classes. All three participants were active contributors in their classes. Cyrus and Nasa were also enrolled in the mid-level College Placement courses, but their success levels in class were not exemplary. Cyrus's teacher claimed he was a joy to have in the classroom, but his problems came from his propensity to miss assignments. Nasa and his teachers often clashed as his teacher characterized him as "all verbal". When participating in classroom discussions he excelled, though his use of profanity to

express himself often caused problems.  His problems also came because of his

missing assignments and a "general ambivalence" towards being at school.

**The Blueprint for the Cypher**

The Critical Cultural Cypher (The C³ Project) began as a reconstruction of the

work of Paulo Freire (2002).   In the Brazilian context, Freire (2002) wanted to design

a project which would attempt to move participants from naiveté to a critical attitude

and at the same time teach reading.  Literacy was the first step toward the main goal

of the democratization of a culture.  In this sense, this research is delving into the

concept of cultural or critical literacy (Jocson, 2005; Jocson, 2006; Morrell, 2004;

Shor, 1997) where students are able to read, write and act as subjects within their

culture rather than having their culture act upon them as objects.

In The C³ Project, the role of the teacher was replaced by the coordinator of

the project, Ms. Stevenson.  The students were referred to as participants instead of

pupils. The lectures were replaced with a more humanizing dialogue, and units of

study were referred to as learning units. The vocabulary changes might just seem a

play on semantics, but the changes went a long way in redefining a space for the

participants to authentically engage each other and the learning units without the

baggage of mainstream academic school culture. The C³ Project took place on

campus in two different classrooms.  I originally thought that the classroom

environment would force the participants to adhere to the rules that govern student

behavior, but the participants were able to quickly move past their physical

environment and adapted to the new roles as participants.  The Cypher sessions met

during sixth period and continued after school.  As I stated earlier, all participants

were seniors, and they had finished most of their graduation requirements. Because of this, all of the participants were done with school by fifth period so the Cypher sessions did not interrupt their class schedule. The typical session lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. The sessions were scheduled for once a week, but due to scheduling conflicts, the sessions were held approximately once every two weeks when school was in session.

Before the initiation of the project, I had the opportunity to speak briefly about Freireian Methodology with Ms. Stevenson and as this was the first manifestation of The C³ Project, I as a researcher wanted to ensure proper implementation of the Freireian Methodology. During the sessions I, as the researcher, took on the role of participant-observer while Ms. Stevenson took on the role of primary facilitator. We would meet before and after each session to discuss and review the previous Cypher session and plan the next sessions. Inside of our planning meetings, we would discuss questions that we were going to have the participants consider and possible directions that the sessions could take. Because we began the sessions with a question, we attempted to guess how the participants might answer the questions as we tapped into our individual knowledge of students and student interactions with popular culture. At our reflection meetings, we would review the video from the previous sessions pointing out places where we could have improved the quality and the depth of the dialogue by keeping the discussions focused and with direction.

I began The C³ Project by asking the participants the question "What is Hip Hop?" Using a democratic dialogic method, the participants worked to clarify the concept. From there, I asked the participants, "What are some problems with Hip

Hop?" The dialogues which stemmed from the clarifications were then used as the basis for the generative themes of the learning units (participant generated units of study) which would be the foundations for all future Cypher sessions. Once the learning units were formed, they were explored by the participants for the purpose of either clarification of understandings/constructions or to seek actions resulting from the clarifications/constructions. These themes were then supported/schematized by both me, as researcher, and Ms. Stevenson, as facilitator both within the project sessions themselves as well as in facilitator-researcher meetings between sessions. This information was then presented back to the participants in the form of a dialogue. In this sense, The C³ Project served as an arena in which culture was discussed as "a systematic acquisition of [valued] knowledge, and also the democratization of culture within the general context of fundamental democratization" (Freire, 2002 p. 81). In other words, The C³ Project became a place where the students could actively construct knowledge that is valued by the participants and the coordinators of the circle.

**Data Collection Methods**

In this study, I did two separate observations in order to collect two different types of data. The first of the observations was in each student's social studies course (Government or Economics) and the second was as a participant-observer in The C³ Project. In the social studies classes, I observed the students' participation in order to learn about their levels and types of engagement in a mainstream academic setting. While in the classrooms, I also found myself paying particular attention to the critical consciousness that the students displayed in their various engagements. In The C³

Project, I paid close attention to the students' understandings of their lived culture in

an attempt to facilitate the dialogues by posing problems with the participants'

constructions/clarifications. I used this strategy in order to push the group dialogue to

a more critical place. In addition to my observations, I conducted three formal

interviews with each of the participants: two before the project began and one after

the project was completed.

Data for this project was recorded in a variety of ways. The classroom

observations were recorded on my phone/pocket pc using the Pocket Microsoft Word

program. I was able to type, using a full keyboard, a running log of participant

activity. I kept a note pad next to me in case of technological failure and any

notations or drawings that I needed to capture. For the more formalized interviews I

recorded all of the interviews and the debriefing sessions with Ms. Stevenson with an

Apple® 40 gigabyte I-Pod with a recorder attachment. This feature allowed me to

capture and import all my recordings directly into a digital format bypassing any

tapes or other external devices. The C³ Project sessions were recorded onto a digital

hard drive camera again bypassing the need for any tapes. I recorded the sessions as I

was seated at the top of the group's semi-circle and at the same time I served as

secretary, cameraman, and facilitator somewhat seamlessly. After all recordings, I

transferred the files to my computer for storage as well as an external hard drive to

maintain backup copies. I also made CD's for each interview and DVD's of each

Project session to minimize the chances of lost data.

*Participant Observation*

Participant observation is a research strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment (Dewalt, 2002). As a participant-observer outside the classroom and inside of the school, I was able to cultivate personal relationships with the participants in order to gain access to previously inaccessible cultural insights.  As a participant-observer inside the Project sessions, I was able to enter and exit the dialogues freely with minimal disruption while pausing to record field notes or to make sure the recording devices were functioning properly. I also made sure to debrief each meeting with Ms. Stevenson where we took to opportunities to explore and push each other's thinking as we reflected on and integrated the liberating learning units.

One aspect of participant observation that needs careful attention concerns the boundaries between the participants and the observer.  Nigel Fielding (1993) delineates that line as he points out that "One is participating in order to get detailed data, not to provide the group with a new member. One must maintain a certain detachment in order to take that data and interpret it." (p. 158)**.**  While I understand and appreciate Fielding's concerns here, his somewhat rigid definition of participant observation did not work for this project. As a participant-observer, I was very conscious of my presence and could not separate myself from the study, but at the same time made sure to guide my own participation in ways that allowed me to gain valuable and otherwise inaccessible information.  My personal knowledge of Hip Hop

culture and people within the culture afforded me referential status within the group as they would seek to defend their points or to challenge another's.

### *Classroom Observations*

Paulo Freire (2002) in the 1950's and 1960's assessed a Brazilian society in transition from a closed society, where people adapted to the society as it was presented to them, to a homogeneous and open society, where people would live an integrated life[17]. The integrated person is a person who possesses the ability to make choices and is not subjected to the choices of others. The integrated person is one who is responsible for his or her own decisions. Living an integrated life as a subject rather than that as an adaptive object is what Freire termed humanization.

Looking at K-12 classrooms, the students' possess little voice in regards to the values and the systems that govern the classes. Students are primarily objects of the educational process. Much of the time, they are acted upon rather than being active participants in their own education. Inside the classrooms I sought to observe all of the actions of each student participant within the 52 minutes of classroom time, as well as the actions of teachers and/or other students that sparked a reaction from participants. Through this panoptic approach to observations, I could capture a revealing picture of the students' lives in a Mainstream Academic setting. At times the participants, being aware of my presence were, in the words of one of the classroom teachers, "amplified" (meaning the student's level of excitement was higher due to my presence). They eventually returned to their typical classroom behaviors.

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[17] "Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and the transform that reality

*Interviews*

Many traditional ethnographers rely on an open ended approach to interviewing, which allows data to emerge as naturally as possible without being biased by the researcher. Wainwright (1997) highlights the differences in interviewing between traditional ethnography and critical ethnography in that "critical ethnography may entail a much more focused approach to interviewing, in which questions are asked about specific issues derived from the broader social critique" (para. 48). As a critical ethnographer, I engaged in three different kinds of interviews: informal conversational interviews, interview guide approach interviews, and standardized open-ended interviews (Patton, 1990).

The informal conversational interview is one in which I as the researcher had the freedom and the flexibility to stay as open as possible regarding the subject matter being discussed. This approach allowed me, as the researcher to allow the participants to explore their own priorities as they had the flexibility to share what they wanted to share and when they wanted to share it. For example, as I was walking to my car, Mia stopped me, and we had a thirty minute conversation about the stresses in her life that I otherwise would not have been able to hear. These informal conversational interviews normally took the form of a conversation where the participants would see me and let me know what was going on in their lives. These conversations did not happen too frequently, but they were significant enough to make a difference in my analysis.

The informal interview is of particular use in critical ethnography in that a more dialectal approach to interviewing can be employed to allow, in the words of Wainwright (1997):

> the researcher to oscillate between the world view of the informant, (e.g., by departing from the interview schedule to pursue an interesting line of inquiry), and the insights offered by the historical and structural analysis, which may enable the constructs and categories employed by the informant to be actively deconstructed during the course of the interview. (p. 12)

Though an informal interview typically has the drawback of limiting information, the information that I collected outweighed the potential problems that accompanies this method, and I was able to capture rich information from all of the participants.

The interview guide approach ensures that the same general information and topics are focused on by all interviewees, but it also allowed degrees of freedom in how I solicited the information. For the first two interviews, I used an interview guide (See Appendix A) to ensure the participants all responded to the same questions. This approach was a sound one as I was just gaining knowledge of the participants, and I did not know how to approach the students in order to get the needed information. I did, however, move into an open interview style as some of the students answered a variety of my questions as they were answering others. Cyrus, for instance, took 35 minutes to answer a single question and the information was so powerful, I felt it would be irresponsible to stop him and change directions.

I just spoke about the standardized open-ended interview, which is the interview type I used as I became more familiar with the participants and they became

more familiar with me.  This approach characterized my final interviews in which I

wanted to find out how the participants felt about and reflected upon the experience

of participating in the $C^3$ project.  In this approach, the participants were given the

same basic open-ended question, which they all answered, and which elicited strong

comparison data.

**Coding Methodology**

I collected data in multiple formats: digitally recorded interviews, write ups of

informal interviews, digital video recorded sessions of The C³ Project sessions, and

classroom observations. All of the primary data were transcribed, digitized, and

loaded into a single coding folder on my computer.  When the project was completed,

I loaded all of the files into a single Hermeneutic Unit of the Ethnographic software

coding program *Atlas Ti*.  The files were organized into three separate groups:

Observations, Interviews, and Project sessions.  Reading through all of the data, I

began to make a preliminary code list.  I did not have pre-determined codes in mind

when I went into the process because I wanted to see what would organically emerge

from the data. I did, however, have specific behaviors that I was looking for from the

participants. For example, I did not go into the coding looking for "a language of

critique" or "critical consciousness," but because those categories of analysis were

evident, I then created the code "Application of critical analysis" (Appendix D) which

better fit the data. I went through all of the primary documents the first time looking

at the quotations of the participants searching for general themes that would warrant

adding codes.  Then I went through the data a second time, re-coding the material

with some of codes that emerged later in the process.  For example, the first

documents that I analyzed were the classroom observations, and then I moved to the interviews. There were codes that emerged exclusively from the interviews that I was not able to apply to the classroom observations, which required me to go back a second time to ensure accuracy. I then generated a code list, which cites how many times each code was used (See Appendix B). Out of the 40 codes that were cited the most, I used 30 in my analysis. Out of the 30 codes I used in my analysis, I focused most of my attention on nine codes. When I had the nine codes that I would focus most of my attention, I went back and created sub-codes for each of the nine primary codes (See Appendices D-K). The purpose for creating the sub-codes was so that I could achieve a deeper analysis. For example, when I was looking at the code *Impact of Hip Hop culture of personal identity* (Appendix H), I saw that two different themes emerged within the code. Participants used Hip Hop culture as both a vehicle of expression and a vehicle for definition, both of which had an impact on their personal identity. Once the sub-codes were generated, I went back into the program and re-coded the nine primary codes adding my sub-codes into the files so that I could generate a frequency table for my sub-codes. When all of the primary codes and sub-codes were entered into the hermeneutic unit, I then created separate hermeneutic units carrying over the codes from the primary hermeneutic unit. This enabled me to see where each of the participants' particular focus was in relation to the selected codes and sub-codes. Each of the participants had a different pattern of uses for the codes, which allowed me to tell an authentic story about each of the participants. For example, Nasa focused on the difficulties in his life, whereas for Brian, school emerged as particularly significant

**Chapter Coding**

In analyzing the codes that had organically emerged from the data, I found that using a uniform organizing system to analyze my results was rather limiting.  I did not want to use the same codes to describe each participant because after the coding process, each participant had different frequencies of codes represented.  For example, Destiny spoke about Family more than Brian did but less than Mia.  If I were to use Family as a category of analysis, I would not represent each participant and their foci.   Because of the versatility of the coding software, I was able to separately organize the codes that I used for each of the following chapters.  Below, I describe the differences between chapters four/six and chapter five.

As I began to organize chapters *Four – An Introduction to the Participants* and *Six – An Introduction to the Participants (The Remix)* I had the idea of coming up with a series of codes that spoke collectively to the participants' identities.  When I searched for patterns that emerged out of the codes that would paint an accurate portrayal of the participants, I began to find that each participant discussed different issues in greater depth and breadth regardless of the uniformity of the interview protocol.  For the purposes of this chapter, individualizing the code selection process for each participant gave a more accurate depiction of the participants' identities (Appendices L-S).  While there were common codes (personal values, family, and school), the codes were prioritized across all of the participants, and attention was paid to both the frequency of the codes and the power of the quotations from the three data sources (classroom observations, formal interviews, and informal interviews).

In setting up the organization for chapter five, I found that grouping the codes by topic (Application of Critical Analysis, Influence of Hip Hop culture on Personal Identity, etc.) helped in setting up the focus of each Cypher session. I was then able to determine what was important for each section.

**Description of Categories for Analysis**

Central to my framing of the data is a bifurcated focus on 1) the systemic influences of schooling on the students, and 2) the influences of Hip Hop culture in the lives of the participants. Taking notes from the powerful ethnographies of Bourgois (2003), Dimitriadis (2003) and Morrell (2004), I am trying to build a counter-narrative of the experiences of students through the presentation of my data, which emphasize the interface between structural oppression and individual actions.

This approach creates a unique and interesting issue in that through ethnography, I had the ability to access the students whereas one cannot have a dialogue *with* structures of power only *about* the structures. This is where critical ethnography at its essence and foundation allowed for a more complete analysis and was more complementary to the goals of this project. Harvey (1990) pointed out the difference between traditional ethnography and critical ethnography as the broadening of critique of social relations through analytical themes that are derived from both the ethnographic data and interrogations of the literature related to social critique. Wainwright (1997) looked at the balancing act the researcher must undertake by stating:

> Critical ethnography entails a constant inter-weaving of inductive and
> deductive logic… the researcher begins by observing the field of study, both

as a participant observer and as a reviewer of academic literature. From the synthesis of these sources a research agenda emerges that can be pursued, again, by a mixture of observation and theoretical work (para. 34).

The balance between my participant observations, my classroom observations, my interview data and the theoretical framework and literature comes from the use of Critical Race Theory and Critical Social Theory, which I use to guide myself consistently as I shift the focus between individual participants and their lives and a broader critique of the structures of power that maintain oppressive societal systems.

**Chapter Four:**

**An Introduction to the Participants**

In this chapter, I provide a profile of the participants that came out of the information that I collected from formal and informal interviews and from classroom observations. These profiles (Stake, 2005) provide specific details about significant moments in the participants' life that helped them become who they are and shaped how they see themselves. These profiles are also a glimpse into the people that I saw as a researcher. Through my observations and my interviews, I could only learn from the participants what they wanted me to know. The words and the stories were not verified with outside sources, and my observations could have been tainted by my mere presence, but I went to great lengths to insure that my descriptions were as accurate as possible. These profiles will help to contextualize my analysis of The C³ Project. Many of the participants speak from a place of experience, and this chapter will hopefully provide a window into their lives.

What struck me first as a researcher was the openness of the participants and their willingness to share the intimate details of their lives with a complete stranger. While some of the introductory interviews were short (Brian and Nasa), most ran an hour and a half long as the participants candidly spoke about everything from family to school to Hip Hop culture. I was amazed at the emotion that was displayed by the participants in sharing their stories. On three occasions, the interview had to be stopped because the participant was crying while sharing the intimate details of their lives with someone they had just met. I then thought back to my years in the classroom, and I realized how little time there is for students to share themselves with

others.  Classrooms today are so regimented and structured that time to share is lost.  I

remember speaking with a teacher who said that with the needs of the high school

students, the high school classroom should look like the elementary school classroom

and vice versa.  These participants not only wanted to share their stories, but they

needed to as well.

This chapter will be organized around the analytical categories, Directors of

Hip Hop culture and Receptors of Hip Hop culture.  While these groups participated

in the Project equally, the groups have distinctly different hopes and dreams when it

comes to seeing themselves in Hip Hop culture.  I will introduce the directors and

then the receptors.  Finally, I told the participants that "every great hero has a theme

song" and then I asked each person for their theme song.  Introducing each vignette is

a verse from a Hip Hop song that the participants chose for themselves. As stated,

each person picked the song while I picked the clip that I felt best personified the

participant (unless noted).

**Directors of Hip Hop culture**

The Directors of Hip Hop Culture are the participants that are active in the

construction of the belief and value systems of the culture and are actively pursuing a

career within the Hip Hop industry.  The Directors see and live Hip Hop culture as

their chosen way of life.

**Daisy**

Daisy was the president of the Hip Hop club on campus, and as a White

upper-middle class female from the suburbs of New York City, she raised many

eyebrows on campus due to her race and gender.  Daisy's mother and father were

divorced when she was two, but she split time between her mother's house in the suburbs and her father's apartment in New York City. Daisy always felt closer to her mother growing up. Her mother was her biggest supporter and friend, while she always felt as if her father was too busy and too negative to be a big influence in her life.

Daisy began school in a Montessori program, which she recalls being a positive and a negative time in her life. She says,

> I liked it but I had a lot of problems because a lot of kids used to make fun of me because of my weight, but my best friends came a few months after that and they basically handled that from there.

Daisy's elementary school experience was a time in her life that she remembers as a particularly tough as she struggled with her weight and self esteem. She recalls,

> I was diagnosed with depression at eight years old and by nine I was on Prozac which was really bad… I didn't really understand what I was doing. I was suicidal and in therapy every Tuesday but it just never did anything for me.

It was at this time in her life that Daisy "fell in love with Hip Hop". Hip Hop provided her an outlet for her pain in that she could identify with the content that Hip Hop readily addressed. The pain that Daisy was feeling was a central theme in Hip Hop and it began to validate her very being.

> I used to watch *Yo MTV Raps*, but I use to watch it on the low. My dad had a problem with Hip Hop because he was scared of the whole east and west coast war the nineties and it was violent. Everyone thought it was misogynist, gun

filled, violence filled, but I just liked it. It was something that I was always attracted to, but because I didn't know anyone else who was into it, I just thought I was weird. But it always meant a lot to me, I always loved it. Well I liked it but I fell in love with it when I heard *Changes* by Tupac when I was at a friend's house. I saw Tupac and that's when I realized that Hip Hop could do big things. I started crying but I didn't even know that I was crying and the way I felt I just fell in love with Hip Hop. {Begins to cry} It meant a lot to me I got this feeling and I wanted everyone to have that feeling. It's like that's the way you are supposed to feel. See I am crying right now. It just meant a lot to me. At that point, it really changed my life. I knew at that point… I had wanted to be a Veterinarian, but it just became important to me and I knew I wanted to be a part of it.

Daisy found Hip Hop to be a great outlet because of her early struggles with depression and Hip Hop's messages of perseverance. Looking specifically at the Tupac song *Changes,* Tupac spoke about the difficulties of living in society today. His basic message was that change is necessary for people to survive, but that change is often times difficult in the face of adversity:

We gotta make a change...

It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes.

Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live

and let's change the way we treat each other.

You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do

what we gotta do, to survive.

And still I see no changes can't a brother get a little peace

It's war on the streets & the war in the Middle East

Instead of war on poverty they got a war on drugs

so the police can bother me

And I ain't never did a crime I ain't have to do

But now I'm back with the facts givin' it back to you

– *Changes* Tupac (1998)

Being in New York, the birth place of Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop was readily accessible to someone that was open to it. Daisy felt that the culture welcomed her, and in it she found strength. At the same time, her mother and father were struggling to maintain a relationship, and her mother decided that she wanted to relocate to rural Georgia.

I didn't want to go because I was this little queen bee having all this fun. Georgia was hard because I felt like when I went there I went as a New Yorker and we go to the south; I'm walking with my head held high. I was like; "Who are these people" It was like I had all these little roaches around me. Everybody wasn't on my level. But it happened to be the biggest turning point in my life.

The differences between New York and Georgia were profound and immediately recognized by Daisy. Her first incident happened almost immediately as she confronted a teacher about a confederate flag hanging in his room and posters promoting religion posted in the classroom:

My history teacher was an army guy from the south. He had a confederate

flag hanging up in his class room. So I asked him why was the flag hanging

over the American flag and we actually got into argument. I had to go to the

principal's office. There were posters in my class room that said, "Open your

heart and let god come in" and I was like why? The principal was an idiot and

I told her "It doesn't take a New Yorker to figure this out. It just takes a

human being with a brain."

Daisy was from a diverse suburb of New York and felt out of place in the segregated

south, but she soon found a diverse group of people, most of them from the New

York area, that shared the same values and beliefs as she did. This made the rural

Georgia environment a little more tolerable:

I loved it because I found all these New Yorkers. It was such a diverse group.

There were Puerto Ricans, Haitians, Dominicans, Jamaicans and we were all

from the same place. It was so fun to relate with them. I found parts of who I

was. It was so great just to share with a group of people the same things I had

experienced since I went there.

Daisy's new relationships came at a price as her diverse group of friends overtly

challenged the racial stratifications that governed her town. Daisy found herself in

the middle of a firestorm of controversy because of her associations. Rather than hide

from the issues, she outwardly challenged the social norms of the school and the

people that maintained them, including the administrators of the school:

I had a lot of problems because on top of the fact that people used to say I was

going to hell because my dad was Jewish, all of my best friends were Black

and most of the people I hung out with were Black and Latino. They had so many problems with that.  People would actually come up to me and be like "Why are you hanging with these people?" And I would say "why not?", "why can't I?", "what's the problem?" I didn't understand.  I just saw my friends as the people that they were.  It didn't matter to me what color they were, but it was so important to other people.  It wasn't accepted.  But I didn't care.  A lot of people would just come up to me and say some terrible things about them and about me for hanging out with them.  It really hurt me because I didn't understand why it was important.  I still don't understand.  These people were making me so happy, but it was making everyone else pissed off… They would say "What are you doing hanging out with all these people?", but they wouldn't say people, they would use the N word and I would take so much offence to that. When I lived in New York I didn't even know what that word meant. And then I come here and… I have never said it in my life and I never will {begins to cry}… And these kids would say it every day… there is no such thing as a Freudian slip in Rural Georgia; it just comes right out.  Also I was under an administration where… we would get together and people would freestyle (unrehearsed emceeing) every morning. We weren't doing anything except freestyling. The administration would tell us to break it up. We would have to move everyday. I didn't understand why. We weren't doing anything wrong.  My friends would say that they didn't want black people hanging out together. I didn't know that they could do such a thing.  So one day I told the administration, "Why are you doing this?   We

aren't doing anything wrong. I don't understand what we are doing that would

require you to break us up." Then he said "Well… we don't need all these

people together when class is about to start." So I told him, "Well go over

there… don't you see all those White people… they are all together, go break

them up!" So I started questioning it and the principal didn't like me. The

administration didn't like me. My college counselor hated me because I

didn't put up with all this shit. I wouldn't let it happen. I wanted them to

know that there was a problem with it. I didn't care if I got in trouble for that.

What did I care? Things need to change. I had been going to my counselors

and tell them that my teachers were teaching religion in classroom. The

teachers would say all these things that I felt were so generalized towards

people. Like they would say these things about Mexicans… I just couldn't

believe that they were saying these things. So I would go to my counselor and

he would basically tell me that I was a waste of his time.

Daisy began to embody Hip Hop culture, boldly challenging the status quo without

fear of repercussion. Hip Hop became personal for Daisy. Her friends shared her

same values, and they were being attacked because of the color of their skin rather

than the content of their character. That was not appropriate and would not be

tolerated by Daisy. Daisy recognized her semi-insider status as a White woman (her

father being Jewish pushed her to the fringes of this "fanatical" community), but

being White, she stood for Hip Hop and she stood for social justice. She accepted her

role as an *OutKast*[18](1992) knowing that she would face certain consequences.

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[18] OutKast is the name of a Hip Hop group from Atlanta, Georgia who asked the Hip Hop community
"Are you an OutKast/An OutKast is someone who is not considered to be a part of the normal

It would have been interesting had Daisy stayed in school in Rural, Georgia, but her mother received employment in Westside City, and as a junior in high school, she transferred schools where another culture shock awaited.

Everybody here at Westside High School is focused on smoking weed and having sex and I don't understand. You're a senior and you should be focused on school and getting out of it and Westside Community College (WCC) is like I'm just going to WCC so I might as well fuck up now. It's kind of disappointing to me because I really don't know that many people who are focused on getting out of here and focused on doing something with their lives. I just like to go to places like the teen club the kind of fun I have doesn't involve drugs, alcohol and sex I just like to have fun. When people are having parties I miss out cause I won't be a part of that. A lot of people are doing cocaine here too. Like this girl was doing lines next to me in class once it just blew my mind. Drugs are a big thing here bigger than I've ever experienced. And a lot of my friends I have here haven't included me in things they do because I don't smoke weed. And I think that's stupid because it's weed. I'm not about that. I won't miss much or many people when I leave.

The one thing that Daisy maintained when she came to Westside City was her love and dedication to Hip Hop. Daisy started the Hip Hop club on campus though her race was originally an obstacle. Daisy again took on the obstacle persevering through the biases that were in front of her. Through a single-minded focus on getting into college and working towards a goal of becoming a Hip Hop executive, Daisy

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world/He is looked at differently/He is not accepted because of his clothes, his hair/ His occupation, his beliefs or his skin color/ Now look at yourself, are you an OutKast?" This is how Daisy identified herself at this time.

understands that there are many obstacles in her future.  To her future and her dreams, Daisy comments,

> I'm praying to get into NYU and I want to get into their recording music school. I want to learn how to manage artist so that I can become an executive producer. I want to reestablish Hip Hop and take it back to the early Hip Hop of the nineties before it became mainstream. But people are telling me that I'm white and a female and I can't do it. And I'm saying I'm not going to let race ever limit me so why would I let it limit my future?"

**Mike**

Mike is an African American emcee whose roots are spread across the nation. Originally, Mike is from the Southern California area, but he has spent a significant amount of time in moving back and forth between California, Illinois, and Georgia. In fact, Mike's junior and senior years at Westside High School were the first time since elementary school that he was enrolled in the same school two years in a row. While his life in the school system has been unstable, Mike felt that his mother more than made up for the disruptions moving caused in his life.  Although his "mom and dad broke up when [he] was two," his father remained in his life and is considered to have played, "a big part in raising [him]" early in his life.  Also providing stability was Mike's older brother (by nine years) who, later in life, as he realized that Mike's father was not around, "gave [him] a lot of advice and was a big influence as he stepped up and played a father role."  Mike also credits his grandmother and the rest of his family on his mother's side as they all, "had a little part in raising me because my mom needed help doing it; they all take their little credit for who I am."

Mike first moved out of the California area when he and his mother were displaced by a major earthquake. Mike recalls, "I remember we had to sleep in the car because everything was wrecked and my mom was scared." As a result, they moved to Illinois. In Illinois, Mike's first experience at school was particularly traumatic. Mike recalls, "I had the most racist teacher who told us that blacks were the slave owners and whites were the slaves. She [eventually] got fired. I went home crying to my mom like 'I don't want to be black anymore'". Once his mother cleared up this misinformation, Mike just finished the year, thinking the teacher was "crazy.".

Late in his elementary school life, Mike's mother moved him back to Southern California. In the schools, he had noticed a change from his early schoolyards. "Everybody started hanging out with their own race of people." As Mike began to follow the trends of the school, he befriended a kid who had a significant impact on him:

> My best friend lived with his aunt who sold drugs out of her house. He started staying at my house; he was my best friend. One day he cussed out his mom and he started breaking down the street. Eventually he went back to his mom's house, but he stopped coming to school. He was getting into trouble. I saw the cops cuff him and the last time I heard about him, he was in the hospital with a bullet to his head.

Around this time Mike's personality in the classroom began to shine through. Mike saw himself as the "class clown" who felt it was his responsibility to bring life to the class. He recalls a situation where he had a teacher who would say, "Don't try and befriend me. I'm not you're friend. I'm your teacher." Mike responded by, "being a

class clown because I would make the class laugh at him." Now Mike did not treat all of the teachers that way. He explained:

> I've always been a class clown in school but some teachers…I mean I not going to say that I disrespect teachers cause I know they deserve more respect then what I sometimes give em. For the most part I always show the teacher the respect they deserve. It's always one or two teachers I might joke around in their class and they'll tell me to stop joking around and I'll keep joking around and that's as far as I'll go with disrespect. I'll never call a teacher out of their name or get an attitude like da, da, da unless I feel I've been disrespected. Then that's when we can go to the next level, but as far as that I've always showed the teachers the respect they deserve as an adult and a teacher.

Mike's personality as a class clown was well deserved as during my observations I saw Mike display all of the characteristics that he spoke of, but I also observed a critical component that was infused in his classroom interactions. In one observation in particular, the class was receiving a presentation from a group of students from Yale University. Mike proceeded to ask eight straight "class-clownish" questions, but his tone changed when the presenter's answers struck a nerve with him:

> "How's the male to female ratio?" Mike asks… when the presenters answer, "50-50…they try really hard to keep it like that"... Mike then jumps in and responds to her answer with the presumption, "So presumably they would admit one over another to keep it like that... Hummm, that's interesting, isn't it?"... The presenter say no and they go into a long explanation of why the

gendered minority would not have an advantage in admission, but the presenters are fumbling with the response not addressing his presumption completely ... He says "I hoooope so!!!" with a semi-sarcastic tone as he knows that he stumped the Yale presenters… (Excerpt taken from Field Notes 12-7-05)

What do you think the class clowning is about for Mike?

Mike shed his clown personality and for a moment adopted a critical stance. When asked later about this specific situation, Mike replied,

For the majority of the class, I'm just trying to make the kids laugh and junk. But if I find something intriguing or interesting that I want to know, then I'm going to throw that in there too, you know. I'm not going to leave out a real good question because it's not funny. And it can get the kids thinking also.

Overall, Mike was keenly aware of his behavior inside of the classroom.  It was this awareness of his behavior that led him to start thinking differently about another area; Hip Hop culture.

As Mike prepared for his next move, this time to Georgia, Mike remembers becoming more serious about Hip Hop culture.  In Georgia, Mike felt free to be himself.  Mike says. "Georgia was different.  It was more slow-paced, relaxed, and kick back. There were no haters.  Everybody is cool. And I was doing me. In L.A was hard to do me because you had to respect certain rules."  While, "doing him" in the school, Hip Hop was just coming into its own down south.  The South was beginning to establish its own sound, and at his new school, they got into it, "At lunch time we

would start rapping at the tables and getting crunk[19]. Down-south started coming up

in Hip Hop at this time."  Mike, who had been, "rapping ever since the third grade"

discovered that he was a gifted emcee, but he did not take emceeing very seriously.

He did though take Hip Hop culture seriously:

> I'm a big Hip Hop fan and I'm going to die over Hip Hop. I love the fact that
>
> you can make a song about anything and if one person can relate to it, it is
>
> good cause everybody is different. When I go through certain things in my
>
> life, it was certain songs that I would just bump every morning before going to
>
> school just to get me ready. It was certain songs that you can relate to.
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> Probably not the best song on the radio, but to you can relate to it. Relate to
>
> him [the emcee] as a person. Not even every aspect of the song.  That helped
>
> me out a lot. When I'm happy there are songs.  When I'm sad and it's crazy,
>
> when you're emotional, you want to hear those "F the world" songs.  Hip Hop
>
> has been there for me. I need the artist that's spreading that good message.  I
>
> need that bad message that I can also look upon that I can say I'm not gonna
>
> do that.

For Mike, Hip Hop was a way to understand the world and because of its diversity of

topics, many times Mike would find something that could address his feelings.  Mike

would often take clips of songs or words that emcees spoke and use them in his life

for guidance.

Mike eventually moved back to California and had just recently begun to take

his role as a practitioner of Hip Hop seriously, performing as an emcee and a poet in

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[19] Crunk is a type of high energy Hip Hop music that originated in the south particularly Atlanta, Georgia, but it can also be used as an adjective that is to describe people's behavior

shows all around Southern California. When asked about the current role of Hip Hop in his life, Mike explains,

Hip Hop is one-third of my life. Hip-Hop I guess you can say what do I live by sometimes the things that happen in Hip Hop are the things that I live by. Hip Hop for me is who I am. I dress Hip Hop, I talk Hip Hop, and I'm about it, the whole culture of it. I respect it. I always talk about the older figures in my life my mom, my dad, my brother; Hip Hop is another figure in my life that I look up to.

**Cyrus**

Cyrus is a seventeen year old, Mexican-American young man from a lower-middle class upbringing. Struggle has been constantly present in Cyrus's life. Through a tumultuous home life, victimizations at school, and gang culture in the streets, Cyrus has maintained and cultivated his hopes and dreams of a career in Hip Hop. As an emcee, Cyrus found a home in front of crowds as he worked his social critique into his music to enlighten the people that he comes in contact with. Like his idols from Hip Hop who came before him, Cyrus's goal is to uplift everyone who hears his voice. While he struggles to lift himself up at times, Cyrus leans on his microphone, grounded in a level-headed understanding and critique of society and himself.

Cyrus grew up in a lower class town outside of Westside City. The town was approximately the same size as Westside City, but with a significantly greater Latino and African-American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Cyrus recalled moving because his family's apartment had been broken into several times. The move

took Cyrus to a city whose population was predominately African American. Being of Mexican heritage, Cyrus struggled to acclimate himself to this new environment as he was consistently the victim of violence at school where he was involved in many verbal and physical altercations. "They [the bullies at school] used to…take my chocolate milk at lunch and stuff and pour it all over my pants. I'd get bullied and at one point, I got tired of it and I started taking weapons to school in my pants." Still the fights did not cease, and Cyrus began to seek protection in the gang culture. This move began a cycle of violence in his life that continues today.

The violence at school was only overshadowed by the physical and emotional abuse that he felt at home. "My mom neglected me…well at least I felt like she did… I felt like my parents didn't want me there at all so I was always out in the streets or out at the park." As Cyrus said, he spent most of his time at the park escaping the neglect. But that wasn't the only thing he was escaping.

> I started to see some other things going on at home. You could feel it. I felt like my parents didn't want me there at all. My Uncle [who had moved in with the family] was like "Where is my wife at?" Turns out my dad was taking his own brother's wife to a hotel. Fucking his own brother's wife. I was like "That's lower than low". My auntie before all this happened; she kind of sexually molested me. So when I found out about this, I was like "Well what she did to me, maybe she was messing with him and my dad didn't want to".
>
> It wasn't true. My dad knew what he was doing. Wow.

This sent Cyrus out of the house, which led him to spend most of his time unsupervised at a local park. It was there that he met a group of older boys who

turned out to be gang members:

> That neighborhood was all Bloods so I kind of got into that whole trend
> around third grade. They started telling me "are you kicking with us" and "are
> you gone stick with us?"  I was like, "What do you mean?"  They were like
> "You gotta be a part of the hood, you know". I didn't really know what it was
> and they all seemed pretty nice to me, so I went ahead and got jumped in the
> hood.

Though Cyrus is Mexican, he was jumped into a predominately black gang when he

was in Middle School.  "They used tell me don't worry about it. You a nigga just like

us."  This was Cyrus's initiation to the gang, and from that point forth, he would be

known as a gang member.  While his gang stayed away from the selling of drugs,

violence was the norm. Cyrus gained a feeling of security around his gang.  No longer

fearing his walks home, Cyrus found a sense of self worth that he was not getting at

home:

> Before I meet these dudes, when I walked home, I would get beat up all the
> time. When I started hanging with these dudes I had a little more protection so
> I was like "I'm down for mine".  It was like fourth grade but then things
> started getting bad at home between my mom and dad.

At home, Cyrus's gang could not protect him though they tried.  Cyrus recalls an

incident that not only shed light on the problems his parents were having, but proved

the extent to which his gang was there to support him:

> That's when I found out my dad was cheating on my momma. Dudes would
> tell me, "You know your dad is doing something funny. You should follow

him." So I did one time. I took my bike, but I wasn't fast enough so some of the dudes gave me a ride. We went to this ladies house and my dad was in there. I saw them kiss and I was like "What the…" So I was like, "Man" and they were like, "You want us to handle this?" I was like "Handle? What do you mean? What is that?" They were like, "You know" and pulled out a gun. I was like, "Naw, naw, naw, naw that's my dad!" And they were like, "I'm saying… You know he's an asshole." I'm like "Everybody's an asshole". I was a little kid man. I used to see the other kids playing dodge ball or hide and go seek. I wanted to do that but I couldn't because sometimes when I would try and go home the door was locked. I'm sitting there pounding on the door and no one would open the door so I would go to the park.

At the age of ten, Cyrus held his father's life in his hands, but chose to spare him. Though his family life was in shambles and his respect for his father was shattered, this incident showed Cyrus that his new gang family would support him in any situation. Though a tragic way of looking for support, Cyrus felt the unconditional love of his group and to a ten-year-old, it would be more than enough.

In the eighth grade, Cyrus began to take his gang activity seriously. He began to dress the part of a gang member and to act out as well. Cyrus would wear his red shoe laces in his shoes, and he would walk with his red bandana hanging out of his pocket to show people he was a gang member and that he commanded respect. One incident began to change all of that:

That's when I started getting serious about my gangbanging wearing my red chucks and red t-shirts, walking around the neighborhood like, "What are you

looking at homie?" I felt all the time like it wasn't me. My dad had left the house for a while and my Momma was struggling to pay the house note, so I started slanging (selling drugs). I was taking what I could get. I was fighting drug dealers all over the place: Bashing 'em over the head, going up to them with heats (guns) like, "Break yo' self!!!" just taking whatever they had and selling it myself. I wasn't proud of it but that's what was getting me my clothes. I didn't have respect for no one. I think that was a bad thing.

Cyrus did not have the tools to deal with the stresses in his life. He saw that his family was collapsing around him, and he relied on the only life he knew to help them through the crises they were currently facing. His action triggered a reaction from the streets that he wasn't prepared for.

One night I was by myself I was thinking like "Damn man, what am I doing? What happened to me" Right then a car pulls up and a dude pulls out a gun and start dumping on me. I straight dove under his car. They drove off and I started running and I kept running, but I could have sworn they hit me. I jumped in this dumpster. I felt sweaty and it was wet. I was looking at my back and it was hit. I got up and the next thing you know, I see [my friend] and he was like "What happened?" I was like, "I cut myself" and he was like, "Man, you got some lead in you!!! Let's go to the hospital." I was telling the doctors not to tell my parents. They were like "How old are you?" I was like, "Twelve". Fortunately they told my dad. My dad took me home after the next day and he gave me a little money and my mom was like "Where you have been?" She was like "What happened?" I was like "They shot me." Now she

was stressing.  She started telling the cops and they were interviewing me.  I

was on lockdown for awhile.

Cyrus's wounds were not life threatening, but the fact that he had been shot did not

escape him.  In the gang culture, if someone shoots, the response is to shoot back.

His friends knew this, and he knew it, and he began to prepare himself mentally for

this inevitability.

As soon as I got away from the cops, I wanted to get back at these dudes. I

know it wasn't the right thing to do, but I was mad as hell cause I got in

trouble. So I told [my friend] and them and they said it was not worth it. He

was like, "They hit you and it ain't gonna make it right to hit em back. And if

you get caught you are spending the rest of your life in jail." I was like, "I

don't care!" He was like, "I done this thing before and you don't feel good

afterwards. I mean we *can* do it."  I was thinking that was a big decision it

was about to be a big turning point in my life. So I was like, do I go shoot

these cats up or what do I do? So, I was doing my music at that time, so I

wrote a song about it. They were like "That's cool!!! Why don't you keep

doing that?" I was like, "They don't like Mexicans out here so they ain't

going to like Mexicans in music." They were like, "But you're black." I was

like, "Look in the mirror" and they were like, "Oh, you're just a light skinned

brother." I was like, "Naw man, my homie Wendell is light skinned; look at

my hair." They were like, "Just put on a do rag and shut up. You black to us.

We've been knowing you for the longest." So it was [my friend] talked me out

of [retaliation].

Through the complexity of the racial identity confusion, the deaths of some of his closest friends, and his discovery of Hip Hop, Cyrus began to see the gang culture as a one way ticket to jail or death. He began to see that retaliation was not going to be the key to his escape from his current life of violence and death; Hip Hop was. Cyrus credits Hip Hop with saving his life in this metaphorical story:

> I was walking down this dark tunnel I had my music which was my flashlight. But I never wanted to use it because I was afraid of what I was going to see. But I just covered my ears, closed my eyes and just ran through it. But in the process I was stubbing my toe and falling so I had to use my flashlight to see again. So I put batteries in my flashlight and I saw everything and it turns out that what I saw didn't scare me at all. I saw the truth; why things are the way they are, why people do the things they do.

Cyrus had been running from the realities of his life since he was a child. His fear had always gotten the best of him until he found Hip Hop. Through Hip Hop, he began to face his fears. By challenging himself, Cyrus began to use Hip Hop as a source of strength; he saw it and his friends saw it. Cyrus's friends saw that he had a talent and that the belief in his strength of character could be used in a far greater and more efficient way than he did in the gang. Cyrus began to explore himself through Hip Hop. Cyrus became an emcee who moved away from what he considers negativity; he considers himself to be a political rapper. He gains his inspiration from his past choices and looks to show that people can change their lives:

> The whole violence thing I'm not with that anymore either. I think that there is better ways to do things then raising a fist at somebody, you know. It takes

a bigger man to walk away from a fight then to get into one cause anyone can

take a swing. You're not getting paid for taking a swing at anybody so that's

not going to get you nowhere.

Through Hip Hop, Cyrus began to see an alternative to the violence that he had

experienced for the better part of his life. He wanted to spread that message through

his music, but his environment was keeping him from doing that. Earlier in his life,

Cyrus might have run back to the streets, but Hip Hop inspired him to take dramatic

measures to insure his success. At that point, Cyrus moved to Westside city with his

father when his parents were divorced so that he could have a fresh start at a school

and where he would not be confronted with his gang member status on a daily basis.

In fact, Cyrus made a decision that many gang members face but few have the

courage to follow through with their desires: to leave the gang:

I was sitting at home like I'm not getting paid for this. I'm hungry I'm hungry

for food; I'm hungry for education, and hungry to keep continuing my music.

I put my music on hold to continue my gangbanging I was like naw man that's

not what I want to do. So while I was getting suspended I started working on

my music. I went back to the hood and got jumped out of the gang.

Cyrus now continues to pursue his dream in Hip Hop, by sticking to his personal

values. Through all of the trials and tribulations, Cyrus has found that Hip Hop has

given him something that the gang could not: a belief in himself:

Hip Hop's impact on my life has been positive because when I felt like there

was nowhere else to go or no one else to talk too, I could always pick up some

paper and a pen and write down what I thought cause no one else is going to

hear it but me and no one is going to sit back and be like "that's stupid".  It

ain't like that.   It's like the paper and the pen ain't gonna talk back to you.

They're here to help you but the paper is listening to everything your saying.

So when I can put all my feelings on a piece of paper and then read it back to

myself or make it into actual music then it makes me feel good.  It makes me

feel like I did something. To get it off my chest, I think it's important.  To talk

to yourself and know what you want to do rather then to ask somebody else

for advice.

## Nasa

Nasa is the son of a renowned poet (his father) who came to the United States

(with his mother) in the early 1980's, fleeing Iran and the Shah's regime.  Nasa's

mother and father separated when he was very young, and while Nasa lives in a city

adjacent to Westside City with his father, he visits his mother frequently.  Nasa's

father has a degenerative eye condition that was slowly depriving him of his eyesight.

On a trip to the summit of Mount Everest the pressure quickly removed what eyesight

that Nasa's father had left.  Nasa's father's vision has had a big impact on Nasa's life

from an early age as he remembers,

> getting on the bus going preschool, and I'd have to help him on the bus. I
>
> mean I always had to help him with groceries; I'd go with him. I'd always
>
> have nightmares sometimes about like what would happen if someone put a
>
> gun to him what would he do? What would he do?

Nasa's fears were never realized, but they were definitely justified as his

neighborhood was the scene of much gang violence as Nasa was growing up.  Crack

dealing, liquor store hold ups and drive-by-shootings were all vivid memories Nasa

had of growing up.  Rather than being afraid of the danger that surrounded him, the

danger actually excited Nasa, who recalled that during this time he "experienced [his]

first stick up scene" of which he thought that "it was fun." The thrill of excitement

stayed with Nasa throughout life as every four years he found himself reliving the

same experiences.

>Nasa:  Every four years it happened over and over again. It was an experience
>
>were we stole a whole box of basketball card out of this teachers room,
>
>then four years later the same thing happened again where we stole
>
>Pokemon cards from this dudes house. Then four years later I robbed
>
>Robinsons-May

>A.Dee:  Not cards again

>Nasa:  Naw

>A.Dee:  I was about to say, if it was cards again, would have had to think
>
>about that… so that was every four years… so what do you think
>
>happened during those four years in-between?

>Nasa:  I don't know… I guess I didn't get much money… I didn't want to ask
>
>my dad cause he didn't get much, and my mom always supported me,
>
>so I didn't want to keep asking her.  I needed a way to get clothes and
>
>cards that everyone else didn't have so that was my way of getting it.  I
>
>used to watch people on the block, on TV, in movies getting away
>
>with it and they had loot so I went for it.

Nasa's dreams and desires were mainly materialistic at that time and stealing was not only exciting, it was profitable. He took the opportunities as they presented themselves to him and more than once he paid a price for his indiscretions by ending up in both the principal's office and later in jail. Nasa did not need the items he coveted, but he wanted them and found a way to get them. Though illegal, Nasa's actions helped him achieve his goals of material gain. At home, Nasa's family life was beginning to become stressful as he desired consistency, but his parents were not able to provide it.

When Nasa's parents split up, he was being shuffled between his mother's house and father's house, as his parents shared custody. Traditionally, parents will alternate weeks or one parent will have a child during the week and the other will have the child on the weekends, but Nasa's parents alternated daily. Nasa remembers the experience, "Every single day was a switch off; it was like a real, real pain… and a waste of time." This instability ended when he entered middle school when he told his parents that he "couldn't do it anymore". The switch away from living with both his parents brought Nasa closer to his father, but his mother moved to Montana where she stayed until recently moving back to Southern California about 30 minutes outside of Westside City.

As Nasa was beginning at Westside High School in the 9th grade, he quickly realized that he was "too short for basketball," and he was not willing to invest the 20 hours a week for football. It was then that Nasa knew that his future would be inside of Hip Hop culture. "Hip Hop became the center of my life." With Nasa's father

being a poet, Nasa always remembers writing and reciting poetry.  Hip Hop would become his new hustle.

> That's when I was introduced to rap, I knew what rap was, but the culture behind rap is Hip Hop. It's what you breathe. It's not the music. It's a culture it's the way you dress. The way you communicate with others, your relationships with people. How your family is and then of course it's the music. People express there feeling upon the culture through the music.  See, I didn't know the true meaning when I found out, I was like, "this is what I should do for a living… this is what I like." Now I live and breathe Hip Hop. I saw everyone here [at Westside High] talking the talk, but not walking the walk. I would tell them, let's battle.  Let's put money on it.  And I made money off that and I made money off selling my CD's and when that calmed down, when people didn't want to battle me, that's when I started stealing again to make my money

Nasa originally turned to Hip Hop to feed his materialistic desires so when his Hip Hop hustle was no longer lucrative, Nasa returned to stealing to feed his wants and desires.  This continued until the last of the every-four-year-experiences where he was caught stealing from a department store.  Nasa remembers:

> Me and my homies were like, "Yeah let's go steal this shit." We were doing it for awhile. We go outside and [the department store] security caught us. My mom came and got me she was crying telling me I disgraced the family name and that's when I realized stealing is not me. But I had to ask myself "how am

I going to get my money?" I realized that I have a closet full of clothes and I

built a studio at my crib so the hustle now is selling the music.

As Nasa further developed his craft as an emcee, he began to develop a genuine love

for not only Hip Hop music but Hip Hop culture as well. Nasa's foray into music has

come at the expense of his schooling. "I realized that I can put 10 percent of time

into school and get straight A's. You can't be the average Joe and make it into the

music business." Besides the amount of effort needed to succeed and thrive, Nasa

found that the schools that he attended did not respect his religious beliefs.

I was always an atheist when I was growing up and every time they [teachers]

would bring up religion, I would feel left out. The teachers would not care,

the principal did not care. They treated me different then everybody else

because they knew I was an atheist.

Though he is now successful in school, reporting that he currently is carrying a 4.0

Grade Point Average up from a 2.8, most of his attention is focused on Hip Hop.

When asked how he sees Hip Hop's role in his life, he replied profoundly, "Hip Hop

is more important to me than school." While his response might cause many within

education to shudder, for Nasa, success in Hip Hop is not guaranteed and only comes

as a result of hard work, perseverance, and a little bit of luck. School came easy to

Nasa, and he implied that he was not challenged by school like he was by music

production. Because of the levels of difficulty involved, I believe that Nasa respects

Hip Hop as an institution in a way that school could not command or demand from

him.

**Receptors of Hip Hop Culture**

A Receptors of Hip Hop culture differs from a Director in that a Director has chosen to make Hip Hop a priority in their life in terms of goals, values, and beliefs. For a Receptor, Hip Hop is less of a lifestyle and more of an indulgence. There are four categories of receptors: Conscious Hip Hoppa, Unconscious Hip Hopppa, Conscious Avoider, and Unconscious Avoider (See Figure 1). All of the participants in this study are Hip Hoppas, but their consciousness levels differ in relation to their understanding of the effects of Hip Hop culture on identity.

**Brian**

Brian is a first generation Asian American whose mother and father emigrated from Hong Kong and China respectively, to escape the communist regime that was ruling the country. Growing up with an older brother and his grandparents all living in the same apartment, Brian's beliefs were shaped from an early age. Living in a diverse city on the outskirts of Westside city, race was a part of Brian's life from an early age. Drawing upon the information that Brian shared with me in the interviews, his experiences and the influences of his family helped him form his own distinctive (if not somewhat problematic) values. Through his racialized experiences, Brian leaned on Hip Hop culture to navigate his experiences with his family, and his life inside and outside of school.

As I began my interviews with Brian, one of the first things that he brought up was his family's beliefs about race. His grandparents and parents came to this country, "not knowing what to expect" and since they had, "never seen anyone except like Asian people before," they relied heavily on the media to teach them about the

diversity which they were now encountering. His family adopted a series of understandings about the groups that they were encountering on a daily basis. According to Brian's elders, African American people tended to "act out as a criminal and [I was to] stay away from them." White people "are more calm with them they don't have anything against them" and Latino people were thought of as "useless people." Though the Asian population was very diverse (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Thai; Pilipino, Vietnamese) the population in Westside did not face much discrimination. Though his parents and grandparents held these stereotypical beliefs, this did not deter Brian from establishing friendships with people from non-Asian and White ethnicities. Brian, "always hung out with Latinos and Black people [inside of school]. [He] played sports with them, but outside of school, never really hung out with any of them" because of his parental beliefs. Even through some personal difficulties that could have significantly reinforced Brian's parents' racial beliefs, Brian refused to adopt his elders' stereotypical beliefs about his friends. Brian recalls a memorable experience from when he was six years old:

> Brian:  My brother and I got into a fight with two Mexicans and one of them stabbed me. We were at [a local school] playing basketball and they came so we played them two on two and it was really aggressive and it was really close, but we won at the end. Me and my brother were just talking to each other about how good we did and I turn around and the boy threw the ball at my head. I go after him and his brother pulls me off and he holds me and the other one stabbed me and my brother chases both of them and beats them up.

A.Dee:  Where did he stab you?

Brian:   On the side.

A.Dee: Did you have to go to the hospital after that?

Brian:  I actually didn't want to tell my mom. I just told her I fell playing

basketball and we just took care of it at home.

A.Dee:  Why didn't you want to tell her?

Brian:   Cause I know she would be over protective and would not let me go

out.  Shit happens.

Brian's course of action was one that might have been rooted in his desire to continue

playing outside, but it also had the effect of shaping not only Brian's racial beliefs but

his personal values as well.  This incident is indicative of Brian's mantra of "Shit

Happens" as he did not want to get his parents involved, whether it was because of

their beliefs about race or their overprotective nature. Though the incident happened

with his older brother (who undoubtedly had an influence over the reaction) Brian,

even at the age of six, was beginning to wean himself from his parents' influence.

Brian listed the pursuit of success as one of his personal values. His idea of

success was…. "I feel that you'll be more happy being successful than being someone

that doesn't have a job.  You'll be stressed and you wouldn't have a happy life."

Another one of Brian's personal values traces back to his incident when he was six:

I feel like it is ok to lie in certain situations. The other person that you're lying

to shouldn't be affected by it, but you're still lying to them. If it really doesn't

affect them at all; if they feel happy by what you said to them then everything

should be fine.

Brian's mother might have been hurt by the stabbing incident, but he lied to protect her. Brian qualifies his statement as he states, "It's not like I live my life with lies. Honesty is also something really important. With certain things like a relationship or if something important like if something affects something else then you should be truthful." It might have been the moral ambiguity of bending the truth that would later lead to trouble in school for Brian. Brian was always very clear about his actions and why he did what he did, but this thread about bending the truth was consistent throughout our interviews. Truth for Brian was relative. Truth for Brian was all about perspective.

To some of Brian's teachers, the concept of truth was absolute. In the seventh and eighth grades, Brian felt that the teachers suspected him of cheating:

I started like really liking to write essays and people would say this is a really good essay and they would say someone wrote it for me but they didn't have proof. They even had me stay after class to write it and they would say it's not my writing and that I memorized it or something, which got me suspended. Wow!

Another incident happened in Middle School where Brian's attempts at humor were taken as an absolute by his teacher:

For the "who am I" project which is about three months long and at the end of the project I made a timeline for myself and it's suppose to be like whatever you want and I said by the age of eighteen I overdose on some drug and die but it was just a joke. I know other people who had did that also and their teacher found it humorous and they received a good grade but my teacher

turned me in to the child protective services, took it way out of hand and I
failed the class.

Aspects of this incident are "reflected" in Hip Hop culture. Many times, Hip Hop artists will talk about something but it is not meant to be taken literally. An emcee will talk about an act of violence, but in reality, the incident would never be considered by the artist. There are too many albums that talk about suicide, murder and mayhem, only a fraction of which come to fruition (though we might think the number is higher because of the international attention being paid to the artists). These topics are often metaphors describing feelings outside of the expressed topic, and this might have influenced Brian to construct a "Who am I" project with an eighteen year old's death at the end.

Brian's views about school and his performance in school eventually turned around in the 10th grade when he had an English teacher who "was into Hip Hop as well. That's when I started to develop a style for writing. I started using metaphors when I write". Brian's teacher understood Hip Hop culture, and Brian's connection to it and was able to help him express himself more clearly. Brian began to thrive in school to the point where he was accepted into one of California's elite public universities. As Brian waits until next year when he will be in college, he can often be found in the back row of his Advanced Placement courses sleeping. His teacher says that he "considers [the AP Economics course to be] one of the hardest classes on campus but [Brian] is doing well on the tests and the outside work. The teacher's philosophy is that if Brian is doing well, "[he] is not gonna disrupt him, but [he]

would like him to be more engaged." Brian had the opportunity to speak later about his classroom manner and had this to say,

> I pay attention sometimes but like most of the time I just go to sleep cause it just seems like I already went through [the information] because I've done a lot of business type stuff. It seems like common sense to me. I didn't need anyone to teach me; not bragging, but that's just like what happened... I normally like listening to people a lot and like seeing their point of views and things, but like when they are just like asking questions that like I can answer it doesn't entertain me much.

Never too far from Brian's influences, Hip Hop has been a force in his life that has shaped his beliefs and his identity. When asked how Hip Hop has impacted his life, this exchange took place:

> Brian: It kind of guided me to hang out with more black people and live kind of their life and see what it's like and I feel like I can I fit in with that.
>
> A.Dee: How is that different with how you were living before?
>
> Brian: Before I was living more like an Asian culture where I would just be studying and like trying as hard as I can to do good in school, but now I have fun also but still I can do what I need to do
>
> A.Dee: Do you fit in more with the Hip Hop culture than you do with the Asian culture?
>
> Brian: I feel that I do.
>
> A.Dee: Why?
>
> Brian: I can find myself liking more and the stuff that they do makes more

sense to me.

A.Dee: Can you give me an example?

Brian: Asians are always really traditional like they only care about their image but not what they really are. Where Black people or their culture is tend to be like what they really are and not what society wants them to be.

Brian's response might have been over-generalized and racialized, but it is easy to see that Hip Hop has had a influenced how Brian perceives himself. Brian is able to find himself within Hip Hop culture even though he sees his Asian heritage as deficient and stifling to his personal growth. Brian continued to explore Hip Hop's impact on his life as he talked about two of the personal values that he sees as similar to the fundamental values in Hip Hop: friendship and competition. Brian said that he respects and tries to integrate Hip Hop's views on friendship and loyalty into his life. He says that he likes, "how they value friends and staying together with a group of people." He also likes the concepts of competition inherent in Hip Hop since it's inception in the 1970's. "Each record label is competitive with each other and trying to make the most money and I feel like I want to be competitive and try to like be more successful then the competition." Brian feels that this belief prepares him to enter the competitive world of corporate America where he has the goal "to do something in business. I can see myself with like a steady job and salary".

**C.J.**

C.J. grew up in the South Central area of the county that includes Westside City, an area which he considered "very low class" with a poverty rate 70% higher

than the state average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). C.J. stayed in a house with his paternal grandmother, his mother, and his father. At the age of three when his father, an active gang member, went to jail, he and his mother were kicked out of the house. "We were kind of homeless after. We were living in a red bucket (an old dilapidated car) for a couple of weeks [while] staying at friends houses. My mom got her stuff together and we moved into an apartment" C.J. recalls of his early childhood. Eventually they moved into a house, which quickly became the house that hosted many of their family gatherings. C.J. recalls with fond memories,

> She used to throw parties every Saturday at least twice a month. She has at least seven or eight brothers and sisters. They would all come over, have some alcohol, play some Marvin Gaye, and have a barbeque. It would be real nice. My cousins would come over and it was real genuine. It was nice.

Though C.J.'s family structure was anything but stable, he learned early on that family was very important, and his mother and his grandparents would become a source of strength for him as he got older and more mature.

One person that C.J. knew he could count on from an early age was his mother. C.J. and his mother had a very caring and loving relationship. C.J.'s mother would take odd jobs in their neighborhood to make ends meet until eventually settling in as a bus driver in Westside City. Through her work, C.J. quickly found out that education was her top priority for him, and he made sure that he was going to be successful so as not to disappoint her, "My mother is a strong person" C.J. said. "She has been through a lot, so the proudest thing I can do is for her to see me go off to college." It was middle school where this emphasis on education made its imprint on

C.J.  School was always easy for him until his mother began working as a bus driver for Westside City enabling him to enroll in the Westside School District.  At the local middle school, he began to see how far behind he really was compared to students that grew up attending Westside schools. C.J. recalls,

> I had a 3.5 [G.P.A.], like three A's and three B's, and it was all easy to me.
> Then when I went to [one of the Westside City's Middle Schools] it kind of fell off, you know. Grades went from A's to B's to C's and D's.

C.J.'s mother again intervened and hired a tutor to assist his academic development. C.J. stated, "Coming from [outside of the] district, I was not able to read out loud. Coming to another district, my mother bought me a tutor.  One of her college friends helped me.  That was a big thing for me"

When C.J. moved to Westside High, the one thing that did not improve was his relationship with his father.  Released from jail, C.J.'s father moved to Arizona to avoid the entrapments of the gang culture.  C.J. remembers an incident that began to define the role that his father would have in his life:

> My freshman year…he called and he wanted to know if he could come and see one of my [football] games. That really made me happy cause I felt like finally my dad wanted to see me do something.  He never showed up to the game and I was like whatever.  I didn't look at him like a father. I just really stopped caring. I didn't call him. He always asked why I didn't call him.  It was because I didn't really need anything from him. I was doing well by myself.

His father's ambivalence was something that C.J. felt he did not need in his life, but

his relationship with his mother remained consistent.  When asked to define his relationship with his mother, he said that it was "go to school, get good grades, and graduate." which was exactly what he needed at that time because...

C.J. had another relationship developing that had a significant influence on his identity development; a relationship with Hip Hop culture.  C.J. talked about Hip Hop's influence in his life when he said

> Hip Hop helped me to understand. Tupac [Shakur] explained his life in his rap and what he tried to bring to the world. His mamma was a crack fiend and his little brother was a crack baby and that's something I could relate to. My mom wasn't on drugs but a lot of people in my family were and I realized it at a young age. What he's talking about is real and it's happening. I understand what he was saying. I can feel the person's pain. Some songs you can feel where the person is coming from or how they felt at the time when they wrote the song or if it happened to them in real life, you can feel it. Even though it hadn't happened to you can feel where they are coming from.

Hip Hop was an association and a validation for C.J.  He was able to see that his life was not abnormal and that he too could make something out of a bad situation. People are often attracted to Hip Hop culture because of a connection and a similarity between what the emcee is saying and how that person is living. Tupac's lyrics struck a nerve with C.J. as C.J. was beginning to witness how Hip Hop was in touch with his lived reality.  Hip Hop for C.J. was an expression of his life, and more importantly, there was hope.

One of the bad situations in C.J.'s life was his relationship with his father. This relationship only got worse as C.J. came closer to finishing high school. His father attempted to contact him one more time and it proved to be one time too many. C.J. remembers:

> We had talked New Years last year and he had called me drunk and he was talking about I disrespected him because I didn't care about him being in my life. He called me on New Years and started going off. He was like 'I'm your father you should respect me more than that' and I was like 'I don't even care'. My father is crazy cause he's from [a gang]. Something is wrong with him. He threatened to kill me and my mom. That's when I got to the phone and I started crying, cussed him out and told him 'Don't ever talk about my mom' then I and hung up the phone. He tried calling me on my cousin's phone and tried to talk to me and I wasn't trying to hear it.

This was the final incident between C.J and his father. C.J. has since moved on and no longer attempts to seek validation from his father. The one value that CJ retained from his father is "hustling" which to him "means making money; anything to get money. If it's to pimping a hoe or selling a rock, you're making money even if it's illegal, you're making money." While CJ has stayed away from the illegal side of hustling because he did not want to disappoint his mother, his street smarts and resourcefulness have helped him survive in and out of school. C.J. felt like he always knew whether or not trouble was coming whether it was from a teacher or a gang member; surviving was important and that meant overcoming obstacles and

persevering.  When thinking about this personal value, he made a connection to Hip Hop culture

> Don't quit, keep going. A lot of people say I can't do it you can't do some things. If you think like that you ain't never gone get nowhere. I know a lot of rappers they say man your flows are wack and they keep going. A lot of people used to tell me in school man you're a dummy you ain't gonna go nowhere you ain't going to college.

CJ has average grades, but he credits his successes in school to both his mother and a teacher that he had his sophomore year who taught history "in a way that you can totally understand it; in a way that you can learn history and I understood it and now I want to get a B.A. in history" so that he can teach to the kids that don't understand their teacher.  C.J. let me know that he was eligible to attend college and he had applied to numerous universities in the Southern California area.

**Destiny**

Destiny's mother was a teenager when she was born, and Destiny was to be her second child.  Destiny's father was part of the Nigerian mafia and was deported back to Nigeria before she was born.  Given that she already had a child as a teenager and the father was not around, Destiny's mother decided to have an abortion.  Little did Destiny's mother know she was carrying twins at the time, and during the procedure Destiny's sibling was lost, but Destiny survived.  This circumstance strengthen the bond between Destiny and her mother as they grew to see each other as a miracle, having survived the life threatening procedure. Destiny recalls, "My mom

would put me before anybody if she went somewhere I always had to go with her. I was her special child I guess, or her miracle baby I guess."

From an early age, Destiny stayed with her grandmother. The arrangement sufficed as Destiny's mother and grandmother worked hard to create a situation where Destiny was well cared for and loved. As Destiny got older, her relationship with her grandmother soured, and Destiny began to rebel. Reflecting back on the situation, Destiny now takes responsibility for the fall-out.

> My grand mother was always on me a lot when I was younger cause I was coming home [from school] with the bad reports. I was constantly in trouble. Me and my grandmother constantly butted heads and I went through the time period when I thought she didn't like me, but I had to come to realize that I was the one that was doing bad.

Destiny's late realization came with a price. Early in her high school career, Destiny's grandmother's kidneys began to fail, and she was admitted to the hospital to undergo dialysis. Destiny had to quickly come to grips with the concepts of mortality and strength all at once. "Being the backbone of the family," Destiny struggled because she didn't want to see her grandmother in such a weakened state. Destiny also struggled with her own feelings as she found herself torn between wanting her grandmother to stay around and wishing that god would take her and relieve her pain. Eventually, as her grandmother's pain levels increased, Destiny found herself "wanting her to pass away quickly." When the situation was dire, the decision was made to move Destiny's grandmother back to her home so that she could pass away peacefully.

Everybody was coming out cause they knew she was about to die. So we were all in the room and my grandma was in the hospital bed just miserable. My mom was like write a poem and she said she wanted me to read the poem. So I start reading the poem and her eyes were closed. Then she opened up her eyes and started crying. So we leave and [my mom] drops me off and goes back when she gets there and in that minute my grandmother passed away.

After her grandmother passed away, a void was left in the family, and Destiny's mother was the only one who had the opportunity to step up to become the rock for the family. This transition of responsibility from the Grandmother to the Mother provided Destiny with perhaps her greatest core value: supporting family.

Seeing the things that my mom does and how my mom does them. She's the backbone. When my grandma passed away, my mom [became] the back bone cause everybody kind of fell off. I'm like "yeah you got to value your family" cause my mom could be like everybody else – depressed and not wanting to move on – but she realized that she had to move on.

Philosophically, Destiny blends a combination of systemic analysis and individual accountability when detailing her personal values and beliefs. When talking about school and school success, she says the students are responsible for turning school into a social kingdom complete with a social hierarchy, "School is a social kingdom. You are here for learning, but we've turned it into a social kingdom and a popularity contest." Destiny doesn't see the school as being responsible for the lack of success by students in the school:

I don't think it is really the schools fault. I think it's really [the fault of] the people that attend the schools. Like me as a student; like some of us slack off, so I mean why else would you come to school? If you are not here to learn, the next thing is to socialize and make friends and a lot of people get caught up in the girlfriend/boyfriend type stuff. That's a social kingdom.

Destiny further explicates her role in this social kingdom and how she has survived intact through her school career:

Like my mom always tells me "Yeah have fun; have a boyfriend cause you're in high school and it's gonna be like four years and when you look back you're just gonna be like [this is] something to look back on". But she is like "At the same time, realize that's not what you are there for. School is not where you go and you mingle and you date and you have friends. That's just the bonus. You're supposed to go there to learn and get educated and leave so you can start you're future". Some students do that; just come to learn and those are the ones that are like to themselves at lunch you can find them in the library studying and those are the ones that make it further – not at all time – but those are the ones that make it far because they are the ones worried about school. Then you have people like me: I come and I learn and I'm all about learning, but I socialize, I have a boyfriend, I do all the bonus, and I do it all, and I still want to be successful.

Though Destiny tries to hold onto her philosophical beliefs in individual responsibility when addressing race and gender roles in America, she feels that she is

forced to include a systemic analysis to properly address the power dynamics in a racial and gendered America:

> Destiny:  I don't like to use race as an excuse.  I mean I'm still doing what I have to do to make it regardless of color, gender, or whatever.  I just feel like we have it hard and America promotes that because they make us struggle for what we want. You see people that want things and we struggle or you see the way the system handles things when it comes to minorities.
>
> A.Dee:  What do you mean the system?
>
> Destiny:  The white man. The system. Like I feel like the system is so corrupt. They're still stuck in the past where we were they're slaves or we were doing for them that they still they don't realize that that that's past tense. This is present tense; were not shackled, you know. You can't tell us to go do this and we're going to do it. We can actually tell you no and not get beat, and even though it's not that severe like go do this and they go and beat us.  It's just the struggle that we have to go through.
>
> A.Dee:  Why don't you like to use race?
>
> Destiny:  Because I feel like everybody uses race as an excuse. Everybody says "Because I'm black I can't do this" or "Because I'm black, they do this to me".  I mean it *is* a problem and I don't like to use it, but it *is* a problem, and you got to use it, but I don't like to use it.

Destiny analyzed different structures in society differently. When Destiny was looking at race and gender in society, her unit of analysis was the systems that maintained the oppressive structures, but when analyzing the school system and Black students' lack of success, I thought that it was interesting that her unit of analysis became the individual.  When looking at Hip Hop, she also exhibited a multitude of ways of thinking.

When asked how Hip Hop impacts her life personally, Destiny did not believe it had much of an impact at all:

> It doesn't really do too much to me.  I mean I like the beats to some songs.  I sing.  I'm more of a slow song person cause it seems like it has more meaning to it. Hip Hop now; I mean it's cool. I listen to it.  Like I said, I dance off of it. I mean when I listen to Hip Hop now [compared to] before I see a big difference.  I mean Hip Hop now has corrupted me to really like old Hip Hop cause I'm like "What are they talking about?" The beats are good but they are not talking about nothing.  So that is the only major influence that it has on me like it hasn't really caused me to like do anything or like change my life.

She does admit, though, that she is impacted by the media and the influence that media has on the public's (and her personal) digestion of Hip Hop culture:

> The media is like "Oh this sounds like a good person. Let's pop him in and get everybody to like him" and once you hear it for awhile, it gets stuck in your head. It's like a brain-washing system. You get brained-washed to deal with it.

Overall, Destiny felt that her life experiences and thought processes separate her from the typical high school student.  "I feel like, at times, I'm higher than a lot of

people up here. Not higher like 'I'm the shit'. Higher like where I'm trying to go and where they're trying to go. I'm on a whole different path than them. I feel like when a lot of people when they leave here [Westside High] they ain't gonna know what to do. I  know before I graduate what I'm gonna do… I want to be the next female Johnny Cochran."

**Mia**

As Mia reflects on what values guide her life, she is taken on a journey through difficult times that caused her to define and re-define her fundamental beliefs.  Mia categorizes herself as a Chicana and though she is "not a hardcore feminist," she does not like "how the woman has to be delicate or has to be fragile".  She states "that it is not fair that guys [are] respected when women are like the backbone of everything."  In addition to feminism, God, non-violence, helping others, and the strength in the family unit are what she identifies as her personal values, but each value has come with an interrogation into its usefulness in her life.

Mia's story begins in a small apartment outside of Westside City.  Mia recalls, "We were poor I know that. We lived with our extended family. We had my aunt there. My mom, my aunt, my grandma, my sibling; I have a twin brother, an older sister and a little sister."  Though the situation was crowded, Mia holds fond, but sometimes embarrassing recollections of how she, with help from her family, not only made do, but thrived emotionally and physically in the cramped environment:

> "I remember when couldn't afford to get toys. It was really embarrassing. My
> aunt would put us in a shopping cart near this business that used to throw toys
> in the dumpster and we'd jump in there and grab all these toys. We didn't

have a car and the car spot in for our apartment at the time we'd just lay them

out and pretend we had a car."

Mia's time at home was extended beyond that of a normal kid, in that she did not

begin school until age nine. "My mom put me in school as soon as she could" and

when she got there she began to learn English. It wasn't long before she had

surpassed her classmates in the traditional standards of academic success due to her

diligence and her dedication shown by her decisions to stay in and receive extra

tutoring when the rest of the students were outside playing. When she would venture

outside, she often found herself at odds with some of the students in the school. Mia

recalls, "In elementary [school] I used to get into a lot of fights because they were

beating up my brother because he didn't want be in a gang." The fighting persisted,

and by the end of the fifth grade, her mother tired of the constant problems at school,

and Mia was sent to her family in Mexico to go to school.

In Mexico, Mia faced an educational system that was very different from the

one she had become accustomed to in the United States.

"School was hell. I knew how to speak Spanish but I didn't know how to

write it and so I sat next to somebody and I started copying what they were

doing...I was like 'Man, I feel dumb!' So the next day I told [the teacher] I

wasn't doing anymore and she took out a paddle and she hit me. I hit her back.

I squeezed through the back door and made it home. I told my grandma the

story and *she* hit me. So the next day I got some Vaseline and I wiped it on

my face and on my nose I put some vapor rub on my noise just so I could

breathe right and when I went to school [the teachers said] 'Sit next to me'

> [and] when I still didn't do my work, [she tried to] hit me again so I hit her in
> the face. My grandma was like you're staying home now. I had to milk the
> cows feed the cattle and do all these chores, but I didn't care, I wasn't at
> school."

Mia had a strong and powerful experience with her family but upon her return to the United States, her life with her family was about to change dramatically.

Mia returned to the United States and re-enrolled in school, but her values were put to the test. "Growing up it was God, but then for a while it wasn't", Mia recalls. It was an incident with her family that turned her away from her deepest values. Mia's family had a deep secret that began with her sister and then continued with her. She would describe the tragic situation to me:

> My uncle would like molest us when we went over there. They took my sister
> to counseling [because] she became suicidal. I began to get more violent… If
> a guy family member was with me I had another girl with me; Or, like when I
> had a guy teacher I'd take a girl with me. I can't hug a guy it feels disgusting.
> Up until last year I wore big clothes and big shirts

Though Mia's mother eventually confronted the uncle, the damage was done. The molestations were the catalysts that initiated three distinct movements in Mia's life. A movement back towards academic success in school, a movement towards feminist philosophy, and a movement towards Hip Hop culture.

In school, Mia is a participant in the Westside High School AVID program[20]. Inside the classroom, Mia was a success. "I got all A's throughout the whole three years [of middle school]. It was easy". Socially, though, Mia was still facing her internal demons. "Middle school was horrible. I was always usually by myself... Even when I had my friends I didn't really talk to people because I still had trust issues. I talked but nothing personal about myself; I just observed." During her observations, Mia began to see some of the ways in which women were not being treated as equals in our society.

> "I was told that women take care of men and I'm a feminist and I completely don't agree with that. Women have so much less freedom and [there are] situations [where] women get treated like less than animals…We give everybody life so don't even try and tell me that we are less then animals… I grew up with a lot of anger especially [be]cause I just sat there and watched everything I never turned away I always just liked watching it I guess it was to learn."

Mia had turned to Hip Hop culture during her spiritual crisis

> "Without Hip Hop I'd go crazy… It was a way to get away from everybody if I couldn't do it physically; mentally it [took] me away. I always need something to distract me from everything around me especially when I'm real frustrated then I have my music loud and I just keep it there and I just let the words seep in.

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[20] AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) is a fourth- through twelfth-grade system to prepare students in the academic middle (B, C, and even D students — who have the desire to go to college and the willingness to work hard) for four-year college eligibility

Mia found that Hip Hop spoke to the frustration that she was facing in her everyday life, and she would use Hip Hop to block out all of the other stressors in her immediate environment. As the words were seeping in, Mia also began to consider the impact of Hip Hop culture on her peers:

> I see it impact other people like the guys, and like some of the girls want to look like the girls in the videos and start acting like that it's really sad [be]cause you are just lowering yourself down. I've had resentment for so many guys like the way they treat women, and the way the supposedly made out to be and what makes a man like Hip Hop shows.

Though Mia has a problem with the way that women are depicted in Hip Hop, Mia remains a part of the culture, contributing to the culture as an artist. This may seem like a contradiction, but for many people, Hip Hop is a culture of contradiction. The culture (and those within it) understands that perfection is unattainable and that everyone has problems that need to be addressed. Some of Hip Hop's most revered artists are the most hypocritical so despite the culture's problems, Mia continues to write her own rhymes. While she has yet to perform for a crowd, Mia considers herself a writer that uses Hip Hop as a personal therapist as most of her rhymes deal with her own trials and tribulations. Mia leans on the poetic aspects of Hip Hop as she often talks about being overwhelmed by her responsibilities of work and home. She claims that these responsibilities cause her to want to give up everything and became a helicopter pilot surveying the California freeways for the local news. "Ever since I was a little kid I saw the helicopters that reported the news and I wanted to fly the helicopters... I could fly celebrities around: that would be fun." The irony is that

she recently found out the rimless glasses she wears (and eyesight that causes her to where the glasses) have prevented her from enrolling in flight school. In the future, Mia sees herself, "in college starting an organization to help people and kids off drugs and into higher education."

**Who are these participants?**

After hearing the individual stories of the participants, it is necessary to take a general look at the participants and their issues as a whole. Analyzing the codes, I found that the participants' main focus was school and problems with school. This was not unexpected as many of my questions in the formalized interviews had to do with school and how they viewed school. Another main focus for the participants was their families and the values that were passed down to them from the family unit. Looking back on the interviews, I have to point out that not all of the discussions about the family unit were positive: Two of the participants were molested by family members; all of the participants (except for Brian) came from single parent households, which caused stress in their lives; half of the participants had either little or no contact with the parent that was out of their lives either by choice or by circumstance. Overall, the participants' family life was tumultuous, but all were persevering through the difficulty.

Interestingly, race and class were some of the most frequently discussed topics in the early interviews and observations. Race and racial analyses frequently found their ways into the mainstream academic classrooms while class was discussed primarily in the interviews in terms of where the participants grew up. Criminality and Violence frequently came up as the participants recollected growing up: Brian

and Cyrus were stabbed and shot respectively; C.J.'s father was in jail for a significant time period; and Destiny's father was part of the mafia and was deported back to Nigeria.

As I look back at my first research question, "How do students' understandings of Hip Hop culture shape their lives, their identities, and their schooling?" I think about the stories that the participants shared. While the students' stories reveal much hardship and pain, they also reveal life. Many of these students—though not all—have found their passion for life through Hip Hop. Whether they are receptors or directors; or passively or actively involved, Hip Hop plays an important role in each of their lives. For some, Hip-Hop was life-saving. For others, Hip-Hop is life-nourishing. There is an important lesson in this—as I will discuss later—for teachers, administrators and educational researchers.

Overall, I do not think these participants were abnormally filled with interesting stories, not in the least. Given the opportunity, all students could demonstrate that their lives are filled with meaning, the expression of which could be used as a platform in the education of others. These participants had the opportunity to share their stories, but there are hundreds of students that are dying everyday, trying to be heard.

**Chapter Five:**

**The Critical Cultural Cypher in Action**

The C³ Project began under the original title of Critical Hip Hop Cultural

Circle, using Freire's (2002) original name, but the name was changed at the end after

Mike suggested during the wrap up, that we incorporate the concept of the "Cypher"

into the name. Historically the cypher was the place where emcees would get

together in a circle and initiate a "freestyle" construction of rhymes. What we have

done in this project was to begin a freestyle construction of knowledge about the

culture which is lived and loved.

This section is organized through the procedural goals of: 1) the clarification

of concepts 2) the development of learning units and 3) the analysis of the learning

units. I refer to this as the loci of impact. This organizational framework allows me to

keep the chronological integrity of The C³ Project intact as respect is given to the

actual process and evolution that the participants were involved in. As the

participants became more familiar with the process, they began to embrace the

process integrating the concepts into their evolving identities. This project was more

about a process than it was about the desired outcomes. That being said, I could not

be more inspired or excited about the outcomes that this process evoked.

**The Clarification of Concepts (Participants in Attendance: Brian, C.J., Cyrus,**
**Daisy, Destiny, Mike, and Nasa)**

The Cyphers were a series of Freireian intergroup dialogues that interrogated

Hip Hop culture through a critical lens. Schoem and Hurtado (2001) argue that

intergroup dialogue, from a Freireian perspective, can be used as a tool to

problematize existing social relations and help move us toward a more democratic

society. It creates a liberatory space where students can begin to also question the

nature of social reality and construct their own. This was a defining feature of the

cyphers. The first session began with the question "What is Hip Hop?" The

participants had all answered this question individually in their introductory

interviews (see Table 2) but as the different definitions came together, a dynamic of

The Cypher began to take shape. In the early sessions, the participants were called

upon to clarify and defend their personal constructions of Hip Hop as they challenged

and considered other participants' constructions. At the end of the first session, the

group was asked to work together to generate a group construction of Hip Hop

considering everyone's shared and stated opinions.

*Table 2. Participants' constructions of Hip Hop from the introductory interviews*

| Name | Constructions of Hip Hop |
|---|---|
| Brian | It's poetry; It's music, it's what someone can say |
| Cyrus | The music is actually what you are trying to put out there what you're trying to say and the actual culture is before you start the whole music that's like your lifestyle basically what you do to make yourself Hip Hop the culture is like everything from the clothes the way you act the things you believe in and the music is just the music |
| CJ | Hip Hop is the world to some people. Some people worship Hip Hop so you can say Hip Hop is a religion, a religion for everybody. |
| Daisy | I feel like it's a culture it's music it's a philosophy and right now it is influencing America in a great way. |
| Destiny | I think Hip Hop is music, voice, expression, appearance, dance, poetry, I mean I think it's like world wide and for some people I think it's a way of life. |

| Mia | Hip Hop is an expression.  It's how people express themselves in a musical way it's like you can't say nothing its music. |
|-----|-----|
| Mike | Hip Hop for me is who I am. I dress Hip Hop, I talk Hip Hop, and I'm about it, the whole culture of it. |
| Nasa | It's a culture that came from jazz it came from Harlem. Maybe the nineteen sixties, seventies, eighties. It's what you breathe. It's not the music. It's a culture it's the way you dress. The way you communicate with others, your relationships with people. |

As the participants began to share their own personal constructions of Hip Hop, they began to see that their own definitions were somewhat similar but in some cases distinctly different from each other in some fundamental areas.  The first challenge that the group faced was when Daisy challenged one specific detail of Nasa's construction of Hip Hop (which mirrored his construction from above), specifically the statement that Hip Hop can be the way you dress.  Daisy's contention was that she did not believe that someone could "put on a hat backwards and say that they are Hip Hop".  Daisy did not look at the totality of Nasa's construction, focusing only on the words she wanted to hear, namely that Hip Hop was "the way you dress". Daisy's challenge opened the dialogue to a deeper consideration of whether or not people's choices *could* represent their cultural affiliation. The ability to choose one's affiliation is a powerful subject to tackle and within ten minutes of the first session we were already beginning to address the dilemma of the subject vs. object that I discussed in detail in Chapter 2.  The group decided that choices could represent their cultural affiliation but only when taking all of their choices into account, such as a choice to dress a certain way could represent a person's choice of cultural affiliation, but the choice to dress a certain way as a stand-alone-determinant would not be

accurate. This explanation about choice allowed the group to theoretically exclude someone from Hip Hop if their only connection to Hip Hop was their style of dress, but someone in Hip Hop could dress a certain way and that would be a valid expression of their cultural affiliation.  Mike helped the group move beyond this point with his statement:

> I don't think Nasa meant it like that if you don't dress a certain way then you are not Hip Hop. I think he's saying that there is a certain style of clothes that is Hip Hop, like Roc-A-Wear, baggy jeans or whatever. When Hip Hop came out people started wearing their clothes bigger and everything like that. Eminem…doesn't dress like a Hip Hop artist but he has an aspect of Hip Hop. There are many aspects of Hip Hop. They got the rapping, the dressing, and the dancing. You know what I'm saying, you may dress a certain way then dance Hip Hop.

Here, Mike was able to point out that one's individual choices should not necessarily disqualify that person from choosing affiliation with one's selected culture. The group began to wrestle with the idea that a person has the freedom to be contradictory and be complicated in a society (and a school system) that tries to define, label and categorize to make assignment to categories simple.  This issue with individual complexity came up again later in the session, after the participants took turns arguing the definitions of rap vs. Hip Hop.

Hip Hop artist, Kanye West, came to campus to perform due to a contest that the student body won from a local radio station.  When Kanye was finished performing for the school, he was asked some questions by some of the students, one

of the questions being, "How did you do in school?" to which he answered, "I got A's but I didn't do no homework… I was just smart like that and I didn't care, ya know". Destiny's response to Kanye's statement was, "That's keeping it real though". Here the facilitator pointed out that Kanye's mother is a college professor and that she had made a statement that bringing home poor marks was not acceptable. The problem was then posed to the group:

> Where is the truth and where is this reality? Where is the telling of the whole story rather than part of it? Common (Hip Hop Artist), does he always tell the whole story or does 50 Cent (Hip Hop Artist) never tell the whole story? Where does this begin or end.

The group brought up Kanye's song and video *Jesus Walks* as an example of him being spiritual in some contexts while promoting the degradation of women in another context. Ms. Stevenson and Mike then had this exchange:

> Ms. Stevenson: So it's not a contradiction that he has a song like Jesus Walks?

> Mike: Pac was the most contradictory rapper ever and he was one of the greatest.

> Ms. Stevenson: So that's ok?

> Mike: That's more than ok. Everybody has different sides. I'm one of the most coolest guys you have ever meet but if you bring me to that point, I can get evil…As hard as you try can you tell me one person that you do know that is not a hypocrite. I try my hardest to not to

cause I know I say I shouldn't do and all that crap. So you know every

body is a hypocrite everybody's got their different sides.

Along the lines of Dubois's dual consciousness, Baudrillard's Multiplicity (1993) and

Freire's Critical Consciousness (1999), Mike was promoting the merits of multiple

ways of being and its necessity in Hip Hop culture. This post-modernist approach to

identity becomes fundamental to Hip Hop culture (Potter, 2000) and the ways in

which Hip Hop sees and defines itself. Hip Hop reserves the right to change itself at

any time.

When pushed to again address the question, "What is Hip Hop?" the result

was strikingly different from the beginning of the session as the following exchange

occurred:

Destiny: So you could just say life

CJ: Yea, Just say life

Destiny: So you could just say life. Rapping is your life. Culture is your life.

So when all is said and done, it's life.

A.Dee: So Hip Hop is life…

Destiny: It's your way of life, your lifestyle. It's who you are.

A.Dee: Is this Ok with everybody?

Everyone: Yep

The group fairly easily came up with the definition that Hip Hop though some of the

participants wished that they had more time to discuss the topic. This analysis and

encapsulation of definition took into account all of the participants' constructions and

they found that by defining together, their new definition became more applicable to

greater numbers of people. Early on, the group was already beginning to develop their own counter-narratives. Through their own lived experiences, the group established a construction of Hip Hop that met the four theoretical and methodological uses for counter narratives established by Solórzano and Yosso (2002). The participants were able to: 1) build community by establishing their own social theories that in this process would be valued and respected 2) provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems 3) open new windows into their reality and 4) teach themselves that by combining their stories they could together construct an alternative understanding of Hip Hop that was richer than their personal stories alone.

After the first session, I met with Ms. Stevenson to review the session which led to our own dialogue about the function and the process in which the participants were engaged. We also spoke about how we could help to deepen the process searching for more effective ways in which to facilitate this group. The following discussion is an example of the reflective practices that we engaged in:

A.Dee: 'What is Hip Hop?' almost limits the amount of discussion that they can get into um. If we were to say 'What could Hip Hop be?' there is no right or wrong answer… It might have been a little less limiting.

Ms. Stevenson: Because there's validity in everything that they were saying. We do see in society [that] there is a Hip Hop culture and the clothing is a part of that. If you buy into the music, then some also buy into the clothes. They associate with the videos connected to the music. Then her excitement about it can be the same as someone saying that 'you're

dressed in slacks'. Also, I think those to be inclusiveness (or the lack

of) in Hip Hop, which is like ok. Well we can only go so many places

the first day, but back again what could it be?

As facilitators, we were challenged by a desire to open the dialogue to include all

possible viewpoints and we realized after reflecting on the session that the ways in

which we framed the questions would have a powerful impact on the direction and

the tenor of the dialogues. We as facilitators began to see that our work was going to

be extremely important in giving the participants as much space as they needed to

thrive in the environment

**The Development of the Learning Units (Participants in Attendance: Brian, C.J.,
Cyrus, Daisy, Destiny, Mia, and Mike)**

Just as Freire's participants in his Cultural Circles established their own

learning units, this group too began engaging in a dialogue that would result in the

development of the learning units of interest. In the planning of the Cypher, I wanted

to pose the question to the participants, "What problems do you see in Hip Hop

today?" The first two questions, "What is Hip Hop?" and this question would be the

last formal questions that I would ask of the participants as their answers would then

begin to dictate the direction of the Cypher sessions.

One of the loci of interest was the development of a language of critique and

transcendence and in this section we begin to see the participants begin to personify

Critical Social Theory in Education's theoretical framework as the ways in which

they spoke about Hip Hop began to transform. The participants began to analyze the

causes of Hip Hop's problems rather than just identifying them. As they analyzed

problems they began to see that the problems they were identifying (marketing, sales, promotion) were systemic issues more than they were problems with the actual culture of Hip Hop in general. This added a degree of complexity that the participants might not considered before the Cypher sessions. For example, when talking about the issue of misogyny, Destiny was quick to analyze the problem as one of capitalist exploitation by the record companies:

> [The record companies] put females out there cause and that's what the media sees. If [women] are out there hoeing around in the music video, their part [in the video] would be giving a boy pleasure. Young boys are going to look at that like "Oh 50 Cent has hoes" and so they start labeling us females as hoes. The young boys are going to have that 50 [Cent] mentality like they can get anything they want, but what they have to realize is the reason why [50 Cent] has these hoes [in his video] is because [the record companies] are trying to make money like he is by him putting the record out there.

Destiny was able to see the systemic influences inherent in the promotion of records and she also pointed out the ethical considerations of exploiting women are trumped by the financial considerations of making money off of the artists. CST sees a language of transcendence as necessary because it assumes the possibility of a less oppressive condition. The participants here were able to begin the process of constructing alternative realities as they started to move from the fatalistic place of, "This is the way that Hip Hop is" to the position of empowerment of "This is what can be done to change the direction of Hip Hop culture". Criticism and systemic critique was beginning to be used as a tool as the critical dialogue opened the

problematization of Hip Hop culture to multiple perspectives represented by the
participants. Through these discussions, the participants were beginning to make
meaning for themselves.

The general tenor of the dialogue was centered on whether systemic
influences were Hip Hop's problem or if the systemic influences were a problem
beyond Hip Hop culture.

Mike:  That's like you saying everybody would love for it to be a positive
        message sent out there but that's not really the problem you know

Daisy:  That's what sells is the problem

Mike:  People bought a Hip Hop World… like if you feel like you gotta speak
        on that mentality and that's what you feel then that's what you speak
        about in your rhyme you know

Daisy:  But that's not Hip Hop's fault though it's just put on it

Mike:  People express they own views through Hip Hop the come out saying
        something negative that's how the song was brought out there and
        that's how they felt on that track

Ms. Stevenson:  So I'm just taking in everything that you just said as a
        facilitator so I want to go back to what you were talking about before
        about um the problem isn't with Hip Hop it's the fact that these
        messages that are being sent are what sale

Daisy:  Yeah that is what's being manufactured and that's what sales it's not
        Hip Hop's fault that that is what the consumer buys into

The group began to consider the systemic impact of societal influence outside of Hip

Hop culture and I thought that it was interesting that the group began by defending

Hip Hop from its detractors.  The groups' defense of Hip Hop led many in the group

to search for systemic influences that has shaped the current image of Hip Hop.  To

the participants, the amount of control individuals had in the everyday functioning of

Hip Hop culture was minimal.  Hip Hop, in participants' eyes, was a scapegoat for

society ills and it was being used by critics to promote their own agendas.  When

pushed to identify the specific identities of the outside influences, the group looked at

record labels and the consumers of Hip Hop culture as the culprits.  The lack of

control one's chosen culture is reminiscent of Freire's argument in the subject versus

object continuum.  Here, Hip Hop is the object that is being acted upon by outside

sources (e.g. consumers buying habits and record companies catering to the habits of

the consumers) while Hip Hop as a subject would see Hip Hop securing the capacity

to make it's own choices and transform its own image.  The following is an example

of C.J. speaking about the transformation of Hip Hop and its attempt to bring a more

positive message to the community, but it was also an example of the personal

transformation that this process was beginning to evoke:

> Ah'ight what I'm saying is you can try and bring a positive message to the
>
> listeners, to the people who listen to Hip Hop… you can do that but how many
>
> people are gonna hear it who wanna hear it no one's gonna wanna hear that

C.J. was able to think about ways in which the positive messages could make it to the

public for consumption, which is significant because it shows evidence of the ways in

which the participants were beginning to transform the ways in which they thought

about Hip Hop culture.  Earlier in the conversation, C.J. wasn't able to even consider

bringing positive messages to the masses, but now through listening to the group and

the group dialogue he began to consider a solution. Though he eventually negated his

own proposal, his consideration of an alternative course of action was most important

and it shows movement.  The participants were thinking about Hip Hop as having no

control over what type of Hip Hop was being consumed by the masses, but the model

that C.J. presented here has the artist in control of the image.  This shift in thought is

only the beginning of the shift in identity from object being acted upon to subject in

control of its own reality.

The participants continued to discuss the depths of their beliefs about the

problems in Hip Hop over the course of two sessions, narrowing an original list (see

Appendix C) of fifteen problems into three distinct problems in Hip Hop that would

become the foundation for our learning units.  The group had come to consensus

surrounding three topics for analysis that we would look to cover in the upcoming

weeks:

1. Negativity in Hip Hop (Violence, Misogyny, Drugs, Greed)

2. Reality in Hip Hop (Keeping it real)

3. Abuse of Hip Hop as a system of control

This list became the foundation of the learning units that we would explore in the

upcoming sessions, but the list itself provides some major clues in the effectiveness of

The C³ Project.  The participants began to see Hip Hop as suffering from a wave of

negativity that wasn't always there.  They talked about the role of women in Hip Hop,

the violence that had cost some of its major figures their lives, the impact the drug

abuse was having on the kids and the rampant materialism that was capturing the media by storm. These were negative things in the minds of the participants, but they also took a critical look and they found that most of problems in Hip Hop were media driven. Through the participants' discussions about the systemic influences in Hip Hop they found that there was little consistency between the artists inside the recording studios and outside the studios. The words that came from the artists were striking different than how the artists were living their lives which the participants found to be disconcerting. Problem # 2 in the participants list was a result of this analysis and the mantra "Keep it real" was not only a problem but a solution as well. The third problem in Hip Hop also resulted from a systematic analysis. The participants felt that those in charge of the disbursement of Hip Hop to mainstream American culture understood the influence they had over the youth of today, but were acting in the best interests of Capitalism rather than the best interests of Hip Hop as a culture. I again return to the developing systemic critique and the language of critique and transcendence that the participants were engaged in. The mantra "Keep it real" was put forth as a way that Hip Hop could overcome some of the negativity that was capturing the souls of Hip Hop culture. The participants would soon find that their journeys had just begun.

**The Learning Unit Freestyles**

As the participants came up with their topics of analysis, Ms. Stevenson and I began to see time as an obstacle. I had originally planned to cover each of the three learning units in a session, which would leave us with seven total sessions not including a wrap up session. The way that the participants structured the topics of

analysis, negativity in Hip Hop (Violence, Misogyny, Drugs, and Greed) would be a session that could be four hours in the current format. Many of the topics in the Negativity in Hip Hop group, we were prepared to discuss, but to have any impact at all, each of the subgroups in that topic would need its own session. We made the decision to ask the participants how and in which format that they wanted to cover the subjects.

The participants felt as though the discussions should be centered on each of the topics in the category of negativity: first Violence then Misogyny, followed by Drugs and finally Greed (Greed was substituted in the last session for the third problem on the participants list Influence as a form of social control due to requests by the participants to focus on this topic). It was later theorized that many of the subjects would cross overlap and that much of the material would be discussed and cross referenced.

Through the analysis of the sessions, I realized that I had made a change in the format of the sessions following the dialogue about misogyny. In the sessions about drugs and influence, I moved away from discussing the problems that the participants had constructed and towards a interrogation of music that discussed the topics. This shift in focus was done in part because of a desire to retain the participants' interest. The project had been going on for approximately three months and the participants, who were all about to graduate in a month, were (understandably) getting tired of giving up their free-time after school. Remembering back to my senior year in high school, it was a wonder I had any volunteers for the program. In turn, I tried to think of a way to get the participants more excited about the sessions and I decided to make

the (what I thought was a) small adjustment in the format of the sessions.   The

participants did respond with an increased passion, evidenced by their uniform

comments about their approval of the music in the Cyphers, but as I said earlier, I

sacrificed a big part of the program's integrity.  The results of the sessions after

analysis was that the participants, while still developing counter-narratives and a

language of critique, failed to address the charge of creating actions that the

participants could use to challenge the problem being addressed.  After all, when

discussing the music of specific artists, the shift moves to the will and responsibility

of the artist rather than the participants taking responsibility for their own actions in

regards to changing the systemic nature of the problems.  As a result of these

changes, I will be addressing the first two learning units individually while grouping

the final two sessions together. I will continue to point out examples of each loci of

impact: development of a language of critique and transcendence, formation of

counter-narratives and the development of consientização (when applicable).  I will

also demonstrate how the procedural goals of the project were maintained (or not) as

we entered into a dialogue about the individual topics.

### Violence (Participants in Attendance:  CJ, Daisy, Mia, and Mike)

In keeping with the procedural goals of the project, the first order of business

was clarifying the concept of violence.  Daisy defined violence as "intentional harm

inflicted on someone for a reason".  All of the participants agreed but were quick to

point out the different types of violence, physical, verbal, mental and emotional:

A.Dee:  Yea, I mean we talk about violence, what is it?

Daisy:  Intentional harm inflicted on somebody

Mike: Damn dictionary Webster

Daisy: It's when you put intentional harm on somebody for a reason

Mia: Well there are different types of violence

Daisy: Well yea, you can be verbally violence but I think we're talking about

physical violence

The group then decided to focus on physical violence for the purposes of the discussion. The group then began by their dialogue about violence by identifying "Beef" as one of the major sources of the violence associated with Hip Hop culture. Beef is a term in Hip Hop culture that refers to conflict between either two artists or two groups associated with artists. In their analysis, the participants differentiated between real beef (beef that is genuine and has the potential to escalate into lethal violence) and manufactured beef (beef that is used to promote an album, generate publicity and increase sales for an upcoming album; a strategy seen with increasing frequency). The group as a whole was very suspicious of how Hip Hop has been portrayed in the media and their critique is supported by evidence they have gathered through their own experiences. The students mentioned specific "beefs" that upon closer reflection, were done as a promotional tool, used and set up by the record companies. They began by looking at the current beef between Hip Hop artist Jay-Z and Hip Hop artist Cam'ron. This beef was deemed to have a shred of credibility due to a recent incident where Cam'ron was in Washington D.C. for Howard University's Homecoming and he and his car were shot in a drive by shooting. Reports said that the shooters drove off shouting a Jay-Z reference and holding up a hand signal associated with Roc-a-fella Records (Jay-Z's record label). This beef though was also

questioned by some in the group as Cam'ron had an album that was to be released in the upcoming weeks:

> Ms. Stevenson:  Does that go back to what you were talking about before
>
> > when you were talking about the various aspects of rap that sell
>
> Daisy:  Yea it does sell, and like I was saying before that, like Tony also said,
>
> > that people always drop a track for a reason, but it seems like beef
> >
> > tracks drop right before albums do.
>
> Mike: To spark sales
>
> Daisy: It's like 'let me hear his album and if he's gonna come hard on Hot 97
>
> > (Radio Station in New York City) talking up Jay-Z, let me go get that
> >
> > Cam'ron album to see if all the rest of it's true.

As the participants continued to debate the veracity of specific beefs in Hip Hop, I asked the question, "How does this move into violence?" in an attempt to move the conversation from the specific to the theoretical.  As the participants began to look for root causes of violence, Ms. Stevenson challenged the group by posing a problem with their current construction of violence being popular in Hip Hop culture.  Her argument was that violence was more of a human infatuation rather than it being isolated within Hip Hop culture.  With this posing of a problem Ms. Stevenson forced the participants to take a deeper look at the systemic functioning of violence within Hip Hop. This also allowed the group to being theorizing about violence in Hip Hop culture at a systemic level.  This began through an analysis of the violence that led to the deaths of both Tupac Shakur and Christopher "Notorious B.I.G." Wallace as the participants looked at the role of the record companies and the artists:

Daisy: And I think it was also because the beef got so exploited that [became] [west] coast against [east] coast… I mean Biggie [and] Pac were fighting for a coast and that's a lot of pressure for the first person to back down. There is a point where somebody has to be a man in this situation, but you know that was before.  It was too late for somebody to do that.

Ms. Stevenson: So it's like it requires them to act a certain way.  And they're left with no other alternatives but to stay that way, like you said they felt trapped so do.  You think that's it as and industry that traps you or requires you to be something that you don't want to be?

Daisy: Of course, like Mike said I think we should look at Suge (CEO of Death Row Entertainment) and him feeding him (Shakur) these things… I think that the industry has a lot to do with it, you know. They are making money [but] the rappers are the ones who carry most of the burden. They are the ones that people are looking down on; people are saying [they are] too violent.  And at the same time the industry is the ones roping it.

Ms. Stevenson: I mean like if I'm working for Capital or whatever, Capital is making money off of me but I'm the one who's on the line depending on what goes down.

Mike: They putting it in the artist head like she said like these top, top labels not just the Death Row but the people over Death Row:  Interscope, Universal where ever is up there those people are like feeding these

beefs on their not saying 'Pac don't make another diss to Biggie' cause

its not good for your career; its great for his sales, you know.

Ms. Stevenson: So what does that mean?

Daisy: the cycle of violence

Mike: the next Biggie the next Pac

The concept of artists being trapped into personas that the artist creates and that the

label supports is one which the participants began to see as an unbalanced endeavor

where the artist is the one who takes all the risks but the label will not cease to exist if

things go wrong.  Violence for the sake of financial gain becomes a risk that only a

few can win and invariably ends up bad for the artist, and in the worst case scenario,

the artist looses his or her life.  The participants began to put word to, as Daisy said,

"The cycle of Violence" and by considering the systemic implications, the

participants began to actively seek ways that this cycle manifests itself in other areas

in their lives.

This interrogation forced the participants to consider worlds outside their own

and also allowed them to begin re-constructing elements in their own world (Hip Hop

culture) with newly considered information.  It was instances like this that showed

how the students were encouraged to sharpen their critical and analytical skills as

they were prompted to consider the depth of the problems.  Because of the dialogic

format of the Cyphers, this analysis resulted in the further development of their use of

language to critique.

A main feature of The C³ Project was to have the participants not only

theoretically construct their culture, but to develop actions through which, the

participants could engage their culture. This is the essence of Freire's (2000) concept

of praxis, which again is reflection combined with action upon the world in an effort

to transform it. These actions serve to help the participants see themselves as

participants acting within and on behalf of a culture instead of seeing the culture as a

stagnant construct too big for any one individual to affect. Ms. Stevenson then began

to push the participants towards the construction of an individual action; in this case,

an action that could help the participant to disrupt their identified cycle of violence

within their culture.

This line of questioning proved to be a difficult challenge for the participants

to fully embrace. The concept of seeing themselves as having the power to

individually (or as an individual group) influence a massive culture was one that was

as challenging as it seemed. Freire (2002) himself talked about the difficulty in

moving people to consider themselves as agents of change and that people would

often get stuck in their consciousness development fearing that the world was too big

to change as they developed a fatalistic outlook toward the process. In the Cyphers,

the participants would consistently return to the difficulties associated with the

influence of a culture rather than seeing ways in which individual action could begin

the process of change. The line of questioning then began to take and the participants

slowly started to think of things that they could do, while at the same time

considering the impact that their actions would have on the culture.

> Mike: Well I guess personally I can't go out and change everybody's mind,
>
> but it could be one of my goals or one of my many goals that I can
>
> pursue as a rapper. If it comes about [the opportunity to change

someone's opinion] then I'm going to take that opportunity.  If I get the opportunity to do something with music then, yes I'll go out and put a party record out there to get known or whatever, but then personally I think it comes up to artist to change.  I feel if I made it, then I would take that chance and try to throw that message out there.

Daisy: I mean and I want to be in the industry so that these people can have a choice to put bullshit out and yea millions of dollars would be great but if I can put out a message I'm going to make last a lifetime then whatever.

The participants were beginning to consider their role in changing culture, but it was still being considered as the hypothetical, "If I made it…", and "When I get that big…"  This was a step towards the consideration of individual actions.  The participants were very tentative about committing to actions so they created hypothetical stories about what they would do in the future.  Looking carefully, even they hypothetical stories were tentative.  The participants needed to begin to see how they were presently affecting change.  On the other hand, the participants were developing their own counter-narratives in relation to the problem of violence in Hip Hop culture.  Their stories about the future were stories from their own (albeit hypothetical) experiences that were counter to stories that dominated the mainstream media, but still they were struggling to their reflections into immediate action.

Finally as the session was about to wrap up, Mia brought forth an example from her life as an artist that really spoke to the roots of the praxis that The C³ Project was built upon.  Mia's example was about taking responsibility for her own feelings

and not using other people as an excuse for her own violent feelings.  I, as a facilitator, rephrased her statement in a way that the participants could see that this was indeed an individual action that could have a lasting impact on all of Hip Hop culture if they as a group were to proselytize this new philosophy to the masses.

> Mia: Like if I had my CD and I had like a song on there I might write about it its not like I did the whole piece or the name you wouldn't even know who I was talking bout  I don't put no names no relations to it and you can get the feeling about the way I say it cause I know how to use my words, you know what I'm talking about, you know how I feel by the way I'm expressing myself I'm not trying to put no names

> A.Dee: Hold on, you bring up a great point, taking ownership of your own feelings rather than putting your violence onto somebody else. Your saying these are my feelings I own them this is what it's about it don't matter who I'm talking about but this is what I'm saying and I'm saying it.

This was a big understanding for the participants and for the project. This was something that Mia was doing now and something that the other participants could actively integrate into their lives. The participants began to actively consider the concept of praxis – reflection combined with action upon the world in an effort to transform it.  This was the first sign of the development of consientização. The participants began to gain an appreciation for the process and they began to see how and in what ways that this program was designed to work. Many teachers ask students how to make the world a better place, but for these participants, this was now

becoming tangible. The next step – and often the more difficult one – was to get the participants to consider how and in what ways they would implement these actions into their every day experiences.  The depth of analysis and the outcomes that the group worked through worked to fuel the remaining sessions. The participants were energized to see the full power of these sessions, from reconstruction of definition to creation of actions related to problems identified in their lived culture.

### Misogyny (Participants in Attendance: Brian, C.J., Daisy, Destiny, Mia, and Mike)

In this session, the participants were working towards gaining an understanding of and working towards a solution for the problem of misogyny in Hip Hop culture. This was an important topic particularly for the some of the female participants in the group.  Destiny and Mia spoke individually about the role of women in Hip Hop culture and the ways in which women were portrayed.  Destiny's issues came from the use of women as a material obsession, "Hip Hop is about the money the girls, the clothes, the cars you know every other word rhyming and a girl shaking her booty".  Mia's issues were more centered on women being "the ultimate prize in Hip Hop" culture,

> Hip Hop promotes the drive for money. You must have money to get the women. Here's how it goes. You need to be good at something to get the money, to get the cars, and the things that women want. They get the woman to get more women.

Many of the men in the group did not mention the role of women in Hip Hop as a problem so this Cypher was going to be an important introduction to a feminist perspective in Hip Hop.

The Cypher again began with Ms. Stevenson asking the participants to clarify their construction of misogyny. This again was an example of the procedural functioning of the sessions as she outlined the need for the group to work together towards a common understanding. The group settled on misogyny as an exploitation of women with a special interest in women being commodified.

> Ms. Stevenson: So what is your group definition of misogyny when you put it
>> out there?
>
> Daisy: It's like an exploitation of women.
>
> Ms. Stevenson:  Is that the group definition exploitation of women?
>
> Daisy:  Oh God lord that's what I think it is.
>
> Ms. Stevenson:  You guys need to form this as a community
>
> A.Dee:  Brian, you talked about possessing women that was one of the lines
>> that you said
>
> Brian:  Like I just felt like Hip Hop makes it seem like women are like
>> property or something. It's something you don't really treat it with
>> respect.

Once this basic understanding was established by the group, Ms. Stevenson worked to establish the roles of both men and women in the perpetuation of misogyny.  This was done to move the group towards a systemic understanding of misogyny rather than misogyny as an individual belief system.  In the restating of the groups definition of how misogyny is perpetrated in Hip Hop, I said, "misogyny is the exploitation of women, women as property, and women as sex objects and that misogyny is perpetrated by women as well as men. Women are doing it just as much as men are

doing it" Mia took umbrage with my last statement and added that, "Well there are not that many women to do it". Mia's statement was an important one as women in Hip Hop are rarely in positions of power or in positions to make decisions. This would separate the misogyny towards women by women because of the power dynamic. In an unequal society, those in power are more culpable for the distresses because they are the ones making the decisions to maintain the oppressive power structures. In and through the dialogue, the participants spoke about women being forced into positions where they degrade themselves or other women because of the males behind the scenes making the decisions.

The next step in the session was to attempt to address the problem in a way that can and will affect change in the culture. Again, the participants, like with the session on violence, struggled to find a way that an individual can change an entire culture, especially in terms of making systemic changes. Initially the changes focused on making younger women [the participants' future children] aware of how the system works and changing their behavior accordingly which did nothing to address the problem itself. Eventually though, Mike brought the participants back to addressing some systemic concerns.

> Mike: I think video and music has influenced me by the way I look at females
> because when you look at it, it's like society gives you these
> stereotypes of what's a pretty girl, an attractive girl and what you like
> in a girl. It [the media] kind of raises you along with your family and
> how you were brought up and stuff, but I can't blame it on Hip Hop
> because the fact of Hip Hop is a part of society. I define Hip Hop as

life and Hip Hop has that part of life in it and I think that, yes, it has
[conditioned] me and I think we came here today to think of ways how
to resolve it. Last week's answer was like you have to be real with
yourself. When it comes to these problems in Hip Hop, especially
misogyny; if you really feel you have to have fifty girls in your house,
then do that. But if you know for a fact that that's not you, even if you
make fun music, you're just doing it to make music, then don't do it.
[The media] has it probably has changed my view or influenced my
view on females because that's how I grew up in Hip Hop. That's what
I see in Hip Hop. When I look at videos I see these so called, what
they say is attractive and that's what I look at when I look for females.

A.Dee: So knowing that you have gone through this, now that you have seen
this, now does this change the way that you are going to look at
women?

Mike: No…

All: Laughter

Mike: …I mean I would love to sit here and say I'm going to go after a church
woman, but I'm not. I don't look at females in a disrespectful way, but
that's what society… eighteen years of me growing up like that. I
think you have your own inner views by the way you look at people
but most of the time I think it's what society made it look.

Mike began by analyzing the impact of the media on his own way of thinking,

recognizing that he had been conditioned to oppress.  His analysis was very

sophisticated and self-aware and it was this dialogue that brought it out. I asked Mike after the session had he ever considered this line of thinking before and he told me "not until now". This dialogue raised a consciousness about his relationships with women and the power of the media to influence his thoughts. Then Mike, building off the last Cypher where the concepts of praxis and consientização were realized, brought the group back to the theme of the sessions which was a systemic analysis of behavior and cause combined with action. The theme of "being real with yourself" came up as an action in response to the misogyny in Hip Hop culture. His honest analysis of the effect that the media has had on his choices was profound; just as profound was his honesty concerning his future. His statement that he will probably not change because of a new construction of misogyny might not be what the sessions were designed for, but it is a great start and with any luck, Mike will continue to see the problems and make changes in his life accordingly.

As this session began to wrap up, the participants again had to reassure themselves that change was possible. As they spoke amongst each other, they began to reflect back on both past Cyphers and the origins of Hip Hop itself. Hip Hop began as a protest; a crying out against the problems facing a community. Hip Hop was a solution to a problem that began with a small group of people and this fact, thankfully, did not escape this group.

> A.Dee: So how do we get to the point to where how do we make ourselves aware that the difficult road is worth traveling? Are we changing society if we change ourselves?

Daisy: That's a personal decision. I feel like if we change ourselves, fuck

society, cause you're doing the right thing. Hopefully you associate

yourself with people who do similarly the right things…I feel like if

we change ourselves and we make a sincere effort to make it known

that were not that kind of person and we don't condone that kind of

lifestyle, you're changing yourself and you can pass that on to your kid

you know what I'm saying?

A.Dee:   So, are you not changing society like that?

Daisy: Yea it is cause because it maybe five people and my friends may have

the same mentality as me and it may be ten people. That's better than

nobody. So people don't think that one person can make a difference,

but you don't realize that the people around you are merely a reflection

of yourself. You can influence them in some way, not completely, but

in a way.  Then you can pass it on to your kids and then their lifestyle

and then generations of people thinking that this isn't right.

Mia:  Hip Hop came as a change right?  Change does hurt and it does happen

like you can even say in a short distance.  As far as music goes, it does

change. As far as this sex thing, sex sells; it's here but it's changing.

It's changed from the past. I'm petty sure its going to change. It might

be there, but if you look, women are dressing more classy now. It's

like a phase. Also women know it still sells, so we can always refer

back to it.

Daisy began by considering how individuals can impact society which was a profound point in The C³ Project. The participants were having such a hard time considering the impact one individual or one group of individuals could have on Hip Hop culture and this was the one of the points that they really began to understand the concept of transcendence. Mia then continued by making a historical connection, harkening back to the origins of Hip Hop culture as a culture of resistance. As a group, the participants began to see a way out of the current situation and the possibility of a future without misogyny as a dominant theme in Hip Hop culture.

*Drugs (Participants in Attendance: Daisy and Mike) and Influence (Participants in Attendance: Brian, C.J., Daisy, Destiny, Mia and Mike)*

I first began to hear about the participants' dissatisfaction with the giving of their after-school time following the participants' spring recess. A Cypher session was called and only two of the participants showed up so I postponed the meeting for another week. During that week, I began to think about ways in which I could rekindle the passions of the participants. I thought about bringing music into the sessions and the next week I had planned to bring in a song that talked about drugs and the impact of drug use on the African American community. Hip Hop artist Kanye West provided a guest performance at the school in the previous semester due to a local radio stations promotion, and with his insightful lyrics, I thought he would be a perfect addition to the Cyphers. The following week, only two of the participants (Daisy and Mike) showed up for this session, and while I thought about postponing the session, I decided to continue due to pending time constraints. I presented the

lyrics of the song *Crack Music* by Kanye West (Appendix T) to the participants and asked them to follow along as I played the song.

The participants immediately began comparing the crack epidemic to the spread of Hip Hop culture across the nation; a metaphor used by West in his song.

Mike: People look at the drug issue like it's a major problem in Hip Hop, which it is. This song is not really like talking about drugs in Hip Hop its just making a metaphor about drugs. Because the whole thing about drugs in Hip Hop is about Black people and all these artists bragging about the drugs they use and how they are "Mr. Dope Man selling on the block" and blasé, blasé. Then he is comparing it to the same thing that they do with their music: how these people come from the hood and how they sell their rock[21].

Daisy: I think on top of the metaphor for Hip Hop, I think it is also saying that this is different than other drugs because it shows a dark side of Hip Hop. The drug, first of all [has] a dark destructive side to it, which is the same thing for Hip Hop. People are always talking about making crack[22] in the studio. You got this crack music, but crack was no joke and that's what he was talking about. It was tearing apart communities and I think that's what he was trying to allude to.

Bringing the music and the lyrics into the sessions allowed the students to bring in analytical skills typically reserved for English classes. This became more of an academic exercise as they began deconstructing poetry, except the participants were

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[21] Rock meaning both Crack Cocaine and Rock and Roll music.
[22] A phrase used to describe music that is highly addictive that people "can't get enough of".

engaged with and had an added passion for the material.  The approach deepened the participants' line of thinking and greatly aided their development of a language of critique as they were now using the skills from Mainstream Academic success to deconstruct their own lived culture. This also was a great way of developing their own counter-narratives as they brought an analysis from their own lived experiences in their interpretations.

The next and final week of the Cypher, all of the remaining participants were present as I took the initiative of moving the Cypher sessions to fourth period instead of after school (detailed in methodology).  I again wanted to see the music's effect on the entire group and I chose two songs to be the foundation of the discussion on Hip Hop's influence on the youth:  *White Gurl* by top selling artist E-40 (2005) (Appendix U) (A Northern California solo artist) and *Shallow Days* by Blackalicious (2003) (Appendix V) (also from Northern California).

I began this session explaining the topic and introducing the songs that we will be using for analysis.  We began by listening to White Gurl by E-40 and we began a conversation about the content of the song.  The participants identified the drug cocaine as the primary topic of the song and white women being the secondary topic.  I then asked the group how this song would possibly influence the youth that listen to the song.  Every one of the participants except for Mia said that they liked the song and that the amount of influence the song holds over them as youth is minimal.  C.J. stated "We don't do coke. It's true we like the song, but we don't do coke." Mike agreed but added a caveat to C.J.'s construction:

> I don't know if I'm using the right terminology, but I heard this before; feeble minded. Some people are real feeble minded and they can be influenced very easily so it depends on if their mentality is that weak; if they can just be moved by that, it can be very influential to some people; to go and be like it's cool cause they like the song.

As I said earlier, Mia was the only participant who did not like the song. Mia had the opportunity to make this statement:

> I think it's kind of destructive because there is some sort of coke movement going on in Hip Hop. It's like the whole infection of the snowman symbol and everybody's trying to push that weight or whatever. That kind of Hip Hop just frustrates me to no end. The whole coke movement because I don't think it's a movement; I think it's retarded.

Mia's criticisms of the song and her critique of the movement is emblematic of the critique found throughout this process and her statement sparked a response as most of the group where they began to look at the veracity of a cocaine movement in Hip Hop culture. Daisy took her turn pointing out that there are T-shirts of cartoon snowmen (snow being a street name for cocaine) that are associated with Hip Hop artist Young Jeezy that have exploded on the school scene to the point where in 2005, administrators across the nation started banning the shirts on school campuses from high school to elementary school (USA Today, 11/6/2005). The group then began to speak in terms of an age gap between cocaine users and youth of today because of the affordability of "their" drug of choice, marijuana.

I then moved on to the next song. This I feel was a mistake in that I did not get a song that had been released in the last two years that would compare in sound to music that had been recently released. Hip Hop today is heavily influenced by the Southern United States and that influence has dramatically changed much of the Hip Hop that has been released. The Blackalicious song was chosen to contrast the lyrics of the song by E-40 but what I did not consider was the sound of an older song (2003) would be something that the participants would have a problem with and as it turned out dominated the discussion. The topics of the discussion shifted as the students focused not on the lyrics of the song, but how much they disliked the sound of the song. This discussion was quickly becoming one which centered on what is good Hip Hop and what isn't rather than discussing how Hip Hop could influence youth to live certain ways.

Sensing this was a topic that we covered in depth in earlier sessions, I posed a problem for the group, "If these songs are influencing people, what can we do as individuals to disrupt this cycle". With this problem, I was attempting to move the participants towards a consideration of individual actions that could be taken to address the problem of influence that the participants had originally identified. It was Mike who identified what it meant to him to individually act. He describes here what his actions will look like and Ms. Stevenson does a great job restating his comments and puts his comments into an action statement for all to hear.

Mike: You know what; I don't think a lot of people see their struggles

matching with the struggles of the people from the hood. They think

like 'Oh no, I only go to public schools with my mom and stuff so I

can't talk about my struggles because people and the bigger struggles

in the game right now…people are getting shot nine times you know'

So if you ain't getting shot and if you ain't grown up without a daddy,

then you ain't really got nothing to rap about.  I think people gotta be

more real with themselves.  Make your music.  Don't care how people

are going to view you.

Ms. Stevenson:  So when you are out there and you are pushing your lyrics

and you're exposing your friends to a different kind of music and

giving them a different appreciation. That's what I was asking.  That's

you. That's all you.  That's what you're doing.

In the end, it was Mike who again helped the group refocus their thoughts on the

development of critical actions that could lead to change within Hip Hop culture.  Ms.

Stevenson powerfully reassured Mike that he was on the right track and that he was in

fact having an impact on the development of critical actions.  Sometimes the smallest,

seemingly inconsequential acts can lead to significant changes.  Many times, as was

the case with Mike and the rest of the participants, they just need to know that they

are on the right path.

**The Critical Cultural Cypher and its Role in Enlightenment**

The Critical Cultural Cypher is a tool which educators can use to engage

students in a discourse which can be used in school settings to help bring

marginalizing systems and structures to light.  Specifically, the participants in The C³

Project critically analyzed Hip Hop culture and many of the major forces (e.g., media,

the record industry, and artists) that are involved in the representation of the culture.

Through this analysis we were able to begin the process of humanization within Hip Hop culture as the participants began to look at themselves as subjects that have a responsibility o acting upon the culture rather than seeing themselves as objectified recipients of Hip Hop culture.  In this section I will attempt to show how the participants began to deconstruct the structures of power within Hip Hop culture, which led to the identification of problems within Hip Hop culture.  These problems were then addressed through the formulation of actions that the participants could enact in their lives as they began to engage others in a dialogue of enlightenment inside of and outside of Hip Hop culture.

To demonstrate the impact of The C³ Project on the participants, I begin with a passage from Freire (2003) adapted to fit this project. These passages demonstrate the relationship the participants (and many youth have) with Hip Hop culture:

This relationship involves a Narrating Subject (the media) and patient, listening objects (youth).  The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified.  (Hip Hop) is suffering from narration sickness. The (media) talks about (Hip Hop) as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable.  Or else it expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experiences of the (youth).  (Its) task is to "fill" the (youth) with the contents of (its) narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the reality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of the concreteness and become a hallow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.  (p. 71)

Re-reading this, I was struck by the accuracy of these passages as it demonstrated the relationship many had with Hip Hop culture today. Hip Hop, as it is portrayed in the media is indeed static, compartmentalized and predictable. What we did in the Cypher sessions was to critically examine to help enlighten some of the structure of domination and subordination. What we found was that it was the media's representation of Hip Hop that was static, compartmentalized and predictable. The participants knew this and this was a forum for them to develop their counter-narratives about Hip Hop because they were tired of the story that was being told.

The participants began with a scathing critique of the media. Their story told that media, while bringing Hip Hop to the masses, was not to be trusted, "It's like giving into the media" Destiny says in response to people believing the stories that are consistently conjured up. "You know how you got the media or typical white America always talking about how black people are always drugged up," C.J. says as he describes how groups of people become compartmentalized. "The stereotypes are what the media and record labels run to", Mike says as he describes how predictable the media is in its desire to show the negative aspects of Hip Hop culture.

The participants were then able to, through a humanizing dialogue, develop their own counter narratives about what Hip Hop was and what it wasn't, and most importantly, they were able to identify the problems for themselves: 1) Hip Hop had a problem with negativity (violence, misogyny, drugs and greed) 2) Hip Hop was not "keeping it real" and 3) Hip Hop was being used as a system of control. This process worked to take the control back from those marketing Hip Hop and put it back in the hands of the people who live it.

Finally, once the problems were identified, the participants found ways to individually take actions to solve the problems that they had identified. Mia found that through her own writing that one way to address violence in Hip Hop was for individuals to take responsibility for their own feelings. She wasn't going to place any blame on any individual for the pain that she felt because the pain was hers and no one else's. This was her individual action. When addressing the problem of misogyny, Daisy said, "If you want to change society you do have to change yourself first because you can't expect to change people when you're following the prototype of the problem in the first place". This came after Daisy had stated that she did not have a problem with how women were being portrayed in Hip Hop. Through the humanizing dialogue and her openness to other people's perspectives she saw that misogyny might be something that she needed to consider more deeply. Mike, addressing the topic of influence took action and told his friend, "Do you realize we are just listening and feeding in to all this right here?" He in the word of Ms. Stevenson was "exposing [his] friends to a different kind of music and giving them a different appreciation". In the terminology of Freire, praxis performed and consientização activated.

Within the Cypher sessions and in the interviews, the participants used a language of critique and transcendence to develop their own counter-narratives to formulate actions which resulted in the awakening of critical awareness or consientização. Borrowing another passage from Freire (2003) Hip Hop – no longer something to be described with deceptive words – became the object of that

transforming action by (young) men and (young) women which resulted in their

humanization.

**Chapter Six:**

**An Introduction to the Participants (The Remix)**

As I was finishing this project, I re-read Freire's (2002) *Education for Critical Consciousness* and a feeling came over me:  I had just met Paulo Freire.  Reading his work after I had finished my project gave me clarity; it was as if Freire himself had come into my house and we began our own humanizing dialogue.  Freire spoke clearly and eloquently about the effects of his Cultural Circles and I spoke about the Critical Cultural Cypher. I had intended to use Freire and his theoretical framework only for the construction of the Cypher itself; I wanted to forge my own theoretical ground in the analysis of my findings.  I found, though, after the re-reading, that it would be irresponsible to not tie my findings, at least in part, to Freire's work.

In this chapter, I begin by looking at the final interviews of the individual participants detailing the individual shifts that they perceived they made and how they felt the Cyphers had on their lives.  Following this section, I will take another holistic look the participants pointing out general themes that cut across the group. At the end of this chapter I will look at an incident that had a profound impact on the Critical Cultural Cypher and its participants.  Cyrus and Nasa, did not finish the Cypher with the rest of the group as each of the two participants engaged each other in a Hip Hop "Battle".  Nasa released a song detailing his anger at a group of gang members who were terrorizing students of Westside High School, but in doing so offended the many members of the Latino student body. Cyrus was compelled to answer this with a song of his own directed at Nasa.  Nasa was subsequently expelled from the school for the incident and Cyrus dropped out of school partly because of frustration related to his

school performance and partly because he was following his dream of success in the

Hip Hop music industry.  I will share the details of this incident from both

participants' perspectives as I had the opportunity to discuss the incident with both

Nasa and Cyrus delving deeply into their reflections, thoughts and dreams for the

future.

I begin with a look at the final interviews for the participants who completed

the program.  The purpose of the final interviews was to gain access to the

participants' self analysis and of my observations and notes from the entire process.  I

told the participants that there were three different areas that I was looking to explore.

The first area was how the participants' evolved through this process.  I wanted to

know what they felt was the difference between today verses five months ago when

The C³ Project first began. The second part of the interview, I wanted to have the

participants look at their silences in the Cyphers themselves.  If, when, and why did

the participants feel that they could not speak in the sessions.  The third part of the

interview was to look at the individual participants' contradictions. I was looking at

when the participants said something in either the interviews or the sessions, but it's

something that might have contradicted that at a later time.  Informal conversational

interviews were used as an interview format which granted me the freedom to inquire

about the specifics of my observations and notes regarding each individual.  Though I

did carry the particular themes that we would cover, the format was less structured

than the original interviews where I had planned questions that I was going to

address.  Some of the questions did carry over into each of the participants'

interviews (e.g., Were there any times that during the Cyphers that you didn't say

something that you wanted to say?) but these questions were meant to give the participants a forum to express things that they wouldn't be comfortable expressing with the complete group present. Another purpose for the final interview was to see what shifts were made in the participants' consciousness regarding their understanding of Hip Hop culture. I had the opportunity to observe some distinct and obvious personality shifts in some of the participants and I wanted to hear the participants own reactions to my observations to see if they were seeing something similar.

**The Directors of Hip Hop Culture**

*Daisy*

Daisy was one of the most vocal and active participants in the sessions but she was not at the Wrap Up session, so in the final interview, I gave her the opportunity to answer some of the questions the other participants addressed as a group. Daisy began by professing how "at home" she was in the sessions. The environment provided her the opportunity to discuss and learn about her passion in life. She describes Hip Hop as, "my school, my career, my future, my present and my past". This opportunity to delve deeper into herself was something that she felt was missing from her Mainstream Academic Schooling experience, and it wasn't until her senior year in high school that she felt so passionate about a subject and she "had a reason to come to school". Besides a general increase in her desires to attend school, Daisy spoke specifically about the evolution of her views toward women and women's roles in Hip Hop culture. Daisy was surprisingly absent from the women in the group that were very critical about how women were portrayed in Hip Hop considering her

desires to become a Hip Hop executive. As she reflected back, her views towards the systemic misogyny present in Hip Hop had shifted because of the potential effects of unconscious consumption of some of the negative but influential aspects of Hip Hop culture:

> A.Dee: How are you different today then you were before the circle?
>
> Daisy: I'm a lot more interpretative of like current events and when I listen to music I think a lot about what everybody said; especially in terms of women… Because I kind of felt like "big deal" you know. It's their choice. But when Mia was talking about, if she had a daughter she wouldn't want her daughter to be listening to that music: she would let her but she would talk to her. That's important because we're at a point in our lives where we can make decisions about that and 6 and 7 year olds aren't.

Daisy was able to step outside of her own consciousness and truly empathize with an abstract group of people as she attempted to see the world as they saw it. Her consciousness was not just longer limited to her experiences and she was able to hear one of her peers point out that women were being affected by the culture that she held so dearly and incorporated the critique into her way of being.

Daisy was really impacted by the Cyphers in her life outside of school. Through this process, knowing Daisy's interest in Tupac Shakur and her desires to be an executive in the Hip Hop industry, I was able to introduce her to Shakur's manager, Leila Steinberg who was running a workshop for artists who were bringing Hip Hop as an agent of social change into the juvenile penal system. Daisy credits

both the Cypher sessions and the Microphone Sessions (Steinberg's workshop) with helping her critical consciousness:

> I feel like before the Cyphers and before the Sessions, I felt like I had to listen to music a few times before it really sunk in, but now its really I hear everything that is said. I'm grateful for that … Now, (after the Cyphers and the Sessions) I'm grateful of LA, because this had been one of my worse moves ever, but like coming here, just there's not really a lot of Hip Hop in Georgia. I mean there is in Atlanta and artists coming out of there but you don't really see kids embracing it like that because it's the whole Bible-Belt culture out there and Hip Hop culture is not approved out there really; at least where I lived. And then I come out here and it's embraced so much that I can come after school and talk about it. And I can go after that to go to a session and meet with underground emcees and Hip Hop wise I've evolved because I have a greater appreciation for the artists and what they say.  With the Cyphers, I can talk about it Hip Hop in school.  In my old school we didn't talk about it and my teachers got disappointed with me because I was a really good student in English but she was disappointed that I wanted to do my English project on Tupac; which she didn't understand because Tupac is a poet.  I think I have evolved as like hearing wise and appreciation wise and I didn't think there was much room for improvement in those areas but apparently there was.

Daisy, through the Cyphers was able to integrate her goals with her philosophies which helped her own process of humanization.  She was in her eyes becoming more

complete. Hip Hop for Daisy was always more than a before school and lunch time activity, it was her life. With the help of The C³ Project, she was able to integrate Hip Hop into her life at the level of importance that she thought that it deserved. As Daisy discussed her experience in The C³ Project, I could not help but think about Freire's concept of "Integration" (2002). Freire stated that the integration is "the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality" (p. 4). Daisy made a move from Georgia to California and has begun the process of realizing her new reality; one where she was able to live and breathe Hip Hop. Rather than waiting for Hip Hop to come to her (the formation of the Hip Hop club at Westside High School), she has chosen to actively pursue Hip Hop (the Microphone Sessions). In this sense, Daisy has begun to make choices that have begun to transform her reality.

Next year Daisy will be attending a prestigious university in New York City where she will be studying in their performing arts department to become the Hip Hop executive that she has dreamed of becoming.

*Mike*

Mike was probably the most enthusiastic participant in the group. He was the first participant that I met and was in attendance at all of the Cypher sessions. Mike was always available to talk, whether it was talking about the cypher or talking about his participation in class, Mike was always accessible. Mike was also the person whose personal identity shifted more than any of the other participants. Ms. Stevenson commented,

Since Mike began to participate in the Cyphers, he spends all his free time either talking about Hip Hop or writing. He has a notebook that he carries with him where he writes his rhymes and I am constantly telling him to put it away during class time.

I wanted to ask Mike about this shift to see what his feelings were on the topic. Consider that before the Cyphers, Mike had only performed once in front of a crowd and the most of his microphone time was at his friend's parties, but since the beginning of the C³ Project, I have seen Mike perform weekly in front of a crowd, on Television and in a contest where he won first prize. I asked Mike how he has evolved since the beginning of the Cyphers and he told that his "music is where my life is really focused right now". I asked him to explain this further and he said

When we first started I was about my music but I had a lot of other things as well. Now my goals come from what I'm doing [with] my music. I look at my future like where is my music going...? I set my plans around my music. I've been basing my life on my music.

Mike's began to live Hip Hop. Mike made the conscious choice to make Hip Hop the center of his life. With that came new opportunities, new goals and a new future that needed to be considered. Mike continued:

At first you know it was just something fun to do. I liked Hip Hop. I was a fan of Hip Hop and I was just having fun with it. With the Cyphers and everything else, I learned so much about how I want to go about doing things: how I want to approach things through my music, through my lyrics; how I need to be careful with the words I choose in my lyrics. I heard a good quote

the other day.  Hitler had a quote I liked.  He said "you want people to remember something, make it short and repeat it over and over again" and I thought about that.  I was talking with my teacher and he was telling me, "It's just that people aren't saying the right thing", so if I can say the right thing, make it short and simple, and say it over and over again maybe I could change peoples mind. Maybe I can make people think a different way.  That's how I've been thinking in my music. If you just choose what you say and how you say it, that's like the biggest evolution and how I evolved.  I look at music differently now. I look at the whole Hip Hop game differently.  I look at it like how I see how Hip Hop influences people.  I got a home boy from Germany [who] makes beats and he raps. [When] I see him do music, it just doesn't seem like it's him. It seems like he's trying to be something that he sees on TV or what he hears on the radio. I look at it and it's like I'm baffled by it cause I'm like "Wow that's really not you". I approach him all the time like "Just make sure you do you when you do your music".  It's just crazy how I see things different now.

Mike began this process as an Active Participant in Hip Hop culture, but would have been categorized as a Receptor (Unconscious Hip Hoppa).  Through this process Mike has begun to actively integrate Hip Hop into his goals, values and beliefs to the point where he would now be considered a Director of Hip Hop culture.  Mike experienced the power of the Cyphers and he sees it as his mission to touch the minds of the masses.  Through the Cyphers, Mike saw power and influence in new ways and

instead of being afraid for his own being, Mike saw power and influence as a tool that he could one day wield.

I wanted to find out specifically how the Cyphers helped Mike see the world so differently to which he replied "by pointing out, by talking about it". Mike then continued:

> You might know things, but when you're aware of them, when they are put out there and they are reoccurring and you think about it again and you're like, "Oh yeah, that is true". So when we talked about things like the drug problems, or like how the videos influence little kids, or how people are separated in school and how people try to fit in to places, or how we talked about the Hip Hop game and how it influences people, I was observing things and I noticed it.

Mike noticed how people reacted to Hip Hop culture, and more importantly to the process, he noticed how he reacted to Hip Hop. Mike and the other participants were made to consider how they interacted with society and this had a profound impact on Mike's desires to do something about it. Mike changed the content of his rhymes to reflect the shift in consciousness which he talks about here:

> Before the Cypher, how I go about my music, I would just [rap about] whatever I thought sounded cool. I've never been like lying person or whatever. Like I said all the time in the Cypher was "just as long as you're being real with yourself". I kind of taught myself something through the Cypher: I can't knock Jezzy (Hip Hop emcee who raps about selling drugs) for doing that if that's him you know, if that's him, then be that. Before the

circle I saw things and I was more judgmental. I would see somebody with something on and I would say like, oh he thinks he's … I don't know I can't explain it but I would see something and I would automatically jump to one conclusion you know but after the circle I actually thought things through … I do know before the circle I would just jump to one conclusion. Before, I would look at a homeless person like damn he messed his life up. Now when I look at a homeless person, I wonder what happened for him to be there. He could have lucked out you know what I'm saying things could have just not went his way.

Again, this reiterates that this was a process that the participants went through that affected how they function in society. This project had an effect on the participants' way of thinking, considering, and reacting to what life offered them. By thinking differently about Hip Hop, by carefully considering his experiences, Mike is faced to work through multiple scenarios as he attempts to discover the best way for him to react, live and thrive in this world.

Mike is still trying to come to grips with the new questions that life has presented him. Mike's new way of thinking is causing him to consider a new line of questioning that traditionally begins with "Why" and has no right or wrong answer:

It was crazy cause like people will realize they do wrong and they still do it. I heard Destiny talking about "Yeah I smoke [marijuana]. I know it ain't good, but that's me. That's what I do" and I'm sitting there thinking as she is saying it "That's you? Do you realize you're doing wrong? But you're concurring with yourself that I'm doing wrong. I'm going to accept it, you know. I used

to think when people say, "Do you not realize that he's hurting himself", or "Does she not realize that dudes are going to look at her different" [that they didn't, but] people realize what they do. I haven't really figured out why yet? Like me I know I'm suppose to do my homework, and I know it's wrong for me to not do it; but why? Why am I not?

I am sure Mike will continue to critically reflect on this question long after his experience with The C³ Project and from his reflection, actions are sure to follow. In a Freireian context, praxis is occurring and consientização is realized.

Mike is out of school and he is working full time during the day in the Retail Industry and at night, he is living full time in the Hip Hop Industry, pursing his passion as an emcee where he is performing all over the Metro Area in a quest to touch as many lives as possible.

**The Receptors of Hip Hop Culture**

*Brian*

Brian was a very interesting participant in that he only spoke fourteen times during the all of the Cyphers including the Wrap Up. I was excited to see what was going on inside Brian's head in relation to the entire goings-on in the Cyphers. Brian's participation in the Cyphers, though, mirrored his participation levels in all of his Mainstream Academic settings. Brian's silence reminded me of Freire's (2002) concept of "mutism" where "silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality" (p. 24)

Brian's existential shift came in part because of an increased awareness of what Hip Hop culture meant to his fellow participants. Hip Hop culture for Brian

turned into openness to alternate ways of being.  He saw value in the other

participants that he hadn't before the Cypher sessions.  Speaking of Daisy, he

mentioned

> Brian: Daisy, I've gotten a lot closer with her and now I sit next to her in class
>
> also and its cool because she's a real cool person like I didn't know,
>
> like when I first met her I didn't expect her to be like anything that
>
> she's like and then I got to meet her and this is like really this person
>
> knows a lot of stuff I didn't think she'd be like that just cause of the
>
> way I guess of the way she looked.
>
> A.Dee: What about the way she looked threw you.
>
> Brian:   I just thought she was this white girl I guess and like she listens to the
>
> same kind of music I do, it's just kind of crazy.

He also found that after the Cyphers, he was open to alternate forms of music.  Hip

Hop culture traces its roots in part to the Caribbean rhythms of Reggae Music and

Brian found that he could listen and actually hear the similarities:

> Brian:  Like listening to other types of music beyond Hip Hop actually like
>
> C.J. listens to. A lot of this Reggae stuff and I don't even know what
>
> they are talking about. Now I can listen to it and like and now I'm
>
> slowly starting to understand some of it, and just now relating to it [the
>
> Cypher] because back then I never thought that I would be listening to
>
> that kind of stuff.
>
> A.Dee:  Being opened up to different types of music does that possibly open
>
> you up to different types of ways of thinking? Do you think about

things differently? Cause you talked about in the circle the final one
you talked about how you bring some of the circle stuff into the class.
Do you think about things differently or do you think about the culture
differently?

Brian: Of course.  You go on in life and you start liking different things and
then you start learning like different kinds of stuff and listening to
different types of music and you start doing different types of stuff.

Ultimately, Brian found that the Cypher opened him up to new ways of thought that
could lead to new actions for him.  Some of those new actions will hopefully be being
more open to the diversity of Hip Hop culture.

A.Dee:   One of the things that I asked you in the first interview or the second
interview and I said describe Hip Hop's impact on your life and you
said it kind of guided me to hang out with more like black people and
live kind of their life and see what it's like and I can feel like I can fit
in with that.  If I ask you now…?

Brian: It's crazy cause back then that's what I thought, but now, it's like I can
hang out with all sorts of people and they will still be like into Hip
Hop. It's not just black people.  I'll go into my friend's car and he'll be
bumping this kind of stuff too and he's not even… he just likes
listening to Hip Hop.  He's still like a skater guy.

A.Dee:  What do you think Hip Hop's role in our society is?  How does Hip
Hop fit into our society?

> Brian:  I think that it gets a hold of its listeners and which is probably the
>
> youth group to like thirty.  It sends out messages to them constantly
>
> and people do pretty much what they say.

In a Freireian context, Brian's line of thinking moved from a level of naïve consciousness highlighted by oversimplification and generalization to a place of critical consciousness where Brian now is open to revision and reconstruction.  In the introductory interviews Brian had characterized Hip Hop culture as indicative of African American thought.  When asked about the difference between Asian culture and Hip Hop culture, Brian responded by saying:

> Asians are always really traditional like they only care about their image but
>
> not what they really are. Where Black people or their culture is tend to be like
>
> what they really are and not what society wants them to be.

This was a gross generalization of the essence of Black culture never mind the fact that the question was about Hip Hop and not African-Americans in general, but as we see with Brian's previous quotation, he now realizes that Hip Hop is a complex and diverse culture with multiple ways of being.  Brian's new found consciousness will help him next year as he will be attending one of the University of California schools where he will be majoring in Business.

### C.J.

I began my conversation with C.J. talking about college and what he could expect in the following years.  We were talking about coursework, dorm life, and being away from his mother.  As we continued talking he began to discuss the impact of a certain Social Studies teacher had on his desires to think critically about History.

C.J. began speaking about a critical moment when his teacher was making a connection to his life and his mind just "clicked… It was like someone had switched on a light, you know".  As C.J. described this moment, I began to think about Freire's consientização which is described as the awakening of critical awareness. Consientização could be a moment when everything just "clicks" and for C.J. it inspired him to move his life towards becoming a teacher who can help inspire more clicks. He said "I want to get my B.A. in history.  That was my click and I want to be able to share that.  I think history is very important especially in a nation like this."

I wanted to connect this critical awareness to Hip Hop and the choices he made when listening to music.  As we were talking about consciousness, I wanted to ask C.J. about his choices in music affiliations.  In the introductory interview C.J. claimed that there were two separate types of music Rap music (which was "a little more dirty a little more grimy more realistic") and Hip Hop music (which talked about "things like truth and honesty and life").  With C.J.'s comments about consciousness, I wondered if he found himself listening to Hip Hop that raised consciousness.  This line of questioning brought up some changes in C.J. that I had not anticipated, namely the integration or melding of his two previously separate categories. He began to see the similarities in both categories.

> C.J.:  If you really listen to their music [rap artists who talk about violence, drugs and misogyny] they are really talking about something. You have your Hip Hoppas [artists who talk positivity and analyzing systemic structures] talking about nothing. Then you have the ones who are really down for the soul, you know. They are down for life.

They talk about something in life and you have to listen to that
message, and if you understand that message than it's crazy.

A.Dee: But that's not the Hip Hop that you listened to.

C.J.: The type of Hip Hop that I listen to is more of the club scene, you know.
You're in the club and no one wants to listen to a Talib Kweli song
unless the beat's right. I'm going to tell you that straight up; it's all
about the beat. If you want [something] to lay back and just kick it to,
you just put on Kanye West and just *Drive Slow* homie.

A.Dee: So you don't see any contradiction in you and both types of music. It
seems like your saying you have an appreciation for both?

C.J.: I have an appreciation for both of course; the one that's bringing the
message and the other one as far as the one's that are not talking about
anything.

A.Dee: What do you call those groups?

C.J.: It's Hip Hop, but it's not a respectable Hip Hop. The respectable Hip
Hop, I respect it. The other type of Hip Hop is something that is
another side of me. It's party side of me and then here is the more
mellow side of me. The music that I really appreciate and understand, I
appreciate them both for being here and having an influence on my life
you know being able to experiment with this type of music.

Following the Cypher sessions, C.J. had begun to not only integrate categories of
music that he previously thought were separate, he began to recognize and honor his

own multiplicity. He was seeing all of the different parts of his identity were in need of nourishment and he was appreciative of Hip Hop's sustenance.

I also wanted to ask C.J. about some of the changes in himself that he observed since the beginning of the Cyphers. In the Cypher session addressing misogyny, C.J. spoke openly about the women and their role in Hip Hop culture. He was very critical of some of the women that he felt "put themselves in [the] situations" to be victims of mistreatment due to their choices that they made. He also took a strong stance against some of the women in the group, particularly Mia and Destiny, who claimed that women were being not only exploited, but were influencing the youth of tomorrow by promoting the exploitation. When addressing the changes since the beginning of the sessions, he had this to say

> C.J.:  I was watching a video and, believe it or not, my cousin was watching a video and she was just popping her little booty and I was like: you know what, it *is* kind of like messing with our younger youth, and it really *is.* They are growing up and they are maturing too fast as far as the young females and for a girl to be young, she's like eight, and to be dancing, I think its just not in a respectable manner, but she was dancing she was having fun so you know that's another part but…

> A.Dee:  So that's different from some of the stuff that you said in the sessions. Now you saw it.

> C.J.:  I saw it and I was able to see it. I was like "cool down" you know. I had to grab her you know "sit down". Big cousin had to let her know.  I'm like "You ain't going to be… you might do that on your own time but

you're around me now so sit tight sit down". So that really had an effect on me and I realized Mia was talking about, Destiny was talking about. So that really impacts me.

In the end, it was an experience outside of the Cyphers that led to a shift in C.J.'s consciousness, though the seed was planted in the Project. In one instant, C.J. reflected back to the critical dialogues in the Cypher sessions and then moved to action. Once C.J. saw his eight year old niece and the effect Hip Hop culture was having on her, C.J. began to really think about the role of women in Hip Hop. His new perspective will be serving him next year as C.J. was accepted and will enroll in a California State University close to home where he will be studying to become a social studies teacher so that he can give back and give inspiration to the next C.J.

### *Destiny*

Ms. Stevenson and I often wondered to each other if Destiny was hearing any of the other participants in the sessions and that she often times sounded like she was set in her ways and thoughts. As I found out in during the wrap up session and in her final interview, she did take in and consider much of what the other participants were saying and she actually incorporated some of this into her consciousness. As I began the final interview with Destiny, I told her that I was looking to discover where she might have evolved since the beginning of the process. She immediately cited, what she felt was the biggest change from the beginning of the process: her ability to hear the lyrics of some of the songs that she unconsciously listened to:

Destiny: Well the only thing that has changed is that now, when I listen to music, I pay attention to the lyrics and what they're saying. Before I

> paid attention, but I pay attention more. I listen more closely and try to see what the person is talking about

> A.Dee:  Why do you think that is?

> Destiny:  Because that was the main focus of what we talked about:  that a lot of rappers are commercial or like how a lot of rappers talk about the same thing. So now, I pretty much listen to see if that is true cause I had made some of those comments.  Is that really true or is every rapper different?  Then doing a comparison from past to present to see if it's the same; which it's not.  I'm just trying to create a balance so when I'm listening to music, am I really like making sense of it when I'm listening.  Does it really make sense?  Is it just a way to brainwash people? Stuff like that.

Destiny discusses how the process of critical inquiry and the dialogic method have changed the way she listens to music and in the Freireian sense, changed the way she reads her world.  Destiny always had a consciousness about certain issues related to Hip Hop culture.  She was one of the first people to bring up the issues of women and the use/misuse of Hip Hop culture as a agent of social control, but there wasn't always consistency between her words and her actions.  One example comes from two separate times in the sessions; Destiny began to speak about the role of women in Hip Hop and the misogynistic lyrics of the songs when her cellular phone rang.  Interestingly enough, she had down-loaded a song called *Laffy Taffy*  which equated a woman's body part to a popular candy bar and then encouraged them to shake it as a display of affection for the men around her.  At one point Destiny was the

revolutionary and at another point, she was a participant in the oppressive power

structure.  Now this is not very different for many people in the world as most in

some ways compromise our theoretical and philosophical beliefs for certain likes and

dislikes, but Destiny was becoming more aware of her inconsistencies and was

addressing them in her own way.

In this same vein, I asked Destiny about the process of addressing her

inconsistencies and how she thinks about herself in terms of her evolution.  One

inconsistency that began to show throughout the Cyphers dealt with Destiny's

understanding of racism and the systemic problems that people of color in society

faced.  Destiny used the word nigga to describe people.  This word has a deep and

rich history and people from all sides have weighed in.  I was not there to debate the

use of the word with Destiny in as much as I wanted to hear how she understood the

word and how it might or might not be inconsistent with the ways she thought:

> A.Dee:  One of the reasons why I asked is because during the course of these
> Cyphers, you say the word nigga a lot and so what is your take on the
> use of that word?

> Destiny:  That's just in my vocabulary.  I don't I honestly don't like that word;
> I really don't, but I'm so used to hearing it and so used to saying it that
> it's hard to take it out. I tried to not say niggas so much cause I don't
> like the word.  My grandmother always told me we're basically telling
> the white man that we did what he wanted us to do; basically like he
> doesn't have to call us nigger no more for us to feel low about
> ourselves: we've got our own people calling us nigga, even though

everybody says, "oh that just means my home boy".  But when somebody of another skin color says it you get mad so obviously it's deeper than "that's just your home boy". So I mean I don't care for the word but I say it, I don't know why. I just heard it so much in my life but I'm trying to limit myself from saying it because I really don't like that word.

A.Dee:  You just talked about a couple of things. You talked about knowing what you did and knowing that something is wrong but continuing through that process and continuing to do it anyway. You know that saying the word nigga is "wrong" but you continue to do it.

Destiny:  I don't know. As I get older I'm starting to change a lot of stuff that I do and I look at a lot of things differently because of how I want my future to be.  I don't want it to be like everybody else. I know that in order to make it in the world you have to have some type of intelligence when you open up your mouth and for me to say, "Yeah me and that nigga worked together" that's not going to work out, you know what I mean.  I got to say, "This brotha and I" worked together or however I want to change it up. So I know I really do need to work on it but change is hard and that's the hardest thing for me to do is change because once I'm so used to something, even though I know its wrong, it's hard for me to pull out. I'm getting better and there's a lot of things that I know that I need to change to better myself and there's a lot of things that I know I shouldn't do and there's a lot of things that

I say, and I'm trying to change but it's hard. It's hard because I'm so used to a certain system. It's kind of like if you wake up every morning at 8:00 and then, all of a sudden, you've got to wake up at 6:00. It's going to be hard, but as time goes on you're going to wake up on time. I know I need to wake up at 6:00 but I'm use to waking up at 7:30. It's hard but I'm getting there, but I'm a slow mover because I got so much other stuff going on. I'll be like "Well that can wait" or "I'll do that later". I know I need to change this right now cause there's so much stuff that I need to change for myself and not even for other people. There's a lot of stuff that people want me to change, but there's a lot of stuff that I can't change because that's who I am. If I change that then I'm not going to be me anymore and everybody will be like what happened to Destiny. So for now, I mean I'm at 7:00, 7:15.

Destiny's time metaphor was a brilliant way of explaining her struggle with consistency in her life. As she is getting older and more mature, she critically analyzes and understands what she wants and what she doesn't want. As important as her critical reflections are, she understands the importance of actions and integrity. Next year Destiny will be attending the same Cal State University as C.J., where she will be studying a combination of law and psychology so that she can one day become "the next female Johnny Cochran".

*Mia*

Mia was very quiet through the process, but when she did speak her words had a major impact on the rest of the participants. Individually though, the Cypher was more of a place for Mia to find herself and find out that Hip Hop culture is not broad enough to capture her and her thoughts. In the year that the Cyphers took place; Mia went from a person who could not imagine her life without Hip Hop. She said earlier, "Without Hip Hop I'd go crazy" to now where she sees music and art as the escape:

> A.Dee: You called Hip Hop your escape. Is Hip Hop still an escape for you?
>
> Mia: Oh I use it I don't think it's just Hip Hop; I use music. Hip Hop right now is really stupid. Like "How did you get that in those jeans" or like all that other stuff. Every song you hear on the radio is about some kind of sex or all this other dumb shit. It's not that doesn't really calm me down, sometimes it's just a good beat; like a dancing music. But other times, it's just stupid. Right now I still listen to Hip Hop for dance music and some of the songs are still good.

This is a big shift for Mia but analyzing her earlier interviews, I could see it coming. In the second interview, Mia was very critical of Hip Hop and the direction that Hip Hop was heading. Mia reminisced about Hip Hop from her youth and the Hip Hop that she grew up listening to, "Hip Hop used to be good. It used to have value. I remember when I was growing up, besides God; I had my music." The key phrase was "used to have value". Being very aware of feminist issues, Mia was already beginning to move away from the misogyny and the violence Hip Hop music

promoted. As Mia critically analyzed Hip Hop this year with the Cyphers, she saw

more of the same and it sickened her and how it was portraying her people.  Mia talks

about this as she speaks to the impact the Cyphers had on her personal viewing

habits:

> Like before I was like "O.K., I'll watch it" but now I look at videos like "it's
>
> really showing a lot". It's so tacky I can't even watch videos any more. I'm
>
> like some videos just like turn you off from the actual song. It makes Latinas
>
> look so bad I was like wow.

Later we went further in depth with this issue:

> A.Dee:  Yeah … You also talked about the way that you look at these people
>
> in videos, and you talked about how Latinos are represented, how the
>
> Latino's look bad that women made the women look bad.

> Mia:  It does look bad; it looks nasty.  Like what are you trying to show
>
> everybody that living in a neighborhood, like T.I. (African American
>
> Hip Hop Artist) he got on [a local radio station] and he said that all
>
> Mexicans should go back to Mexico. "You're dumb". They had the
>
> Latino radio stations where they had a whole session and they had
>
> everybody go down to the station and they were burning and breaking
>
> T.I's CD's. But it's funny cause we were watching his video and he
>
> has Latinas in his video. Like how are you going to say you should go
>
> back to Mexico but you're using them in your video? I'm, sorry.

Mia here was questioning the integrity of Hip Hop artists and the integrity of Hip Hop

in general.  Half of Hip Hop's audience is female, but Hip Hop music continues to

promote violence against women and sexual exploitation of women. The inconsistency is beginning to drive people away from the music, and Mia is a prime example of this.

Mia hasn't left the culture completely; she is just searching for substance in what she is listening to. Mia is the kind of person that needs the music in her life to represent her and her struggles. While many people in Hip Hop culture listen to the beat first to determine the worth of a song, Mia listens attentively to the words and if the words don't connect with her life, she will not connect with the music, no matter how good the music on the album is. Mia is currently searching in many different corners of Hip Hop culture for meaning. One nook that Mia found was the small but growing contingent of Christian Rap artists. Here Mia talks about sharing this music with her co-workers and their stereotypical and superficial understanding of Hip Hop culture:

> Yeah but I was like they were making fun of me the other day because I have this rapper and he's a Christian rapper and he was singing this song called "cross over". They were like, "This shit's ghetto" and I was like "that's because you're not listening to the words" and they were like "who is this?" They were trying to figure out who it was and these are people… like the guy that came over pretending to be the pimp. He's the kind of person that is into Seven Jeans the Ashley Simpson kind of person. You know that type of music; and the girl, she is the same way and they don't really listen to Hip Hop. If they do, they just make fun of the words. They were talking about "Who is this? This is ghetto. What are they talking about" and I was just like

"listen" and they were like "I don't know what he is saying." He was just

talking about God. And they are like oh my God and they started clowning

and they were like "What rapper talks about God?" and they were clowning

and I was like, "Alright, keep talking shit".

There is a perception that Hip Hop culture solely represented by "Thugs",

"Gangsters" and "Pimps", because of the multi-media's focus on what is selling.

80% of rap music is bought by white people (George, 2001) and many times people

from outside of the culture are buying the music to gain access into a culture that they

have only heard about on television. It would be hard to buy into the diversity of a

culture when the diversity is rarely promoted or seen. Mia introduced Christian Rap

music to a group of people and they laughed incredulously. The reality is that Hip

Hop culture has a place for many people including Mia; people who are frustrated by

the national direction of Hip Hop and people that want to hear something that

connects with how they live. Mia will continue to search for meaning within Hip

Hop awaiting her favorite artists like Mos Def and Talib Kweli, who have more of a

spiritual focus. Next year, Mia will be attending a California State University where

she is supposed to be studying Psychology, but is thinking about Women's Studies as

well as Ethnic Studies.

**Who these participants became**

When I finished my interviews with all of the participants, I remarked to Ms.

Stevenson that there was a sense of ease about them that was difficult to describe.

The participants' general feeling went beyond the comfort that we now shared having

spent a school year together and it went beyond the "end of High School" relief that

many of them were undoubtedly feeling.  The ease in our final conversations came from a familiarity with me as a researcher and from previously engaging in a discourse concerned with challenging systemic and structural domination.  The participants were better able to express themselves as we casually conversed about their changes.  This program was built around the critical reflection on Hip Hop culture so when asked in the final interview to critically reflect on their identity, there was an ease in transition.  The participants were open to the changes they went through, just as they were open to having a discussion about them.

Looking at Freire's (2002) description of critical consciousness, it is highlighted "by refusing to transfer responsibility, by rejecting passive positions, by soundness of argumentation, and by depth in the interpretation of problems" (p. 18), all of which have found their way into the lives of these participants.  When talking about the refusal to transfer responsibility, it was Destiny who took personal responsibility for her uses of the word "nigga" when describing her friends.  It would have been very easy for Destiny to fall back on the argument that 'all of her friends use it" or "I hear it so much, it just gets stuck in my head".  She recognized that this was something that she wanted to change in her life and it was something that she was actively pursuing.  When talking about rejecting passive positions, it was Mike who after the Cypher sessions, went to his friends and spoke to them about the content of their songs and being true to themselves, an action that arose directly from the Cypher sessions. It was also C.J. when watching his cousin dancing inappropriately, stopped her and explained to her the ramifications of her actions. When talking about the soundness of argumentation, it was C.J. who explained his

construction of race and race in America. When talking about depth of interpretation of problems, it was Daisy who was able to break down the fallibility of my constructs Active and Passive participants and engaged me in dialogue to work towards the resolution of the issue.

These participants had begun to interact with Hip Hop culture in a way they previously had not. Again, there were many things going on in these participants environment that could have triggered changes, but these participants did all participate in the Critical Cultural Cypher and together they worked to define and identify problems with their lived culture and then create actions towards the resolution of those problems. These participants grew in ways, which I could have only hoped for in such a short time.

**Narrating the lives of non-Cypher participants**

Two of the participants in the study-Cyrus and Nasa-were not able to fully participate in the Cultural Cyphers. Nevertheless, I did have the opportunity to connect with them after the school year. Leading into this chapter, I briefly described the incident and in the final interview I noticed many changes in their thinking. While they did not participate fully in the critical transformative intergroup dialogues, their participation and in the interview process and the few sessions they did attend did have an impact. Both were very reflective about their choices and the ramifications of their choices and the direction that their lives were taking them. I will begin by describing the incident in depth and then I will delve into the profiles.

**"Beef" hits Westside High School**

Noticeably absent from most of the Cypher sessions, were Cyrus (attended session # 1 and # 3) and Nasa (attended session # 1). In the middle of the school year, the school was having an issue with violence on the campus between the African American and the Latino students. The origins of this conflict date back to 1993 when there was a rash of "Black vs. Brown" killings in the general area around Westside City that led to the deaths of at least 17 people including at least four Westside High School students. Originally this was a gang war between two new gangs in Westside City, one predominately Latino and the other, predominately African American. Over the next 14 years, an uneasy truce was maintained on campus, but the year prior to my arrival at Westside High, a riot occurred where over 20 students were arrested, and the school was "locked down" until 5:00 pm, meaning no one could come in or out of the school including parents. Since the riot the previous year, gang activity, especially amongst the youth was steadily rising inside and outside of school. Inside of school, African American and Latino students were being suspended for fighting and outside of school, affiliated and non-affiliated students were being viciously attacked because of the color of their skins.

Nasa and Cyrus had no connection to either gang. Cyrus was a gang member, but renounced his membership and was "jumped out" of his gang. Again, his gang was not affiliated with either of the conflicting parties in Westside City. Both Nasa and Cyrus were part of Hip Hop crews that performed at venues across Westside city and the Greater Metro Area. One of the people Nasa performed with and someone who Nasa considered a friend, was attacked outside of school and severely beaten.

Nasa was furious about the attack, but instead of getting involved physically, Nasa decided to make a song about it, print his own CD's and distribute it amongst the students at Westside High School. This was a Hip Hop solution to a street problem. Many times in Hip Hop culture, when one group has a problem with another group, songs are made about the groups and they "Battle" to see who would be the victorious group or crew. This method of "Battling" is as old a Hip Hop itself. As early as December 1981 when one of the most famous rap battles between emcee Kool Moe Dee and emcee Busy Bee, battling has been a way of life in Hip Hop culture. Again, "Beef" is a term in Hip Hop culture that refers to conflict between either two artists or two groups associated with artists. It is widely thought that it was beef between Tupac Shakur and his record label Death Row Records and Christopher 'Notorious B.I.G.' Wallace and his record label Bad Boy Entertainment that indirectly led to the death of Shakur and directly led to the death of Wallace. Beef and Battles continue to happen in Hip Hop culture and one was brewing here at Westside High.

In the song that Nasa released, while meaning to attack and demean the specific gang and their membership, Nasa's words were hinted at systemic racism and were taken by all Latino's as demeaning and disrespectful. "We are beating up more [name of the gang] than the Border Patrol" and "I said you not hot but you faking a lot though/ instead of talking smack go and make me a taco" "You Mexican's go get your men, pussies" were all direct lyrics from the song which caused the controversy. The effect on campus was immediate. Two days before the release of the song to the public, someone snuck onto campus overnight and spray-painted the words "Fuck Niggers" on the Administration building wall, so the campus was already wrought

with tension.  When the song came out two days later it was picked up by the rival

African American Crew as an anthem.  Not hearing the racist and disrespectful lyrics

and only hearing the attack on the actual gang, people began to duplicate copies of the

song and it spread outside of the school walls and city boundaries.

One person who did hear the song was Cyrus.  When the song came out,

Cyrus was called out of his Social Studies class by a friend of his and he listened to

the song.  When he came back in he was furious.  The following are excerpts from

my observation notes from the social studies class two days later:

The teacher tells me that he is struggling in the class.  She says that

something is happening and she can't put her finger on it.

Cyrus comes up to me and shakes my hand. "What's up???" I say to

him, keeping in mind what the teacher told me at the beginning of the class.

"I'm cool." He responds.  I continue my inquisition into the issue with the

question "How's school???"  He says, "I am doing well just trying to keep this

thing going... trying to keep up."

I then got more in depth with him and I asked him if the problems in

school were creating some problems in class (the school was facing a crisis

where African-American students were physically fighting with some of the

Latino students).  He said sort of, he went more in depth with the issue that

was facing him and it dealt directly with the Cultural Cypher.  One of the

participants in the Cypher (Nasa) was part of a group that released a mixtape

(which I had already) that had some racist (systemic and individualistic)

content directed toward Latinos/Mexicans.  Cyrus told me that this was

bullshit and he felt "in the middle of this whole thing".  I asked him how and he responded by saying that he liked Nasa but this mixtape was "going to have dire consequences for him".  "I just don't want to see anybody killed, but the word is out.  He has dude's coming from [Neighboring City] to get him.  Both Bloods and Crips are united and when that happens, there are problems."  I asked him if he was getting any pressure from the Latino gang members to get involved, to which he responded "they be hitting me up all the time now telling me to get him, but I don't get down like that anymore… All that banging in my rhymes like Nasa is doing is wack and I just can't go there anymore".  I said to him "Yea, your rhymes are political and conscious." Cyrus sat quiet for three seconds and said "I've got the perfect beat for this." He was going to get involved but bringing it to his level… "Have you heard the *Mass Appeal* beat from Gangstarr?"  I told him "Of course." Cyrus then asked me if I could read the lyrics before he "put them down".  I told him I would be honored.  The bell rang and he shook my hand and gave me a man hug (hand shake and a one armed hug).

I went to the teacher and I told her that I talked to Cyrus and much of his frustration came out of a CD that a student released two days ago and she said that "Now it all makes so much sense.  Two days ago he was in class and someone called him outside.  He went out and I saw him put some headphones on and when he came back inside he was not the same.  He was short and pissy at everyone and I have been having problems with him since." (Excerpt from Field notes 1/19/06)

Cyrus had decided that he was going to take on a leadership role in this conflict and he was going to be the one to step up, but he wanted to do it on his terms. Cyrus was jumped into a gang at nine, shot when he was twelve, and had been jumped out of a gang at 15. This situation was nothing new to him, but what was new was his new consciousness. Cyrus wanted to bring the beef to his level. He was going to make a political record out of this situation.

Meanwhile, when the administration got wind of Nasa's CD, he was immediately sent home and was told to stay home for five consecutive days. He was, in practice, suspended for his own safety, because the administration had heard that some of the gang members were out to get Nasa. The following is an excerpt from an informal conversation with Nasa:

> I see Nasa from across the quad outside of his class and he waves me over. He says what's good and he shakes my hand. I ask him what is new and he says that he just got out of a meeting with the Assistant principal and his mom. He says his mom is all worried "because of the track that he laid down and that all hell is breaking loose"...
>
> He tells me that he knows that the track was disrespectful and that he offended a lot of Latino people and that wasn't his intent. I told him that he was right and that he went at everyone instead of just going at one person... I ask him if he heard the latest Eminem album specifically the track Yellow Brick Road. On this track he apologized and said that he was wrong for doing this. Nasa says to me that he has thought about it "but I am getting about seven calls a night talking about 'watch your back' and I tell them "You know

where I live".  I hear you on the 'my bad' track, but in the streets there are no

'my bad's'.  I fucked up and I am just gonna have to take my shit"…

I tell him that from the beginning of this he answered a street problem of

someone shooting at his friends he used a Hip Hop to deal with his problems

but now he is resorting to the streets for the solution.  I ask him if he sees any

inconsistency in that.

He says that there is "No one from the streets that can see him.  The track was

so hot that they (the gang members) had to answer it, but word is that

someone, you know who I'm talking bout (Cyrus) is trying to come out with

something, but can't no one see me"… he then disappears into class as the

bell rings (Excerpt from Field Notes 1/21/06)

Nasa understood that his song was creating problems that he had not prepared for

when he sat down and created the song.  He was getting threats on his life that he was

now beginning to take seriously, but as he said, he had to "take his shit".

Cyrus went home and wrote a song which he entitled *Unheard Voices* (see

Appendix W).  In the song he talks about the life of gang members and how Nasa is

no gang member and he should stick to rapping about things that he has lived.  Cyrus

and Nasa did not have a problem going into this, so Cyrus approached Nasa and let

him know that he is going to come out with a song that will be an answer to his song.

This meeting was, according to Cyrus a bit confrontational, but both sides understood

the gravity of the situation.

Nasa was busy going through his own struggles in school.  I had the

opportunity to talk to one of the administrators about Nasa's predicament and they

told me that he was being banned from the campus after 4<sup>th</sup> period (the Cyphers took place during 6<sup>th</sup> period).  I asked the administrator why he was being banned and he said that Nasa's song that he released was the equivalent of throwing kindling on a raging fire, it was unnecessary and it only served to destabilize an already tense situation between the Black and Brown youth at the school.  Nasa was done with his classes by 4<sup>th</sup> period and the administrator told me that he will be escorted off campus immediately and would not be let back on campus for any reason, including to participate in the Cyphers.  Nasa was also going through some issues with graduation. Nasa approached me outside of his classroom and said to me "I might not graduate". I asked him why and he said that he did not pass his government course and he was short credits for graduation,

> I failed my government class because I turned in my term paper in 2 days late
> and now I have a 54.4% in the class... I am .1% off and he won't even look at
> my paper... I talked to the principal and she said that she will talk to him for
> me.

Having observed Nasa in the class that he was speaking of, I went to the teacher to find out what was going on from the teacher's side.  The teacher told me that he had given Nasa plenty of opportunities to turn the paper in but he did not and he failed the class.  He said that it was better that Nasa learn the lesson now than learn it later when it can affect more than just himself.  The teacher said that he had already talked to and received the full support of the principal.

In the end, Nasa decided to leave the school and make up the course that he failed at Westside School District's continuation school.  Three weeks later Cyrus

began to have problems at the school and decided to drop out of High School completely. He had reportedly moved to New York City where he was pursuing a career in Hip Hop music as an emcee.

*Cyrus*

Though Cyrus had not participated fully in the Cypher sessions, I was still anxious to hear his story. In his earlier interviews, Cyrus had professed a love and respect for the educational process. He had left the gang and transferred schools so that he could better focus on getting his diploma. Cyrus had said that his music was his flashlight and that it was going to guide him down the right path. I found myself asking "What happened?" Did he go to New York to pursue his Hip Hop? Did he get back into the gang life? What happened?

After graduation and the school year had ended, Cyrus finally re-emerged at Westside High School. He had re-enrolled to finish the last semester of his requirements for his diploma and was assigned to one of Ms. Stevenson's English courses. I went over to the school to try and set up an interview and when I arrived, I found out that he had dropped out for a second time. He had told Ms. Stevenson that he needed to get out of the high school environment and would finish his courses at a night school. I was again back to searching for Cyrus. One day as I was going through all of my paperwork, I found his father's work phone number and I finally was able to track Cyrus down for an interview.

Cyrus drove up to the interview in a new truck and he explained to me that he had gone to New York and met with some record executives and had signed a record contract and he bought his mother a car and bought himself a truck with the advance

money.  As we sat down, I began to ask him all of the questions that I needed

answered, beginning with what happened with school the previous year.  Remorseful,

Cyrus responded:

> I was frustrated.  You know, I wasn't proud of myself at all.  I knew in my
>
> heart that I was a smart kid and I could've done a lot better than I was doing,
>
> but I'm easily distracted. That's my problem and I did not want to be like
>
> "Here's my excuse for not doing this". The problem was that I did not feel
>
> good about school already me dropping out, I'm telling myself that I'm going
>
> to go to adult school, yeah right!  When am I ever going to go enroll in adult
>
> school? I wasn't going to go do that, to me I knew I wasn't going to do that,
>
> but I kept telling myself "yes I will", but I already knew.  Basically I dropped
>
> out because I was getting frustrated.

Cyrus had begun to under-perform in his classes and instead of working harder for

something that he wasn't passionate about he decided to stop going.  I was a little

confused, because he did not seem like the type of person that would let a little

adversity stop him from succeeding and that's when he added, "And was starting to

get into fights at school also".  He continued:

> The whole racial tension thing, you know. I was sitting there making music
>
> for people to get their minds off of it. To tell them basically dude, black and
>
> brown cannot be doing this, we cannot; not even whites. We can't even do it
>
> to the whites and it's got to stop.  My message in my music was simply that.
>
> It's got to stop because I was beefing it with Nasa, you know with his
>
> mixtapes and all that stuff. We got a good chance to talk you know me and

him. One day we saw each other at Downbeat and cleared the whole thing up everything was cool. Cause obviously the last thing you want to do is get to violence. You know Azad is not about violence. He's not with that stuff. He's a peaceful cat. We talked it over it was done with…

That had cleared up what had happened with Nasa, but I still wanted to know about the violence at school. Cyrus told me that after he had dropped out of school, he had gotten back into his gang:

I was discouraged that I couldn't do good in school no more and I was kinda getting tired of talking about the peaceful stuff cause it seemed like nobody was listening. So I was like "alright then, they wanna see that side of me, I'm gonna hit the streets harder than I've ever hit 'em before". That's what happens, dude. During that process I lost six good homies. That would get anybody mad.

One night, Cyrus was involved with a drug deal and he recalls another close call that would again make him reconsider his life choices:

So there was a drug deal going down, down the street from my Mom's house, guns out, spraying at everybody couple of my friends got shot, I'm coming up, I slid under a car. I come out, I look over to my left, and I got hit with a baseball bat over my chest. I'm on the floor now; cat puts a gun to my face. I'm thinking "that's it man." And he just looks at me and he's like, you're lucky, man, you're lucky. He just got in the car and left. I knocked out after that. Wake up in the hospital dude; you could see the mark of the bat on my

chest.  I can't even breathe.  And I'm like "ah man" and after that I went to

New York basically as they say with a fistful of dreams and a head full of fire.

Cyrus had just faced another near death experience. He was one person's choice away

from loosing his life and again his music was his flashlight, and he left and went to

New York to pursue his dream.

In New York, Cyrus met with some Hip Hop groups who took him in and

provided him with everything that he needed at the time, food, shelter and a studio to

record in.  With this group, Cyrus made three mixtapes, had the opportunity to

perform in a couple of live shows, but there was something missing.  He felt that he

needed to come back to Los Angeles and finish his schooling.

I came back to L. A., "Dude, I gotta get back into Westside High somehow".

I asked if they'd let me in.  They gave me another chance to come in.

Unfortunately, another incident happened.  This was after school; I was

picking up my sister. There were some kids fighting in the alley and this guy

comes through wielding a baseball bat.  I'm sitting in my car and I'm thinking

"Well, what's going on?"  He starts walking up like he's going to hit

somebody.  My first reaction, I hit him and I broke his jaw.  This dude tried to

press charges, so then the cops were looking for me.  We went to court for this

and everything.  My argument was simply this: it's like, "if you're going to

take me to jail because I protected someone's life, but you're going to tell me

you're taking me to jail because I wasn't wearing a uniform, a police uniform,

that sounds ridiculous to me".  "If anything I should be asking you and the law

enforcement how is this gentleman got into school."  And they're telling me I

did something wrong because I injured this man. "Now tell me, would you

prefer a broken jaw or a dead child?" They looked at me in court like damn,

he got us. [A.Dee laughs]. Oh yeah, oh yeah, you damn right I got you.

This was the reason that I was not able to catch up with Cyrus after his return. This

was the reason that he had dropped out a second time. Cyrus continued to find

himself in these situations or these situations keep finding him. As Mike would ask,

"Why"? Cyrus feels like an extremely moral person. He also is a person who is very

conscious of his beliefs and his actions. Cyrus will continue to learn from his

mistakes and apply them to future situations. He knows he has a lot to learn; he is

very aware of this:

I'm far from becoming a man. We can't understand life completely because

we learn everyday. You're a lot older than I am and I'm pretty sure you still

have a lot to learn. If you have a lot to learn, what does that tell me? I got a

whole world of things to learn. And you've been through a lot more than I

have, I'm pretty sure. We've had our share of differences there. There's

different ways to go through things. But that to me is making me who I am.

Cyrus has signed to a record label and is working on his first professional album,

which he is hoping to release in the fall of 2007.

*Nasa*

Nasa was another participant that did not get to go through the entire program.

My goal in tracking down Nasa was to find out what had happened to him after he

was kicked out of Westside High School. I also wanted to figure out, now that he had

time to reflect on the "beef", what he ultimately thought about his song, the controversy it caused and the overall racial problems at Westside High School.

I knew what Nasa's inspiration was for putting the song out (his friends being attacked on the street), but what I did not know was how the song came about. I asked Nasa if he had any regrets about the song and the controversy that it had sparked. Nasa's response was interesting in that he was about to tell me that he had made a mistake, but then he began to justify his actions:

> I mean to be honest I made a mistake by doing that um… I look at it now, I have no regrets. That's what I felt was necessary, so I took the initiative. I hopped on the track blind-sided not knowing what was going to happen, the repercussions. I thought I was going to put the track out and it was going to be done. My homies already made the track and they had spaces for me to hop in and they were like "oh yeah, you hop in and set your opinion"; I had so much to say about it. I guess it overwhelmed them [my friends] because I had so much to say about it. I guess when they [the gang members] heard it they were like "We are going to kill this kid."

Nasa had obviously been thinking about and replaying the series of events that led to the release of the song, but I am not sure that he had had the opportunity to recall the events in the way that I was asking him to do here. I then asked him about the specific line from the song which was inflammatory, "I said you not hot but you faking a lot though/ instead of talking smack go and make me a taco". I asked him, did he understand that this was the line that upset the Latino community outside of the gang members he was targeting. Nasa admitted that, "yeah that was a bad line

cause that is what got Latinos hot they thought that it was directed to all Latinos but it was not they misinterpreted what I said" Nasa continued:

> In reality it was word play like I was playing with the words to get a metaphor or a simile out there and it slipped. I was so hot when I was writing and when I was spitting it I did not realize that oh, that was derogatory.

I think that part of the controversy was that Nasa was coming from a place of perceived privilege. Nasa being Middle Eastern worked to enhance the response of the community because he was, according to the US census (2007), a white person making a derogatory remark against a group of people. Whereas Nasa doesn't see himself as white and doesn't see himself as powerful, his actions went unchecked by his close friends because they see Nasa as Nasa sees himself, a member of Hip Hop culture. The administration though saw Nasa as a person that was a cancer to Westside High School and someone that needed to be removed immediately. Nasa said that he was told by the school administration that the release of his song constituted a hate crime. Nasa recalls the situation with the administrators:

> They were having problems with both the Latinos, who were trying to be apart of the gang and the Latinos who were part of the gang. Once I put that track out it kind of gave them an excuse, like I was the one causing the feud [between the African American and the Latino students] so they [the school administration] took it upon themselves to see me out of the school, saying to the public that I was the reason that that shit was going on (because of me and what my friends and I were causing). The reason why they were expelling me was because it was suppose to be a hate crime, at least that's what I was told.

A security guard from the school pulled me to the side one day and told me that, "this is freedom of speech and in no way was it a hate crime; and what you said was not a hate crime".

Nasa was allegedly being expelled from school because his song was being categorized as a hate crime. The point that the school was trying to make is that Nasa's song was inflammatory and it came at a time when the school felt like it was about to erupt as it did the year prior. Nasa's mere presence on campus was making the campus unsafe for the rest of the students and they were going to find a way to get him out of there. In a way, Nasa's song, let the school system off the hook, because now they had something to point at as a trigger for the violence and conveniently it was Hip Hop.

They [Administrators] just feel like it's [Hip Hop] the reason why people are gang banging, but what they don't realize is, if anything real Hip Hop tries to explain and gives people a voice. If you gangbanging … people gangbang for a reason; its over a territory but a lot of people want to gang bang just to be cool. It's because of that because they [administrators] view Hip Hop as an African American type of culture. It is, but isn't. It's our own culture, its Hip Hop culture you know. But they feel like Hip Hop music is bad and the African Americans who inspire that kind of music and they are condoning that kind of foul, sexual stuff that [administrators] see with the girls.

Hip Hop music strikes fear into many people's heart as it is typically associated with violence and misogyny. It is not surprising that many schools do not welcome Hip Hop culture on its campuses for fear of the potential for inciting abuse. What is not

understood is that many urban students today are waiting for schools to look like them – with the inclusion of faculty and administrators of color – and as this project shows, students are waiting for schools as a system to think like they do as well. It is more than ironic that the culture that many school administrators fear most is the one that could be a key to unlocking the minds of the students.

Again I wanted to ask Nasa how he felt about this entire experience given that the last answer was a bit vague and unconvincing. This time, Nasa responded differently as he again recalled the magnitude of the problem he helped cause:

It really changed my life like how I should uh, especially when you're nice [talented]. I'm not saying I'm nice, but I got to people with that track; like a lot of people. A lot of my Latino friends viewed me differently and the gang really wanted to kill me. I got jumped a couple of times, but then I realized if I can do this in a negative way then how about if I switch it around and do it positive.

To be honest if I could go back not even if I could go back but I wouldn't even put the track out. What I would do is I would get individuals and have like a little circle like if we could just sit down and all talk the problems out it would be easier, but every time one of us try to do that we end up in a fight; and I'm not trying to say us as if I'm on the African American side cause I'm not. I have homies from both sides even after the track [song]. I lost a lot of my Latino fan base. I just wouldn't put the track out to be honest that's how I view the situation.

Nasa had answered a problem that had arose in the streets of Westside City in a way that is consistent with the values of Hip Hop culture. Had he focused his attention on strictly the people he was trying to address, his academic fortunes might have been different. Then again, he might have fallen victim to a gang that might have been more focused to bring him harm. As the situation did play out, he did offend some people that he did not intend to. Cyrus came out with a song that addressed his misspoken words, and I wanted to find out what Nasa thought about the back and forth the two had:

> The message was nice. The song and his flow wasn't on point, but if [you] put the technical to the side or whatever and [were] just look at the message ok. Then I understood [and] I took the advice of the message. I fully understood it, it took some time. I knew that it wasn't just him who put that song together. I knew that he had people feeding him cause he's not smart enough to do that by himself; not trying to down him or nothing like that but I heard his other songs and I heard this one and you know [he had] a bunch of other trash songs. The song was trash but the message is nice like wow. I thought about it like "wow that's a real good message" and I took the advice, you know. I stopped that shoot em up rap and I now I make stuff that people can move their head to; even then I try to get a message out in a club song.

As the competitive fires continued to burn – Nasa downplayed Cyrus's technical skills as an emcee and doubted that he "was smart enough" to come up with the concept for the song – Nasa couldn't help but respect the message the Cyrus had put

out.  Nasa had taken Cyrus's words and actually changed his outlook on the ways he was approaching Hip Hop music.

Today, Nasa continues to write while attending Westside City College, frequently performing in shows across the Metro Area and he is still releasing his mixtapes, this time with the hope of enlightening.

**Chapter Seven:**

**Implications**

Revisiting the research goals and the questions that guided them, I find that

the young women and men who participated in The C³ Project were able to see

themselves as subjects who have the power and responsibility to affect change in Hip

Hop culture.  These participants also used Hip Hop to help define their identities.

The stories that these participants told about their lives within and their feelings about

Hip Hop culture helped me, as a researcher, understand who they are and helped them

put many of their feelings to words.  The participants were charged with the task of

defining Hip Hop, identifying problems within Hip Hop, and developing actions in

response to the problems, and through this process they were able to think about and

take responsibility for their personal values and how they as individuals interact with

and within Hip Hop culture.

These participants also used Hip Hop culture to begin the process of

identifying and challenging some of the structural and systemic issues in society,

(e.g., violence and misogyny).  As such, the Critical Cultural Cypher can be used as a

tool to help educators engage students in a dialogue about a their understanding of

Hip Hop culture, and help the students begin to see the world as a malleable and

complex system rather than seeing it as a rigid and simplistic.  Hip Hop can be called

upon to help students address systemic and structural domination by providing a site

where a student can take advantage of skills like counter-narratives and a language of

critique and transcendence to help them describe and act upon an ever changing

world.

I found that The C³ Project can have a powerful impact on students'

development of consientização (the awakening of critical awareness) which can lead

to a depth in investigation. Tying this into the *California State Educational Standards*

*for Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills: Grades 9-12* (California

Department of Education, 2006), The C³ Project helped the participants meet and

exceed the performance expectations required by the state: 1) *Chronological and*

*Spatial Thinking* was addressed as the participants were able to understand that

change is complicated (especially when attempting to change cultural norms) and it

affects not only politics but also values and beliefs, 2) *Historical Research, Evidence*

*and Point of View* was addressed as the participants identified the bias and prejudice

in historical interpretations (dominant narratives that inaccurately portray Hip Hop

culture as a blight on society) and 3) *Historical Interpretation* was demonstrated as

the participants were able to show the connections between particular historical

events within Hip Hop culture (deaths of Tupac Shakur and Christopher "Notorious

B.I.G" Wallace) and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.

The participants in The C³ Project looked within themselves and within Hip Hop

culture where they found a culture wrought with controversy and problems, but the

participants worked towards developing answers. With these answers come

substantial implications for researchers, for teachers, for administrators, for teacher

educators and for policy makers, all of whom I will address in this chapter.

**Implications for educational researchers**

This study gives practical application in an area many researchers have

viewed as purely theoretical. Critical Theory generally and the work of Freire

specifically are often criticized because the problems of the Brazilian underclass don't necessarily transfer to more "advanced industrial countries in the West" (Giroux, 1985 p. xviii). This project answers these criticisms directly, as it is shown here and in other studies (Macedo, 1997; Murrell, 1997) that Freireian Pedagogy does indeed have a place in industrialized countries. The problems that the participants addressed were organically created and addressed which helped to base this project in the praxis that was intended. Critical Theory's and Freireian Pedagogy's anti-positivist epistemologies blend well with the philosophies of Hip Hop culture which enables application to better address the concerns and the challenges of youth education. Future researchers would do well to consider Hip Hop culture as rich and rewarding site where Critical Theory and Freireian Pedagogy could be utilized not only as explanatory, but in the production of action research as well (Dimitriadis, 2004; Morrell, 2005). The consciousness raising methodologies of Freire continue to be a powerful force in the educational community and his work re-thought and re-invented could have some powerful results.

Researchers would also do well to consider listening *to* the ways in which students define Hip Hop culture and how the diversity of their definitions might impact the ways in which students function in mainstream academic classrooms. Too often researchers are listening *for* contexts that will push students towards mainstream academic cultural assimilation. While this study was focused on the engagement of students in a discourse of enlightenment inside of schools, little attention was paid to the individual outside of the project sessions. Observations were conducted in classrooms, but the focus of the project was to see how the

participants would function as a group as they worked towards definition.  The diversity in the definition of Hip Hop culture was evident, but in the debriefing, Destiny called for further investigation:

> I feel like I kind of know but I really don't know cause I'm one of the listeners.  I listen to Hip Hop. I might rap here and there but I'm not him [Mike].  As an artist, I might do it for fun, but I'm a listener, so it's cool to have somebody that's a rapper and somebody that's a listener.  We have different views.

Destiny here is calling all researchers to pay attention to the differences between the Directors of Hip Hop culture and the Receptors of Hip Hop culture to see how they listen and define differently. The conceptualization of Directors and Receptors that I put forth in this work can help teachers situate their practice in the culture of the students by accessing how the students view both Hip Hop and the impact of popular culture on identity. Such an analysis would lead to fascinating findings that could help educators address the problems of understanding the complexity and diversity within Hip Hop culture and the nature of students' relationships with Hip Hop.

This work could also be situated within the research on educational reform. The C³ Project builds off the work of Morrell (2005) and Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) who infused the official Mainstream Academic Curriculum with the lyrics of Hip Hop artists which served as a scaffold as students analyzed canonical texts.  This work differs in that the curriculum of The C³ Project is grounded in Hip Hop culture.  Cuban (1993) points out that many educational reforms have failed due to a refusal to recognize the multiplicity of curricula and the power of pedagogical

influence in educating students. While The C³ Project's discourse of enlightenment would definitely be considered non-standard curricula, the pedagogy can be recognized through Moll's funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) where the strengths of the students are incorporated in the teacher's pedagogy. The development of educational reform must be done at both the curricular and pedagogical levels and research of this ilk needs to be valued and continued if researchers are truly going to have an impact in classrooms.

**Implications for Teacher Educators**

I once wrote that a teacher's role in education is evolving and today there are four aspects of being a teacher that one must consider before entering the profession: A teacher is a revolutionary, an activist, an advocate for love and a friend (Williams, 2002). As we look at teacher education today, we do well to insure that all teachers are prepared to teach the subject matter(s) they have chosen, but when do we assist them connecting and understanding the students' lived culture? This program would be a great site for student teachers to learn about who the students are and how the students think. Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) had teachers observe the home environment of the students to gather the funds of knowledge of the students, but The C³ Project can be used in schools to access students' culture. In one of our reflective sessions, Ms. Stevenson commented:

> As a teacher of those students, it allows me as they said an even closer look
> into their lives and an ability to access there ability, learning ability as their
> English teacher, verbalization of their ideas all of that through a less formal
> structure so I got to see what they were capable of in the class room with

topics that haywire's as comfortable or interested in with this less formal setting.

She went on to discuss how this site was one that changed her approach in the classroom because she was able to read the cues that she learned in the Cypher sessions that showed that the students were engaged and interesting in a line of thinking. This insight is crucial to the development of a teacher and this project is one that could put student teachers in touch with insights a traditional student-teacher placement would certainly miss. While a student-teacher is fighting classroom management issues, there is little time to investigate how students think. Moreover, there is little research that can help the student-teachers experience youth accessing and engaging their lived culture. As teacher educators we need to begin to think about complementary programs that could better prepare teachers to enter the classroom and The C³ Project is a great place to start.

On this same note, the Critical Cultural Cypher as a framework is not limited to the investigation of Hip Hop culture. While the Cypher – in its current manifestation – borrowed much from Hip Hop's values, beliefs and customs, it could be used to engage students around other cultural phenomenon using for example, other musical genre's (e.g., country, punk, reggae, go-go), online communities (e.g., My Space Facebook, Friendster), or sport-based cultures. These different locations are all valuable places where teachers (pre-service to veteran) could re-invent the Cypher sessions to address popular culture as a site of marginalization.

Another aspect of teacher education comes with the levels of connection the participants made with the facilitator. Ms. Stevenson was a great asset to this project

and the participants' feelings regarding her participation only highlights this fact. It was Destiny that summed up the feelings of the group when she said:

> It kind of lets you feel like you have somebody that's got your back. She did not have to do this. She could have been like "I'm too busy" cause lord knows she is, but she made time for us. She took time out and made sure she was on it: calling us "tomorrow we got a Cypher session" so it made me feel like somebody actually does care about us and wants us to actually go somewhere. She did not just drop out on us like "well I have to do a meeting so I can't come" like she has been here since we started.

Ms. Stevenson went through the process of humanization with the students. She became more than a teacher; they began to see themselves in her. This is an important process for the participants because the teaching profession has become much more than the teacher as a conduit of information between the states' mandated curriculum and the students. The teacher has to be able to understand and empathize with the students and the students need to see the teacher as someone who cares about their authentic being. The C³ Project was another vehicle through which Ms. Stevenson was able to show those qualities.

Finally, as teacher educators, we also need to rethink the role of Critical Pedagogy in the classroom. Teacher education needs to include the investigation of Freireian Pedagogy (Macedo, 1997; McLaren, 1994), Critical social theory in Education (Leonardo, 2004), and Critical Race Pedagogy (Lynn, 1999), beyond a class in urban education, but as a systemic and programmatic framework that cuts across teacher education programs.

I have demonstrated through this program that the development of counter-narratives, a language of critique and transcendence and consientização can help students deepen their thinking about a culture which effects how they see the world. The participants took this a step further by developing action related to addressing the problems they identified through this process. The next step would be to work towards the Critical Cultural Cypher inclusion as a part of teacher education programs to begin to build pre-service teachers' cultural literacy (Jocson, 2006; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell, 2005) and to see its effect on how teachers think about the classroom as sites of learning and action.

**Implications for School Administrators**

It is important for school administrators to understand that despite the mainstream media's (and much of academia's) portrayal of Hip Hop culture as a toxic elixir that is corrupting the minds of the youth, Hip Hop culture is vibrant and highly intellectual. There is such a culture of fear surrounding Hip Hop culture that school administrators are in a bind because even if they support the incorporation of Hip Hop culture into the school structure, politically if something did go wrong, it could be the end of their careers. There are also major issues with governmental programs like No Child Left Behind, where schools are being held accountable for increasing student test scores. While fighting for social justice is often akin to political suicide (Taliaferro-Baszile, 2000), this project provides an easier alternative.

As the participants were discussing how the Critical Cultural Cypher could fit into a mainstream academic format, two suggestions were made that could be easily implemented and at the same time work for social justice. The first suggestion was to

restructure the school day to create spaces for teachers and students to have these types of interactions and dialogues. This could be done using either an inquiry or advisory period or an extended homeroom period where the space created could be used for cultural connections between the students and the teachers. The argument can be made that The C³ Project fosters both community building and anti-racist environment. In this project relationships were built through a common experience in a dialogue about a common culture which moved these participants to challenge their own stereotypes and biases.

The second possibility that was discussed consisted of an after-school program. At Westside High School some students are enrolled in a Regional Occupation Program (ROP) where the students are trained in an occupation for which they receive credits. Asking the students to further consider how it would work, the students suggested that Hip Hop could be an occupation that the students would be trained for and The C³ Project could be a part of the program. This would follow the model of the entrepreneurial approach (Anderson, 2004; Meacham, 2006) in which the students learned the trade aspects of Hip Hop music (sound mixing, production, marketing, distribution, etc).

This would all be done at the secondary level, but that does not necessarily preclude elementary schools from considering The C³ Project. While speaking with Daisy, she made the point,

> I personally feel it should be an elementary school, I think that it's important, but a lot of teachers, a lot of parents at that age are trying to steer their kids away from Hip Hop, they don't want you to watch MTV. You know I got in

trouble for watching Coolio videos when I was nine, so its things like that you know. I think America is still really afraid of Hip Hop, of the effect it's had on the youth. The older people and a lot of the older generation see as negative and I think they are just afraid of [Hip Hop] impacting younger kids because they are impressionable. But I think that's why best time, because if you let them find Hip Hop by themselves, let them watch the videos, let the girls do the dances, when the girls are 8 and 9 years old they're never going to learn. I feel this way about a lot of things in school, like we were saying gang violence and things, kids should be aware of these things early because um, you know if they find out by themselves, that's good that they find out, but a lot of kids are interpreting it the wrong way even at our age and they are doing negative things with it. In a perfect world, I mean early.

Daisy's rationale is a solid one. There is no better time to engage in discussions about the power of the media and the images that are being shown to have influence. It is my experience that students of all ages form opinions about issues in their lives which are supported by research studies (Morrell, 2004; Oakes, Rogers & Lipton, 2006) but, convincing the public of the importance of critically analyzing Hip Hop culture is a different challenge. As I stated, there is still a culture of fear surrounding Hip Hop; partially because of its portrayal in the media, partially because of the actions of some within Hip Hop culture and partially because of who it's coming from. To ignore the racialized aspect of this pubic dialogue would be irresponsible. Because Hip Hop emerged from the urban centers and because of the race of the participants, it is often thought of as unworthy of study, but with over 300 universities

across the nation including its most prestigious (Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Harvard, etc.) offer courses covering Hip Hop and Hip Hop culture, the intellectual foundation is quickly becoming indisputable.

**Implications for Teachers**

I begin with a message to all classroom teachers: Hip Hop is not just what your students listen to, it is who they are. While this message might frighten some teachers out of the classroom, the desired effect would be to have teachers begin to investigate the students' lived culture and incorporate their findings into their classroom and curriculums. If teachers haven't had a discussion about the connections between Hip Hop culture and their subject matter, they probably haven't had the opportunity to see the students discuss the material in a way that actually connects to something they love. Many teachers have had the opportunity to have the privilege of having students who have been engaged by the material in a classroom, and when it happens, the feeling a teacher gets is indescribable. Ms. Stevenson, who was in her sixth year in the classroom and was known around campus for her relationship with the students, was amazed by the passion of the participants and the level of dialogue she witnessed while talking about Hip Hop in the Cyphers:

> We don't have a discussion about Invisible Man like that, you know? I think
> it's because they don't always see the connections like if I'm talking about
> Baldwin or if I'm talking about Ellison, I have to spell out all of those
> connections for them. And then they have a discussion about, "oh yeah the
> system really does work that way"… "Oh yeah, we really are invisible in this
> society we're not honored" da, da, da. But this music is something that they

love every day so they can quote every song for you and bring some validity

to it.

I think one thing that this project shows teachers is that there needs to be an

integration of Hip Hop culture, not just the music, inside the classroom. Too often,

Hip Hop is brought into the classroom and is used by a teacher in a way that is

equivalent to a teacher bringing in fried chicken and collard greens to celebrate Black

History Month.  Sleeter and McLaren (1995) point out the failures in part of the

Multicultural Education movement by letting the movement be corrupted by well-

wishers who did not value or respect multiculturalism, but just wanted to say they did

not ignore it.  Students know if you respect their culture and teachers need to find

authentic ways to integrate Hip Hop into their classrooms.  Daisy speaks to the

existing culture of a classroom and the need for cultural integration:

You know you walk into an AP class and its mostly white kids, more money

than other people and kids aren't really connecting with each other. I don't

think they understand the book.  I can honestly say that I Spark-Noted every

single book.  I'm not interactive with the stuff that I was learning… but...  I

know I'll remember this [the Cypher] because it's something personal. Even if

you don't like Hip Hop, you still have an opinion about it and its effect on

culture. It has affected culture, it has a history.  It's part of something really

big.  It always has been. It's just a controversial topic and I think when you

incorporate personal things from kids, they are going to remember things

more and they are going to want to learn about it and I feel like if we did that

in a classroom, and if we had Cyphers once a week or something like it, and

then incorporated [mainstream academic] facts, it wouldn't be so hard to

learn.

Daisy is speaking of the potential for teachers to use The C³ Project as a pedagogical

tool, through which they could scaffold the mandated materials. This would have to

be paired with teachers changing the power dynamics in the classrooms. As Freire

mentioned (2003), too often it is the teacher in a position of authority and the students

as passive recipients of the knowledge that is being deposited. But the use of the

Cyphers puts teachers in the sometimes awkward position of learner and this requires

not only preparation, but courage as well. If, though, the teachers were to take the

leap, the incorporation of The C³ Project into their pedagogical tool box, could pay

off handsomely because it is desperately needed. Some students today see school as

irrelevant and if school is going to continue to serve students in an age where

technology has replaced the teacher as a disseminator of information, we are going to

have to find new ways to engage the students. When I asked Daisy about why

teachers should consider engaging students in this discourse of enlightenment, her

response says it all:

> Take a look around, this is a big thing. It's [has] a big impact and this is what
>
> we are listening to everyday of our lives. We are listening to these rappers and
>
> whether we believe it as true or not, we are accepting their words and at the
>
> same time we are coming to class and we are failing. We aren't listening to
>
> our teachers, we're failing. Give us a reason why we should come to class.
>
> Give us a reason and we will. If I could take an exit exam for all my classes
>
> and just study for 3 weeks, I would, just to avoid the bullshit in classes I don't

care about. I don't have a reason to come to class, I don't have anything that I

feel is so important that I'm motivated by, we don't have motivation in

school. These kids run around thinking it's a prison and it feels like a prison.

We don't have any motivation to learn. Give us something we want to learn

and we will learn it.

Appendix A

Interview Protocols

1. Biography/life experiences
    a. Early life experiences
        i. Where did you grow up?
        ii. What was it like?
        iii. Was it Urban or Suburban? (What does that mean to you?)
        iv. Did your family move often or were you in one place through out this period?
        v. Describe the neighborhood (Class)
        vi. What did your parents do for a living?
        vii. Were they married? How old were they when they had you?
        viii. Describe your relationship with your parents? Your Siblings?
    b. Childhood (Elementary School)
        i. Where did you grow up? (Was it different from infancy?)
        ii. What was it like?
        iii. Was it Urban or Suburban?
        iv. Did your family move often or were you in one place through out this period?
        v. Describe the neighborhood (Class)
        vi. What did your parents do for a living?
        vii. Were they married?
        viii. Describe your relationship with your parents? Your Siblings?
        ix. Describe your experience in school.
        x. What was your favorite subject?  Least Favorite subject?
        xi. Tell me about something you really enjoyed in and out of school?
        xii. Most memorable experience inside of school? Outside of school?
        xiii. What do you consider your high point during this time period? Low Point?
        xiv. Sum up your experience within this time frame
    c. Early Adolescence (Middle school)
        i. Where did you grow up? (Was it different from early childhood?)
        ii. What was it like?
        iii. Was it Urban or Suburban?
        iv. Did your family move often or were you in one place through out this period?
        v. Describe the neighborhood (Class)
        vi. What did your parents do for a living?
        vii. Were they married?
        viii. Describe your relationship with your parents? Your Siblings?
        ix. Describe your experience in school.
        x. What was your favorite subject?  Least Favorite subject?
        xi. Tell me about something you really enjoyed in and out of school?
        xii. Most memorable experience inside of school? Outside of school?

xiii. What do you consider your high point during this time period? Low Point?

xiv. Sum up your experience within this time frame

d. Late Adolescence (High School)

i. Where did you grow up? (Was it different from early adolescence?)

ii. What was it like?

iii. Was it Urban or Suburban?

iv. Did your family move often or were you in one place through out this period?

v. Describe the neighborhood (Class)

vi. What did your parents do for a living?

vii. Were they married?

viii. Describe your relationship with your parents? Your Siblings?

ix. Describe your experience in school.

x. What was your favorite subject? Least Favorite subject?

xi. Tell me about something you really enjoyed in and out of school?

xii. Most memorable experience inside of school? Outside of school?

xiii. What do you consider your high point during this time period? Low Point?

xiv. Sum up your experience within this time frame

xv. How do you see yourself now?

xvi. Where do you see yourself beyond high school?

2. Identity

a. Describe yourself in terms of your values, beliefs, and customs.

i. What of this do you bring into your schooling experience?

ii. How do you construct your identity?

b. Describe your perception of the values, beliefs and customs that govern the schools you have attended

c. In terms of how American society governs itself and the world, describe its values, beliefs, customs, and actions.

3. Hip Hop

a. What is Hip Hop?

i. What values and beliefs do you see in Hip Hop?

ii. What influences Hip Hop music?

iii. Why do you think Hip Hop music is so popular?

iv. What is the difference between Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture?

v. Do people within Hip Hop control what people hear? What people believe?

vi. Who is in control of the Hip Hop that we see on television and listen to on the radio?

vii. What is the difference between the culture of Rap music and Graffiti art? Rap and Breakdancing? Rap and Dejaying?

viii. What is the connection between emceeing and popular rap music?

b. Describe Hip Hop's impact on your life.

i. What type of Hip Hop do you personally associate with?
ii. Do you listen to Hip Hop?  Why?
iii. What do you get out of Hip Hop?
iv. What values and beliefs from Hip Hop impact your life?
v. Which of these values carry over into your schooling experience?

Appendix B

Primary Code list and Numeration

- School 253
- Application of Critical Analysis 224
- Personal Values 200
- Influence of Hip Hop Culture on Personal Identity 182
- Systemic Analysis of Hip Hop Culture 170
- Influence of Hip Hop Culture of Group Identity 144
- Family 131
- Difficulties 127
- Race 118
- Hip Hop Content 116
- Impact of the Circle 113
- Values in Hip Hop 112
- Definition of Hip Hop 109
- Defining Hip Hop Culture 104
- Friends 87
- Emceeing 85
- Criminality 81
- Class 79
- Family Values 78
- Deconstruction of Middle Class Values 74
- Deconstruction of Personal Identity 59
- Misogyny 58
- Understanding one's own engagement with Hip Hop Culture 51
- Facilitation 57
- Critiques 55
- Violence 52
- Activism 47
- Deconstruction 42
- Criticisms 38
- Community 34
- Dreams 35

- Priorities 34
- Influences 33
- Reiteration of Personal Beliefs 29
- Problems in Hip Hop 28
- Gender 27
- Materialism 26
- Systemic analysis of Popular Culture 26
- Reconstruction of Personal Identity 25
- Connection of Information to lived culture 24
- Responsibilities 22
- Reality in Hip Hop 22
- Contradictions 21
- Resistance 21
- Questions 20
- Power 20
- Logistical 20
- Clarifications 19
- Suppositional analysis of individuals inside of Hip Hop 19
- Production of Hip Hop 18
- Street Fashion 18
- Memories 18
- Interests 18
- Identification 17
- Evolution of Hip Hop 17
- Building Relationships 16
- Procedural 16
- Authorities 15
- Challenges 15
- Hip Hop as a system of Control 15
- Drugs in Hip Hop 14
- Lifestyle choices 14
- Old vs. New Hip Hop 12
- Spirituality 12
- Knowledge Acquisition 12

- Maturation 12
- Teacher Training 10
- Comodification of Hip Hop 10
- Cultural Mismatch 10
- Knowledge Regurgitation 10
- Beef 9
- Globalization of Hip Hop 9
- Cultural Differences 9
- Street Entrepreneurialism 8
- Repercussions 8
- Active vs. Non-active 8
- Employment 8
- Religion 7
- Consumerism 7
- Lifestyle Contradictions 7
- Negativity in Hip Hop 7
- Street Knowledge 6
- Suppositional Analysis of individuals outside of Hip Hop 6

- Sexual Orientation 6
- Observations 5
- Standards of life 4
- Stereotypes 4
- Street Language 4
- B-Boying 3
- Graffiti art 3
- Fan Culture 3
- Reactions 3
- Narratives and Counter Narratives 2
- Addressing Bias 2
- Reproduction 2
- Athletics 1
- Understandings 1
- Trust 1
- Originality in Hip Hop 1
- Deejaying 1
- Directors and Receptors 1
- Beatboxing 1

Appendix C

Problems with Hip Hop – Refined List

1. Negativity in Hip Hop (Misogyny, Violence, Drugs, Greed)

2. Reality in Hip Hop (Keepin it real)

3. Abuse of Hip Hop as a system of control


1. Most of the subjects goes back to the money

2. Hip Hop is not seen as life, but is only a way to get ahead in life

3. People's perceptions of what Hip Hop is are distorted

4. There is a consumer demand for negativity (Violence, Drugs, and Greed)

5. Beef (The Gangsterization of Hip Hop) (i.e. G-Unit) takes lives (Pac, B.I.G. etc)

6. Once Power is attained, it is abused

7. There is a formulaic script that administrators and artists stick to that creates the same old thing in Hip Hop

8. The Powerful are not acting responsibly in the changing of the formula

9. People don't keep it real (They stretch themselves to fit into the formula)

10. The promotion of misogyny to young women.

11. The police's role in Hip Hop is over extended (People snitching, but who is monitoring the so-called monitors)

12. Racial Profiling

13. Drugs

14. The Role of Hip Hop as a system of control

Appendix D

Critical Analysis Subcodes

Analyzed Systems
       Social Reproduction
       Mainstream Academic Schooling
       National Security/Authorities
       Violence
       Child rearing
       Religion
       Family
Hip Hop as a cultural system
       Misogyny
       Violence
       Drugs
       Greed
       System of Control
       Reality
       Struggles
       Bridges
              Popularity of
              Definition
              Influences
Systems of Advantage
       Economic
       Privilege
              Gender
              Racial
              Class
       Political
       Mainstream Academic
              Corporate

Appendix E

Difficulties Subcodes

Peers
  Violence
  Gangs
  Friendship/Trust
  Relationships

School
  Schoolwork Completion
  School Preparedness
  Teacher/Administrator Relationships
  School Requirements
  Violence
  Trust
  Grades

Family
  Responsibilities
  Violence
  Relationships
  Abuse
  Absence
  Forced Living Arrangements
  Loss/Death

Authorities
  Harassment
  Trust

Other
  Self-depression
  Emcee's relating to audience

Appendix F

Family Subcodes

With participant relationships
        Mother-child relationships
        Sibling Relationships
        Father-child Relationships
        Grandparents
        Extended Family Relationships (uncles, aunts, cousins)

Other Relationships
        Mother's relationships (Boyfriends)

Responsibilities
        Family responsibilities/obligations
        Living Arrangements

Work
        Mother's profession
        Father's profession

Appendix G

Impact of the Cyphers Subcodes

Individual Centered
  Consideration of position
  Vocabulary refined
  Defining of space
  Goals set/Future considered
  Increasing conscious observations
  Decreasing judgmental assessments
  Increasing possible explanations
  Increases comfort levels in MA courses
  Analyses of the unspoken or unknown
  Evolution of Understandings
  Counter-storytelling

Community Centered
  Dialogue Starter
  Building community
  Highlights Power Dynamics/Changes power dynamics
  Developed facilitator/student relationships
  Increased awareness of participants lives
  Increased awareness of systems of analysis
  Increased awareness of politics
  Broadens Authorship
  Deepens friendships/awareness of peers
  Reduces racial barriers/stereotypes
  Increases relevancy of MA courses

Appendix H

Influence of Hip Hop culture on Personal Identity subcodes

Vehicle for expression
      Shaping social commentary
      Feelings and emotions
      Providing an outlet for social commentary
      Providing an outlet for creativity
      Providing an outlet for critical analysis/cultural critique
      Providing an escape from reality
      Social outlet
      Addressing personal difficulties
      Addressing peer related difficulties
      Provides an Activity

Vehicle for definition
      Setting of Goals
      Style Influences
      Shaping likes and dislikes
      Acquisition of role models
      Acquisition of Values
      Location for self identification
      Conversation starter
      Bridging social stratifications
      Divider of families

Appendix I

Personal Values subcodes

Mental States of being
        Peace of Mind/Tranquility
        Beware the Media
        Trust in People
        Questioning/Standing up for Inequality in Society
        Questioning/Standing up to Authority
        Learn from Life Lessons
        Learn from Role Models
        Stop Snitching
        Know the Rules
        Count your blessings
        Try to stay positive
        Have a hobby
        Being Non-Judgmental
        Listen for lessons
        Listen to yourself
        Don't get too into yourself
        Self Preservation
        If you can't take the heat…
        There is a time and a place for everything

Goal oriented Values
        Achieving Financial Independence
        Mainstream Academic School Success
        Children are the future

Action related
        Non-Violence
        Give an honest effort
        Stay away from negativity
        Protect the innocent
        Be Consistent
        Leave good first impressions
        Don't Quit
        Keep it real
        Have Heart
        Be a Leader
        Just Say No to drugs
        Friendship is Key/Choose your friends wisely
            Setting goals/Identifying Priorities/Following Dreams
        Take care of Family Responsibilities
        Fight for Unity

Find an outlet/be passionate about something

Systems of belief
      Spirituality
      Feminism
      Truth and Social Justice
      Independence
      Respect
      Identity Freedom/Individuality
      Loyalty

Appendix J

Race Subcodes

Bias and Bigotry
　　　One's own Personal biases
　　　One's own Personal bigotry
　　　Other's Personal biases
　　　Other's Personal bigotry
　　　Racial Stereotypes

Oppression
　　　Individual Oppression
　　　Institutional Oppression
　　　Structural Oppression

White Supremacy
　　　Analysis of White Supremacist Individuals
　　　Analysis of White Supremacist Institutions
　　　Analysis of White Supremacist Structures

Racial Ambiguity/Postmodernist Racialized Analysis

Appendix K

School Subcodes

Problems with school

       Student (Individual) centered
            Completion of Work
            Testing
            Priorities
            Student ambivalence
       Teacher Centered
            Teacher ambivalence
            Teacher expectations
            Teacher distrust
            Authoritarianism
       Classroom Centered
            Lack of interest in curriculum
       Administration centered
       Peer Centered
       Family Centered
       Other (Inter-district Comparisons etc)

Classroom Contexts
       Student Resistance
       Cultural Connections
       Cultural disconnection
       Racial awareness
       Teacher/Student Relationships
       Critical Engagement
       Mainstream Academic Cultural Assimilation

Social Contexts
       Peer Relationships/Conflicts
       Spiritual Relationships
       Racial Identification
       Personal Choices
       Family Relationships
       Hip Hop influences

Appendix L

Brian Coding Numeration

School 21
Application of critical analysis 20
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 14
Impact of the circle 13
Systemic analysis of HHC 11
Classroom Contexts 11
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 10
Friends 10
Family Values 9
Resistance 8
Family 8
Personal Values 7
Social Contexts
Defining HHC 7
Definition of Hip Hop 7
Difficulties 7
Race 6
Problems with School 6
Deconst of Personal Ident 5
Understand own engagement with
HHC 5
Critique 5
Values in Hip Hop 5

Influences 4
Deconst of Middle Class Values 4
Reconst of Pers Ident 3
Hip Hop Content 3
Deconstruction 3
Knowledge regurgitation 3
Lifestyle choices 3
Dreams 2
Class 2
Priorities 1
Power 1
Knowledge Acquisition 1
Evolution of /History of Hip Hop 1
Misogyny 1
Repercussions 1
Connection of information to lived
culture 1
Systemic analysis of pop culture 1
Community 1
Activism 1
Criminality 1
Criticisms 1
Athletics 1

Appendix M

C.J. Coding Numeration

School 34
Application of critical analysis 28
Personal Values 24
Family 23
Social Contexts
Race 18
Difficulties 18
Family Values 14
Deconst of Pers Ident 14
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 13
Classroom Contexts
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 12
Systemic analysis of HHC 11
Priorities 10
Class 10
Deconst of Middle Class Values 9
Deconstruction 8
Values in Hip Hop 8
Problems with School 8
Defining HHC 7
Power 7
Definition of Hip Hop 6
Interests 6
Criminality 6
Responsibilities 5
Understand own engagement with
HHC 5
Critique 5
Street Knowledge 5

Dreams 4
Spirituality 4
Influences 4
Connection of information to lived
culture 4
Criticisms 3
Activism 3
Reconst of Pers Ident 3
Emceeing 3
Impact of the circle 3
Memories 2
Knowledge Acquisition 2
Violence 2
Street Entrepreneurialism 2
Lifestyle choices 2
Maturation 2
Systems of Advantage 2
Systemic analysis of pop culture 2
Analyzed Systems 2
Reiteration of personal beliefs 2
Resistance 2
Community 2
Identification 1
Repercussions 1
Street Fashion 1
Suppositional analy of individuals in
HHC 1
Mysogyny 1
Street Language 1

Appendix N

Cyrus Coding Numeration

Personal Values 34
Violence 32
School 28
Difficulties 27
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 25
Application of critical analysis 22
Values in Hip Hop 21
Problems with School 21
Criminality 16
Classroom Contexts 15
Systemic analysis of HHC 15
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 14
Family 14
Social Contexts 13
Emceeing 13
Family Values 13
Friends 12
Race 10
Responsibilities 9
Understand own engagement with
HHC 9
Interests 7
Defining HHC 7
Repercussions 6
Influences 6
Critique 6
Deconst of Pers Ident 6
Community 5
Deconst of Middle Class Values 5
Class 5

Definition of Hip Hop 5
Impact of the circle 5
Authorities 5
Beef 4
Hip Hop as a Cultural System 4
Dreams 4
Hip Hop Content 4
Criticisms 3
Deconstruction 3
Lifestyle choices 3
Reconst of Pers Ident 3
Spirituality 2
Lifestyle Contradictions 2
Misogyny 1
Reiteration of personal beliefs 1
Challenges 1
Addressing bias 1
Reactions 1
Resistance 1
Street Entrepreneurialism 1
Street Fashion 1
Sexual Orientation 1
Standards of life 1
Activism 1
Connection of information to lived
culture 1
Observations 1
Old vs. New Hip Hop 1
Power 1
Priorities 1

Appendix O

Daisy Coding Numeration

School 47
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 42
Impact of the circle 38
Application of critical analysis 33
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 28
Personal Values 27
Social Contexts 26
Classroom Contexts 25
Systemic analysis of HHC 22
Understand own engagement with
HHC 20
Family 18
Friends 17
Values in Hip Hop 16
Race 15
Critique 15
Criticisms 14
Difficulties 14
Defining HHC 14
Deconst of Middle Class Values 13
Family Values 13
Definition of Hip Hop 13
Hip Hop Content 12
Class 12
Memories 11
Activism 9
Criminality 8
Priorities 8
Deconst of Pers Ident 8
Cultural mismatch 8
Systemic analysis of pop culture 7
Reconst of Pers Ident 7
Facilitation 7
Religion 7
Connections to MAC 7
Identification 7
Misogyny 6
Knowledge regurgitation 6
Connection of information to lived
culture 6
Gender 6
Cultural differences 5

Problems with School 5
Evolution of /History of Hip Hop 5
Reiteration of personal beliefs 5
Violence 5
Influences 5
Deconstruction 4
Dreams 4
Globalization of Hip Hop 4
Active vs non active 3
Emceeing 3
Procedural 3
Materialism 3
Resistance 3
Responsibilities 3
Contradictions 3
Challenges 3
Suppositional analy of individuals in
HHC 3
Hip Hop as a Cultural System 2
Knowledge Acquisition 2
Interests 2
Old vs. New Hip Hop 2
Directors and receptors 1
Fan Culture 1
Authorities 1
Athletics 1
Reproduction 1
Sexual Orientation 1
Suppositional analy of individuals
outside HHC 1
Stereotypes 1
Problems in Hip Hop 1
Maturation 1
Addressing bias 1
Community 1
B-Boying 1
Beef 1
Commodification of Hip Hop 1
Beatboxing1
Building relationships 1
Analyzed Systems 1
Reality in Hip Hop 1

Appendix P

Destiny Coding Numeration

School 35
Application of critical analysis 27
Personal Values 23
Social Contexts
Race 17
Systemic analysis of HHC 16
Family 16
Classroom Contexts
Deconst of Middle Class Values 13
Difficulties 12
Deconst of Pers Ident 11
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 11
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 10
Family Values 10
Dreams 10
Friends 10
Materialism 9
Deconstruction 9
Problems with School 6
Reconst of Pers Ident 6
Criminality 6
Understand own engagement with HHC 6
Old vs. New Hip Hop 6
Mysogyny 5
Activism 5
Defining HHC 5
Definition of Hip Hop 5
Values in Hip Hop 5
Critique 4
Gender 4

Emceeing 3
Influences 3
Impact of the circle 3
Class 3
Authorities 2
Interests 2
Lifestyle Contradictions 2
Knowledge Acquisition 2
Criticisms 2
Analyzed Systems 2
Clarifications 2
Violence 2
Connection of information to lived culture 2
Hip Hop Content 2
Resistance 2
Lifestyle choices
Identification 1
Systems of Advantage 1
Systemic analysis of pop culture 1
Sexual Orientation 1
Production of Hip Hop 1
Community 1
Responsibilities 1
Questions 1
Suppositional analy of individuals in HHC 1
Maturation 1
Street Fashion 1
Evolution of /History of Hip Hop 1

Appendix Q

Mia Coding Numeration

Application of critical analysis 35
Family 27
School 27
Class 26
Personal Values 25
Difficulties 21
Race 20
Deconst of Middle Class Values 20
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 18
Social Contexts 18
Friends 17
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 14
Deconst of Pers Ident 14
Systemic analysis of HHC 13
Criminality 12
Problems with School 11
Reiteration of personal beliefs 11
Critique 11
Values in Hip Hop 11
Classroom Contexts 9
Family Values 9
Activism 8
Priorities 8
Criticisms 7
Misogyny 7
Deconstruction 7
Defining HHC 6
Employment 6
Spirituality 6
Systemic analysis of pop culture 6
Definition of Hip Hop 6
Influences 6
Authorities 5

Impact of the circle 5
Analyzed Systems 4
Clarifications 4
Challenges 4
Observations 4
Dreams 3
Connection of information to lived culture 3
Suppositional analy of individuals in HHC 3
Resistance 3
Reconst of Pers Ident 3
Sexual Orientation 3
Understand own engagement with HHC 2
Power 2
Knowledge Acquisition 2
Cultural differences 2
Hip Hop Content 2
Systems of Advantage 2
Violence 2
Gender 2
Responsibilities 2
Suppositional analy of individuals outside HHC 1
Globalization of Hip Hop 1
Standards of life 1
Lifestyle choices 1
Lifestyle Contradictions 1
Community 1
Reactions 1
Memories 1
Old vs. New Hip Hop 1
Questions 1

Appendix R

Mike Coding Numeration

Application of critical analysis 35
Family 27
School 27
Class 26
Personal Values 25
Difficulties 21
Race 20
Deconst of Middle Class Values 20
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 18
Social Contexts 18
Friends 17
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 14
Deconst of Pers Ident 14
Systemic analysis of HHC 13
Criminality 12
Problems with School 11
Reiteration of personal beliefs 11
Critique 11
Values in Hip Hop 11
Classroom Contexts 9
Family Values 9
Activism 8
Priorities 8
Criticisms 7
Misogyny 7
Deconstruction 7
Defining HHC 6
Employment 6
Spirituality 6
Systemic analysis of pop culture 6
Definition of Hip Hop 6
Influences 6
Authorities 5

Impact of the circle 5
Analyzed Systems 4
Clarifications 4
Challenges 4
Observations 4
Dreams 3
Connection of information to lived culture 3
Suppositional analy of individuals in HHC 3
Resistance 3
Reconst of Pers Ident 3
Sexual Orientation 3
Understand own engagement with HHC 2
Power 2
Knowledge Acquisition 2
cultural differences 2
Hip Hop Content 2
Systems of Advantage 2
Violence 2
Gender 2
Responsibilities 2
Suppositional analy of individuals outside HHC 1
Globalization of Hip Hop 1
Standards of life 1
Lifestyle choices 1
Lifestyle Contradictions 1
Community 1
Reactions 1
Memories 1
Old vs. New Hip Hop 1
Questions 1

Appendix S

Nasa Coding Numeration

School 25
Values in Hip Hop 23
Difficulties 23
Personal Values 22
Friends 19
Emceeing 18
Influence of HHC on Pers Ident 18
Problems with School 17
Application of critical analysis 16
Family 15
Criminality 13
Definition of Hip Hop 12
Defining HHC 12
Influence of HHC on Grp Ident 10
Race 7
Classroom Contexts 6
Systemic analysis of HHC 5
Social Contexts 5
Activism 5
Influences 5
Family Values 5
Responsibilities 4
Dreams 4
Resistance 3
Priorities 3
Maturation 3
Violence 3
Beef 3

Lifestyle choices 2
Cultural mismatch 2
Analyzed Systems 2
Reconst of Pers Ident 2
Cultural differences 2
Lifestyle Contradictions 2
Memories 2
Gender 2
Questions 2
Class 2
Impact of the circle 2
Repercussions 2
Clarifications 2
Deconstruction 2
Addressing bias 2
Challenges 2
Contradictions 1
Graffiti art 1
Knowledge regurgitation 1
Stereotypes 1
Deejaying 1
Street Entrepreneurialism 1
Hip Hop Content 1
Critique 1
Systemic analysis of pop culture 1
Beatboxing 1
Street Fashion 1
Reiteration of personal beliefs 1

Appendix T

Kanye West – Crack Music

[Chorus: Kanye West] + (The Game)
That's that crack music nigga
That real black music nigga
  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}
(That's that crack music nigga)
(That real black music nigga)
  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}

[Kanye West]
How we stop the Black Panthers?
Ronald Reagan cooked up an answer
You hear that?  What Gil Scott is "Heron"
When our heroes or heroines got hooked on heroin
Crack, raised the murder rate in D.C. and Maryland
We, invested in that, it's like we got Merrill Lynched
And we been hangin from the same tree, ever since
Sometimes I feel the music is the only medicine
So we, cook it, cut it, measure it, bag it
Sell it, the fiends, cop it, nowadays they can't tell if
that's that good shit, we ain't sure man
Put the CD on your tongue, yeah that's pure man

[Chorus]

[Kanye West]
From the place where the father's gone, the mothers is hardly home
And the madigon's lock us up in the Audy Home
How the Mexicans say, we just tryin to party homes
They wanna pack us all in a box like styrofoam
Who gave Saddam anthrax?
George Bush got the answers
Back in the hood it's a different type of chemical
Arm & Hammer baking soda raised they own quota
Right when our soldiers, ran for the stove cause
Cause, dreams of being Hova
Went from bein a broke man to bein a dopeman
to bein the President, look there's hope man
This that inspiration for the Moes and the folks man
Shorty come and see his momma straight overdosin
... And this is the soundtrack
This the type of music that you make when you 'round that

[Chorus]

[Kanye West]
God, how could you let this happen {*echoes*}

[harmonizing for 18 seconds]

[Kanye West]
Uhh, that's that crack music, crack music
That real black music, black music
  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}

[The Game]
That's that crack music nigga
That real black music nigga
  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}

  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}
  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}

[Kanye West]
Uhh, that's that crack music, crack music
That real black music, black music
  {La la la la la la la lahhhh, la la la la la lahhhh}
Our father, give us this day, our daily bread
Before the feds give us these days and take our daily bread
See I done did all this ol' bullshit
And to atone, I throw a lil' somethin somethin on the pulpit
We took that shit, measured it and then cooked that shit
And what we gave back, was crack, music
And now we ooze it, through they nooks and crannies
So our mommas ain't got to be they, cooks and nannies
And we gon' repo everything they ever took from grammy
Now the former slaves trade hooks, for Grammy's
This dark diction, has become America's addiction
Those who ain't even black use it
We gon' keep baggin up this here, crack music

Appendix U

E 40 – White Gurl Lyrics

{*"White girl" continues to repeat 8X in background*}
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiiite girl

[E-40] Girl girl {*8X*}

[E-40]
I throw the yola in the pot, let it simmer and bathe
Add a little baking soda, make it foam like aftershave
I like to serve my dope wet, cause it weigh a hella lot mo'
You can smell the residue and the fumes from next do'
Ughhh, turf superstar, microwaves and pickle jars
Portable digital scales, custom painted muscle cars
Pimpin where the razor blade? Use a safety pin
What they goin fo'? Nigga what you tryin to spend?
When it's a drought I just sit on my dope and wait
for the prices to skyrocket and rise like real estate
I got that ice cream, that candy, that girl, that white white white
My car's a Charger 2006 Hemme, tight tight tight
I'm a d-boy, BOOTCH, I thought you knew
Just like ehhhhhhhhhhh'ry motherfucker in my crew (BEOTCH!)
Bundle in the bushes, chopper up in the tree
AK'll light up your chest like E.T.

[E-40] White girl {*4X*}

{*"White girl" continues to repeat 12X in background*}
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiiite girl

[Juelz Santana]
Uhh, now let me introduce the world to my girl
She white, she bright, she shine like a pearl
And I ain't talkin 'bout Lindsay Lohan
I'm talkin 'bout that sniff that blow man, what that
one hit that'll get you open
Might make your nose bleed, if it's potent
So if you're not ready, homey don't tamper with it
She the chick who had Tony Montana slippin
She so bad she make you mad
But soon as you get mad, she make you cash

That white girl, but she ain't always that light
She ain't always that bright, she ain't always that white
Nope; gimme one girl, I mean one gram
I'll teach how to give a white girl a suntan
Put it in that pot, 'til it get that hot
Then start to Sir Mix-A-Lot

[E-40] White girl {*4X*}

{*"White girl" continues to repeat 12X in background*}
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiite girl

[E-40] Oooh!

[Bun B]
Well down in the Dirty, South to be exact
Gettin money with white girls is a well-known fact
I like 'em black, brown, Puerto Rican or Asian
But nothin bring the bread back like a caucausian
Whether, winter fall, summer or spring
A white girl's always down for doin the damn thing (fo' sho')
Put her on the highway, she ain't no punk
Got a white girl drivin with white girls in the trunk (hold up)
I ain't lyin, it's the best thing goin
When my white girl's around, it's always snowin
Momma cain't stand her, tellin me to switch
Sayin I'ma go to jail fuckin with that white bitch (no shit)
Always around to keep me paid
With some white girls on my team, I got it made
So if you down on your luck, and got no money
Then do what I do (what?) go get you a snow bunny mayne a

[E-40] White girl {*4X*}

{*"White girl" continues to repeat 12X in background*}
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiite girl
I got that, whiiiiiiiiiite girl

[Pimp C]
I got the Pyrex workin with the white girl in it
It's the dope Superbowl and nigga I'm 'bout to win it
No question marks or commas, nigga we got the scarma
When we through with this batch, we goin out to the Bahamas

I keep them stiff broads when I'm fuckin with the hogs
Cause they never get stopped by the motherfuckin cops
Bootch look hard but the bitch is a fraud
Don't like to see me ball, want me to go rock a rock
Move around bitch, you need to get out the way
I keep a young Suzy when it's time to move yay
You need to learn the game befo' you try to play
Cause like Calgon, them laws'll take you away
So I keep me a snow bunny, ridin in the front
With a triple zillion head and a platinum cunt
Ya already know they eat nuts like a squirrel
Let me hit ya in your ass and bust nuts in your curl
White girl {*laughing*} bitch!

Appendix V

Blackalicious – Shallow Days Lyrics

I just keep moving on... (moving on...)
I just keep moving on... (moving on...)

time and time, a brother asks why
the rhyme is not laced with a gangsta touch
I said "Simply because I don't live that way
still kickin' them rhymes rugged and rough"
"But that won't sell,
cause you gotta keep it real
so that we can feel
where you're coming from
Because these streets is ill so if you ain't
killing niggas in rhymes
your whole sound's just bubble gum"
I said "I won't contribute to genocide;
I'd rather try to cultivate the inner side
and try to evolve the frustrated ghetto mind
The devil and his army never been a friend of mine
"But niggas don't wanna hear that shit" said the brother
who was obviously totally misled and yelled out
"murder murder, kill, murder" instilled in the influential (walks ?)
of our kids' heads

shallow days, you never wanna
let a brother be a brother
fully inner to the outer
caught up in all them hollow nights
can't escape cause everywhere that I look
people front, and it just ain't right
(repeat)

I said "Don't you know the powers that be
are using people as pawns, devouring we
until they see us all gone and outta the scene"
and as I passed the chronic, he said "look at where I be,
I tried to get a job for real,
but all the homies (hit licks?) and rob and steal
and keep fat pockets caught in a rut to catch ground
this way's in, plus who could you trust?
I said "I'm all about protecting mine,
but neglecting minds for getting left behind.
Why don't you change your environment?"

He said "This is all I know,
plus my fam's all that I got, I can't go"
I said "You gotta make it for the fams"
"Damn," he said "I didn't make the ghetto,
The ghetto made the man"
I said "You're more than just that,"
shook his hand, said "Damn, you gotta find a way
to break the devil's master plan, peace"

shallow days, you never wanna
let a brother be a brother
fully inner to the outer
caught up in all them hollow nights
can't escape cause everywhere that I look
people front, and it just ain't right
(repeat)

The word "peace" is just an expression
used to say bye when it's time to jet
and them red black and green medallions
was all just part of the trend, I guess
Hardly ever them around brothers' necks no more
Instead of that gold (gats ?)
inspiring gangstas and macks
who at the young age of four
be seeing more drama than war veterans
instead of learning God's laws
and hip-hop is ((all the ways ?) till we enlist that ??)
to express how we be feeling about this and that
but music does reflect life
and kids look up to what you're portraying
and mimic what you act like
It's time for a new day
an era in rap, conscious styles,
makin' them aware of the happenings
but their ears seem more steered towards
self-annihilation so then they might laugh
and write this off, like I'm out here just
blowing wind, maybe label us soft or unreal,
something they just can't feel, while they yell
"murder murder murder, kill kill kill"

I just keep movin' on (moving on ...)
I just keep movin' on (moving on ...)

shallow days / hollow nights

Appendix W

Cyrus – Unheard Voices Lyrics

Chorus:
When you talk they listen
You getting locked behind your own words like you in prison
I ain't dissin, pay attention homie listen

The ice let me break it
No way you're gonna make it
Talk about the gang bang
But you're only fakin'
You're more vulnerable than a gangsta that's naked
And when it all falls down, ya'll the first to start breakin
So I'm here to break it down and start name takin
Let's keep it real B, ain't none of us gang bangin
Think y'all doin it big kuz your names is changin
But the big the only thing big is them lies y'all be sayin
You need to quit playin and be about your business
I don't even know why y'all would begin this
But now it's time to end it
Kuz the number of people involved
Is down right tremendous
My style is relentless
Now listen to the voice of those you've offended

(Chorus)

Don't try to say I'm disrespecting
I'm simply defending those you've offended
Stop the nonsense is what I'm recommending
And maybe one day we'll make a new commandment
And it'll read:
Thou shall not use Hip Hop for Negativity
Since I can't teach you physically or mentally
I'm hopin to get through to you realistically
And lyrically shed some positive light in your life
And hopefully next time you'll start it off right,
Kuz you're messin with guys whose life belongs to the street
They ain't got nothing to lose so they'll let you feel the heat
They won't hesitate or think too much,
Next thing you know the coroner is baggin you like a sack lunch
You may laugh and call this a joke
But what's gonna happen when it's you on the floor
Now listen to the voice of those you've offended

(Chorus)

Your nine is your mic
Their mic is a nine
So you know they ain't gonna hit you back with a punch line
You may have funny lines, but you need to get your mind right
I know actin hard kuz right now you in the limelight
But when I arrive you gonna be beggin for a nightlight
The street life is not a life you live
So I don't know why you makin songs talking bout you is
This isn't a diss, it's more like a lesson
So pay attention to the issue I'm addressin
You're not makin a very good first impression
So you need to be more careful with yo word selection
Take a look in the mirror
Check your reflection
There's no gang in the world that you're representin
My lyrical flows are not ones to be tested
Now listen to the voice of those you've offended

(Chorus)

let the killer be killed, the rapper be rapped
messing with the streets, will get you capped

I'M OUT

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