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# Re/presentation Of Hip-Hop: An Exploration Of White Hip-Hop Fans, Consumers And Practitioners

Dale Compton Anderson
*Wayne State University,*

**RE/PRESENTATION OF HIP-HOP: AN EXPLORATION OF WHITE HIP-HOP FANS, CONSUMERS AND PRACTITIONERS**

by

**DALE ANDERSON**

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## DEDICATION

I am dedicating this to my uncle, Wade Telaar, and my Grandparents, Leon and Doris Anderson.

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## CHAPTER 1 "INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO 1520 SEDGWICK[1]"

*It's a brisk fall day as I stand on the asphalt court waiting for others to come join me for a game of basketball. I am wearing black-on-black Nike Cortez shoes with worn out soles, the biggest pair of jeans I could find at JC Penny's – the label husky doesn't bother me any longer, it is the look I want – a dirt stained tee-shirt and a fairly new fitted Miami Hurricanes hat. My hands are also darkened by the dirt transferred to my body and clothing from the indoor/outdoor rubber basketball I dribble between periodic shots at the hoop. I imagine my look as cool. By mimicking the apparel choices of my favorite rappers, I was more "hip-hop."*

*The hoop is two metal circles fused together with a chain-link net hanging from it. The backboard is rusty with its white paint severely chipped. There are cracks in the court that serve as the line from which we shoot free-throws or determine what basket is worth three points and which is worth only two. As recess starts for the other fifth and sixth grade classes, my friends join me on this filthy paradise. My friend Howie is rocking his Howard University windbreaker. Howie is a fellow sixth grader, black and is looked to as a leader by the others in our fifth and sixth grade building because of his athletic ability and size.*

*Nearly six feet tall, Howie towers over my barely 5'2" frame. As he rebounds my errant shot, he says to me, "Fresh hat."*

*I reply back, "I'll trade you for that jacket." I didn't know the significance of Howard University. I didn't know where Howard University was. I didn't know Howard was a HBCU. If it wasn't for the Cosby Show spin off, A Different World, I'm not even sure I would have any idea that predominantly black colleges existed. All I knew was that jacket was cool.*

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[1] 1520 Sedgwick the location of a housing project that DJ Kool Herc used to throw a party. This party is pointed to by many, including some scholars cited in the dissertation, as the first hip-hop party.

Trading clothing items was not an unusual activity for me during my middle school and high school years. The significance of this particular trade, however, rests in the unwitting act of appropriation in which I was engaged. I was not just a little white kid wearing a symbol of hip-hop culture; I was wearing a symbol of African American self-determination. While hip-hop culture should never be considered a synonym of African American culture (Kitwana, 1995), this typical youth act of exchanging goods underscores the important convergence of these cultures. It also underscores the ways in which race becomes central to all hip-hoppers.

The impetus for me to conduct this research project is the convergence of race and hip-hop that I have experienced in my life as a white hip-hop fan. Hip-hop is strongly rooted in African American culture and is clearly part of the African Diaspora (Hebdige, 1987; Rose, 1994; Keyes, 2002; Chang, 2005). I have been shaped by hip-hop culture and music in terms of my race and social consciousness, in subtle ways as a youth and more explicit ways as I've matured. While the intersection of race and music consumption sits at the center of this project, I also take into account larger questions about hip-hop as a culture and the perspective of white hip-hoppers toward issues of race. Because African American culture is deeply embedded in the origins of hip-hop, race/ethnicity has become a central concern for an authentic hip-hop identity. While McLeod (1999) identifies race as an important aspect to being perceived as authentic, there are also a number of other dimensions to hip-hop authenticity[2]. I will investigate the re/presentation and conceptions of hip-hop authenticity, white hip-hoppers' reflections on race, and hip-hop as a culture/subculture/community through my impressions from the field research and extended participation as a white hip-hopper to explore the intersection of race and hip-hop authenticity in the digital age.

[2] When I speak of authenticity, I am solely concerned with hip-hop authenticity. I am not concerned with a general understanding of authenticity.

In this chapter, I explain my intent in terms of my writing and methodological choices and provide a brief overview of existing scholarly literature on hip-hop. I conclude this chapter by previewing the dissertation. The interaction with hip-hop by whites is the crux of my dissertation. I focus on how white hip-hoppers conceive of themselves, hip-hop, and race. I examine all of this while also noting the current state of the ever changing tapestry of hip-hop culture. I have followed the traditional qualitative social scientific model, while taking measures to present my information in a way that holds true to my ideals and the ideals of hip-hop.

## Disclosing My Intent

"Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless - like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup, you put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle, you put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend." – Bruce Lee[3]

*Bruce Lee's famous quote about blending martial art styles is blasting out of the speakers of my green Jeep Compass. The Compass is missing its headlight covers, both taken out by my distracted pulling out of parking spots. I am constantly distracted while driving; constantly thinking about how the excessively loud music coming from the stock speakers in this station wagon can be reshaped into scholarship. We are all producers of knowledge, it is the reshaping – or could be better described as re-contextualizing – of knowledge that is the obligation of the scholar. Lee's philosophy provides the underpinnings of my own scholarly voice. I, as an ethnographer, desire fluidity.*

*The sampling of Lee's voice frames how I listen to L.E. for the Uncool's track "Life Excessiveness." Naledge[4] is featured on the first verse of this hypnotic track. His appearance on the track is so fitting because knowledge, like water, is shapeless. The presentation of knowledge*

[3] Bruce Lee from an 1971 interview by Pierre Berton (originally aired in 1994)
[4] Pronounced "knowledge"

*will determine the shape of the knowledge and all too often the presentation will shape how people value that knowledge.*

Like Lee, hip-hop is fluid like water. The meanings derived from hip-hop flow through its members, taking shape in each hip-hopper. Through Van Maanen's (1988) impressionist tales, I reveal the receptacle for the water. I use impressionist tales to reveal myself as an active participant in the story (p. 102). Through these tales I divulge that I am not a passive observer or an extra in the scene. I am involved and visible. I provide a rendering of my experience through vivid, rich description.

In the impressionist tales, I hope to expose my very particular receptacle. I am tasked with pouring knowledge from the bottle of hip-hop into the cup of dissertation formatting. Though in a different receptacle, the knowledge that was shared with me through my experience as a hip-hopper, my observations in the field, and from the other participants of the community is the same. To do proper justice to hip-hop as a source of knowledge and not simply to treat it as an artifact of analysis, I am writing this piece not as scholarship on hip-hop but as hip-hop scholarship. By hip-hop scholarship I mean, that there is evidence of hip-hop traditions in my writing and data collection, such as sampling different methods.

Before establishing the epistemological foundations of hip-hop and my perspective on social scientific data collection and presentation, I want to parse out the difference between scholarship on hip-hop and hip-hop scholarship. While certainly important, scholarship on hip-hop is the imposition of the academic paradigm onto the artistic outputs that make up hip-hop's cultural productions. Imposing a theoretical lens from outside the community is vital to contextualization of the culture; however, it is my position that any culture needs to be presented using its own epistemological framework. To this end in my dissertation, I seek to create a piece

of hip-hop, as well as a piece of scholarship, i.e. hip-hop scholarship. I am influence by my adherence to a hip-hop scholastic perspective, including everything from my data collection methods to my data presentation choices.

I made two methodological choices during my research that attempt to move my dissertation toward hip-hop scholarship. The first choice was adhering to ethnographic methods for studying hip-hop community. I use ethnographic research methods to empower the voice of the hip-hop participants, so that they are not being theorized about but theorized with. As encouraged by Dimitriadis (2001) and Potter (1995), as well as seen in the work of Rose (1994), Kitwana (2005), Rodriquez (2006), Harrison (2009), Harkness (2010) and Jeffries (2011), hip-hop scholarship greatly benefits from an open exchange with hip-hop's participants. I use my scholarship to contribute to this rich tradition. Second, I want to join with the tradition of hip-hop scholarship in my data collection and presentation choices. With my presentation, I adhere to the transactional epistemological framework that is set forth by hip-hoppers. Hip-hoppers—through sampling, cultural homage in lyrics and art, and other means—have created a transactional dialog between communities, generations, and other genres. I lean heavily on sampling different data types to provide a fully sketched picture of the culture and its participants. I use my methodological "sampler… [to allow for] cultural criticism to save isolated moments and then juxtapose them as a final product" (Rice, 2003). I splice together autoethnographic vignettes—which appear in italics to distinguish them from my other findings[5]—with ethnographic prose, made up from participant observation, interviews, and white emcees' lyrics functioning as cultural artifacts, into a singular layered account of findings. This presentation at times resembles the

[5] The purpose of the italics is to indicate that the information presented occurred prior to my data collection. To that end, the vignettes presenting my findings from the field will be without italics.

masterful musical genesis of DJ Premier[6] and at other times reads as abrasively as the minimalist, punk inspired production of Tyler, the Creator[7] but it always embraces the singular vision of a well-executed hip-hop track. While being rigorous in my data collection, I remain committed to what robert karimi[8] (2006), calls a "sampled consciousness". For Karimi, sampled consciousness is the act of taking experiences, from others or oneself, to create a unified self-expression (pp. 222-223). By drawing from my own experiences and incorporating the experiences of my participants, I exhibit in my dissertation an oscillation between my participants and my own experiences/perspectives to accurately convey my impressions of white hip-hoppers. I use a sampled consciousness approach to adhere to the, aforementioned, transactional epistemological framework embedded in hip-hop.

I have implemented particular methodological and presentational styles that fit with hip-hop's tradition of empowering the voice of the people. Methodologically speaking I attempt to balance my participants' perspective with my perspective as the researcher by using ethnographic methods, placing ethnographic findings alongside autoethnographic vignettes. By treating my voice and my participants' voices as comparable, I am attempting remove the power embedded in my academic gaze. I am also using this writing style to link to the hip-hop epistemological foundation of "edutainment[9]" (Watkins, 2005, p. 241). Some hip-hop artists seeks to educate via entertainment, I intend to entertain via scholarship.

I preface this entire dissertation with this short overview of my positionality as a researcher, interpretivist, and participant, not because the information does not fit anywhere else. While I

[6] Producer/DJ for hip-hop duo GangStarr and has produced for many emcees including Jay-Z and Nas.
[7] Producer/Emcee and Leader of the Los Angeles based hip-hop collective Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All
[8] Written stylistically with no capital letters
[9] The term "edutainment" is a reference to the position that entertainment should educate. It linked to Boogie Down Production emcee, KRS-One.

expand on these concepts later in my dissertation, I want to take a moment to point out my intentions. First, I feel it is vitally important that the entire work reads as closely to creative non-fiction as possible. Though I am a social scientist and am committed to ensuring my data is trustworthy, I refuse to delude myself into thinking that I am the only provider of knowledge participating in my dissertation. Through the discourse between the text and reader, I intend to create new understandings of hip-hop. Second, it is equally important to me that this dissertation, from the introduction to the final period, be read as a re/presentation—re/presentation of my identity, re/presentation of my participants, and a re/presentation of white hip-hoppers' re/presentation of an authentic hip-hop identity. I address these issues in this introduction, because it is important to me to be transparent throughout about my intentions.

The bass line[10] that brings this dissertation together is its narrative. Humans are "homo narrans" (Fisher, 1984). The narration of reality, through our words and actions, is another source that compels me to employ ethnographic data collection methods. It is the alternative narrative present in hip-hop that has made it so captivating to academia for the past 20 plus years (Rose, 1994; Potter, 1995; Stapleton, 1998, Dimitriadis, 2001; Keyes, 2002; Perry, 2004; and Dyson, 2007). The centrality of narrative to hip-hop makes ethnography the ideal method for investigation of hip-hop's participants. While narrative is central to hip-hop, hip-hop narrative decentralizes the source of power. Hip-hop began as a subculture of resistance that continues to provide alternatives to the dominant narrative, such as the long legacy in hip-hop of criticizing policing of African American neighborhoods.

The hip-hop waters are altered in shape by receptacle each hip-hopper holds their perceptions of hip-hop. To make my dissertation cup as similar to my participants' bottles as

[10] Bass line reference to hip-hop producers' use of bass to drive the instrumental portion of a song.

possible, I cannot simply collect narratives but I must perform them. I perform them in my behaviors in the field which shape my data. As suggested by Pollock (1998), performative writing is difficult. Despite this difficulty, I aspire to the spirit of performative writing in my dissertation to make me, the researcher, visible to the readers of the research. I use the term's spirit because I have not fully adopted the established devices, seen in Pelias (2005), Spry (2001), among others; rather, I desire to achieve an alternative relationship with the readers and the text using means that are comfortable to my own writing style. Arranging words on a page to resemble poetic verse or use formatting to illustrate difference locates the writing/writer creatively, thus distancing the writer's position of the objective research/scholar. While I do not use these approaches, I make conscious word/storytelling choices to re/situate my researcher self.

Conquergood's (1991) question: "what are the differences between reading an analysis of fieldwork data, and hearing the voice from the field interpretive filtered through the voice of the researcher?" (p. 190) was in the front of my mind as I crafted my findings. To avoid the lofty positionality of the omniscient observer, I aim to couple Van Maanen's (1988) "realist tales" with vibrant "impressionist tales" to accentuate the "doing" of the fieldwork. The impressionist tales, will allow me to maintain a commitment to the truth while exposing that this truth is relative. Additionally, I approach my dissertation as a process, thus my writing often resembles a wave crashing back upon itself as I revisit my preconceptions. What appears to be repetitive is a stylistic choice to re/present how my thoughts progress. I revisit a concept and add to it frequently throughout my dissertation in order to demonstrate that gaining knowledge requires movement between existing perceptions and new information. At times, I re/present my findings by utilizing a stream of consciousness approach to demonstrate how that information is organized in my own mind.

I view my dissertation as ***A*** perspective on contemporary hip-hop and not **THE**[11] perspective on white hip-hoppers. According to Pollock (1998), "[w]riting that embodies this kind of subjectivity tends to subject the reader to the writer's reflexivity, drawing their respective subject-selves reciprocally and simultaneously into critical 'intimacy" (p. 86). Using a creative (non)fiction[12] writing style, inspired by the spirit of performative writing, allows me to displace the power of the social scientific voice. Placing my own narrative, alongside my field data and re/presenting them as a fluid and unique interpretation, I allow space for the readers to access individual interpretive filters. Thus my whiteness and my hip-hopness become artifacts for analysis by the readers.

## Overview of Hip-Hop Scholarship

Hip-hop is constantly evolving, changing, expanding and branching out (Foreman, 2004a, p. 1). I evaluate hip-hop in its contemporary setting, so when placed alongside previous hip-hop scholarship the changes in hip-hop can be seen. While I look at race and cultural organization, the literature about hip-hop culture has a diverse range of foci. In chapter 2, I outline previous hip-hop research most relevant to my data.

To date, the focus of hip-hop researchers ranges from production and technology (Bartlett, 1994/2004; Dery, 1990/2004; Schumacher, 1995/2004) to sociological theorizing about the culture (Dyson, 1993/2004; McLeod, 1999; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). While I am not focused on the musical/technical aspect of the culture, a major theme that emerged from white hip-hoppers that participated in my study stated that skill or musical/technical merit is valued as authentic.

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[11] It is my position that a definitive work is impossible; however I do not want to diminish my contribution to the area of research. As seen in my Method Chapter, a great deal of rigor was built into my study and is not simply my opinion.

[12] I place the "non" in parentheses as a visual representation of my desire to re/present my findings as subjective truth. While my research is grounded in empirical observation, I present the facts utilizing narrative flair and metaphoric representation.

Prior researchers' work about the culture of hip-hop can be divided into eight different trajectories. I am influenced by many of these trajectories, in terms of my theorizing, data collection, and analysis. For this reason it is not only important to provide an overview of the literature, it is necessary to designate specific categories. Researchers often blur the lines of these trajectories and apply multiple areas in one piece. However, they must be identified to place this project within the body of hip-hop literature. The first trajectory that I identified is research that documents the history of hip-hop culture and its origins (see Chang, 2005; Dyson, 2004; Hebdige, 1987; Keyes, 2002; Rose, 1994; Stapleton, 1998). The next is made up of the works that focus on hip-hop's roots in African Diaspora, African American culture, and how it affects the African American community (see Ards, 1999/2004; Dyson, 2007; Foreman, 2004b; Hebdige, 1987; Keyes, 2002; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994; Samuels, 1991/2004; Watkins, 2005). Another critical trajectory I found is hip-hop research that analyzes the mainstreaming of hip-hop through growing commercialization and the subsequent commodification of the culture (see McLeod, 1999; Ogbar, 2007; Potter, 1995; Rose, 1994; Samuels, 1991/2004; Stapleton, 1998; Swedeburg, 1992/2004;). Gender, sexism, and sexuality represent an important area of not only academic writings, but also of many journalistic ventures (see Keyes, 2002; Morgan, 2000; Rose, 1994 & 2008). As indicated by Foreman (2004a) hip-hop is a culture of resistance, and there has been a great deal of research attempting to explain this phenomenon (see Ards, 1999/2004; Dyson, 1993/2004; Kitwana, 1995; Lusane, 1993/2004; Potter, 1995).

While I am informed by each of these previously mentioned trajectories in my investigation of white hip-hoppers, the remaining trajectories play a more critical role. Scholars dealing with space, globalization, and localization of hip-hop (see Baldwin, 1999/2004; Bennett, 1999b; Foreman, 2004b; Hebdige, 1987) provide nuance of how location influences hip-hop identity and

how the global spread of hip-hop allows for hybridity in identity. While each of these trajectories frame my findings, I have a direct dialogue with the final two trajectories – authenticity and racial identity (see Judy, 1994/2004; Kitwana, 2005; Lusane, 1993/2004; McLeod, 1999; Ogbar, 2007; Potter, 1995; Rose, 1994; Sullivan, 2003; Swedenburg, 1992/2004) and white consumption/appropriation of hip-hop (Baldwin, 1999/2004; Cutler, 1999; Hess, 2005; Potter, 1995; Rose, 1994; Rodriquez, 2006; Samuels, 1991/2004; Stapleton, 1998; Sullivan, 2003; Thompson & Brown, 2002; Watkins, 2005; Zillman et al., 1995) in my research.

## Charting My Dissertation

*I received my bachelor's degree less than a week ago in the mail and now I am sitting in a graduate level research class being asked to construct a method paper. As I walk home from class, it strikes me that research about myself, and those like me, would make for an original study. I have classified myself as qualitative researcher, mostly due to paradigmatic concerns that are characterized by my discomfort with the idea of generalizing about others. When I walk through the door on this cold winter day, I begin to organize the outline for what would become my dissertation. I would later fill in the necessary knowledge about theory and data collection, but for now I am just excited about the potential of collecting white hip-hopper's perspectives on race.*

I conceived of this project several years prior to my first PhD course and is drafted years after my last interviews and observations. During this time, I continued to view and review my data, causing a shift in my analysis. In my research, I discuss my social scientific impressions of the slice of hip-hop I experienced through my ethnographic fieldwork and my own life experience. I have five chapters in my dissertation, layered with ethnographic data, autoethnographic vignettes, cultural studies scholarship—particularly Critical Race Studies and subculture/post-subculture theory—and hip-hop research.

In the next chapter, I establish my theoretical lens. I have broken the theoretical lens chapter into sections that relate to each of my five research questions, with the two RQs dealing with authenticity proposed together at the end of one section and two RQs dealing with race at the end of another. I will also examine Critical Race Theory, focusing on the concept of whiteness, and review the tension between subculture theory and post-subculture theory. Also, I use chapter 2 to introduce potential contributions my research can make to the body of literature involving whiteness and hip-hop and conclude by restating the questions that drove my research.

Following my theoretical lens chapter, I set up my method for data collection. Chapter 3 provides the reasoning behind my methodological choices. However, I also explicitly lay out the steps followed for my data collection, the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of my data, and the stylistic choices made to present my data. This is followed by chapter 4, the display of my findings, which consists of ethnographic data and my autoethnographic vignettes.

I conclude my dissertation with the implications of my findings. In my conclusion, I directly relate my findings to my research questions by way of my theoretical lens. In the discussion chapter, I reflect on the limitations of my research and the potential for future research in this area.

## CHAPTER 2"THEORETICAL LENS: VINTAGE CAZEL FRAMES[13]"

*The brim of my sweat-stained, low-profile climbing hat is tilted ever so slightly to the right, as I walk into the classroom. As the instructor explains the incongruent title of the text and the course, my mind starts wandering back to my dissertation project. I am only halfway attending to her explanation of critical cultural studies. I begin to peruse the book to see what writings makeup this reader, she has assigned. My mind is filled with expectations created by the titles of the chapters and how they fit into my dissertation. Despite some of the readings in the Cultural Studies Reader being about subculture and cultural consumption, I am not fully grasping how central the theorists in this text will be to my ability to properly analyze my findings in the field. I should not be taking this so nonchalantly because the pages I am thumbing through will become absolutely vital to my dissertation. They are the foundation of my theoretical lens.*

I establish my theoretical lens in this chapter, as well as present existing hip-hop scholarship. I have broken the chapter into four distinct sections that pose my research questions (RQ) and review the literature related to each RQ. The first section addresses literature pertinent to understanding how hip-hop should be viewed. This is followed by a discussion of the origins of hip-hop and establishing hip-hop authenticity. Next, I define whiteness to better understand my participants' race. Finally, I reflect on my potential contribution to the body of scholarship and restate my research questions.

### Hip-Hop Culture(s)/Community

While not the initial focus of my dissertation, white hip-hoppers' understanding of hip-hop as a culture, subculture, and/or community[14] is crucial for shaping my impressions of white hip-

[13] Glasses made popular by Jam Master Jay, DJ for rap group Run DMC
[14] I use multiple terminologies for hip-hop structure throughout the dissertation to reflect the multiplicity of relationships my participants had with the hip-hop.

hoppers and my behaviors as a hip-hop fan. For this reason, I draw from previous literature on the origins and development of hip-hop.

**Hip-Hop's Development**

The introductory chapter is titled "Introduction: Welcome to 1520 Sedgwick," a place long considered the public debut of the musical form now known as hip-hop music (Chang, 2005, p. 77; Hess, 2010, p. 5). Despite my use of 1520 Sedgwick as a symbol for the introduction of hip-hop to the world, scholars that have documented the history of the culture create clear links to the African diaspora. The South Bronx may have been the birthplace but it was Caribbean dancehall music and culture that fertilized the seed from which hip-hop grew.

Two of the four artistic elements associated with hip-hop culture have direct ties to music culture in the West Indies. The residents of Kingston, Jamaica, and all over the West Indies, as early as the 1960s, would watch "cats" toasting and deejaying at parties, but little did they know that these two artistic expressions would become the foundation for emceeing and deejaying, (Hebdige, 1987; Rose, 1994; Ogg & Upshal, 2001; Keyes, 2002; Chang, 2005). Once toasting and deejaying made its migration to the Bronx, New York, they were joined with b-boying or breakdancing and graffiti art, the visual art form associated with hip-hop culture (Hebdige, 1987; Rose, 1994; Ogg & Upshal, 2001; Keyes, 2002; Chang, 2005). These four elements became the foundation of hip-hop and the point where fashion and other hip-hop activities coalesced.

While the elements of hip-hop are important, hip-hop is not merely the practice of its elements or the artifacts those elements generate. Murray Foreman (2004a) points out that "hip-hop [should] be seen as a series of social practices with an evolved history and ongoing potential to challenge both social norms and legal structure" (p. 1). Scholarship on hip-hop, along with my lived experience, led me to view hip-hop culture as "social practices," including fashion, language,

lifestyle, politics, and consumption. I view these practices as complex expressions that oscillate between individuality and collective identity. It is the previously mentioned elements of hip-hop that influence and direct these social practices of hip-hoppers. There is also a long history of resistance in the art and social practices of hip-hop that create the unique environment to look at whites and their hip-hop authenticity. Even though hip-hoppers adhere to a particular style and ideology (Hebdige, 1987, p. 136), as illustrated in the findings, my participants identified multiple hip-hop cultures/communities. Thus, a wide spectrum of behaviors and norms fall under the hip-hop tent.

*Hebdige's essentialized perspective of hip-hop to its attitudinal expression is reflected in my face and my movements as I walk through the mall. The brim on my Vancouver Canucks snapback is slammed down just above my eyes, covering my eyebrows. Below the yellow brim of my hat is an ice-cold stare mimicking the ones seen on my favorite rappers in my favorite rap videos. I walk into FYE in my Timberland style hiking boots and immediately walk to the Rap/R&B section to sift through the CDs. As I decide to purchase EPMD's Back in Business album. I hear a conversation between two employees talking about "w***ers."*[15] *I narcissistically believe that they are speaking about my friend and me. As I decide against starting an altercation, I feel forced into a state of identity negotiation that my teenage self is ill equipped to take on. Now nearly double in age, I want to tell my 17 year old self to shout at the two FYE employees, "I'm not trying to be black, I'm trying to be hip-hop. You f'n racists."*

Cultural practices established the subculture I identified with as a teen. In my mind I was resisting cultural norms; in retrospect it was merely the commodification of hip-hop I was

[15] I refuse to type out what is popularly known as "the N-word"; it will appear in this paper as "n***a" or "n***er". By logical extension I also refuse to type out the word that refers to white appropriators of black style; it will appear in this paper as "w***er."

presenting. Before moving on to the examination of the resistant nature of subculture, I would like to preface the relationship between African American culture and hip-hop. Though the ties between African American culture and hip-hop are clear, Kitwana (1995) indicates the importance of defining terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. "For the sake of clarity… analysis of rap music must distinguish between rap music and hip-hop culture; popular culture and black culture; and hip-hop culture and black culture" (p. 11). Rap music is part of hip-hop culture but does not represent the entirety of the culture's social practices. *Hip-hop music* and *rap music* are used synonymously despite a debate about their differences; this debate can be seen in my participants' conceptions of hip-hop authenticity[16]. Not pointed out by Kitwana but equally important is the difference between African American and black or black American. The former is an ethnic distinction; the latter is an assigned racial category. The difference is recognized but again I use these terms interchangeably for the sake of bringing together different perspectives found in the literature.

*While my annexing of hip-hop style was not a direct attempt at being black, it was definitely an affront to what society expects from presentations of whiteness[17]. I know now, but did not see it then, that my identity performance could only be correctly analyzed through a critical race lens. As my sixth grade self-traded Howie's Howard jacket back to him, this temporary, and unwitting, theft of "blackness" by way of hip-hop was over. It was far from the first and last time that I would be the perpetrator of such a crime. Just as hip-hop is deeply rooted in African American culture,*

[16] As found during my research this division between rap music and hip-hop music is not a very useful dichotomy for understanding the hip-hop. Also there is a lack of substantial academic literature that addresses this argument so I will use hip-hop and rap as roughly synonymous.

[17] As will be argued in this dissertation, despite being perceived – or even a purposeful attempt – as acting black, white hip-hoppers are still performing whiteness.

*my perceptions of my racialized performance are deeply entrenched in the influence of hip-hop culture.*

**Subculture as an Arm of Critical Cultural Studies**

*It is my eighth birthday. I walk through the record store looking though cassette tapes. My uncle always took me and my brothers out to lunch and to pick out presents for our birthdays. As I thumb through rows and rows of cassettes locked in the anti-theft plastic that triples the size of the case, I run across a tape cover with a man standing on the hood of a car. This man, dressed in mostly black with a Kangol[18] bucket hat, red tee-shirt, and third generation Nike Air Jordan sneakers, is leaning against a fence with a gold chain draped around his neck. I want this tape, I know nothing about what is on this tape but I want this tape.*

*LL Cool J's[19]* Bigger and Deffer (BAD) *album marked my entry into being a consumer of hip-hop culture, or at least what I long believed to be hip-hop culture. While most kids my age point to Michael Jackson as the artist on the "BAD album," I personally think of LL first. It is this simple act of consumption that marks the importance of power and culture.*

Selecting LL Cool J's *Bigger and Deffer* was my entry into the community of white hip-hop consumption. Cultural studies theorists provide a useful lens to look at consumption. I will address this substantial body of research by looking at subcultural theory and post-subcultural theory but let me first provide an explanation of core concepts of the cultural studies field.

According to Clarke et al. (1976), "culture is the way, the forms, in which groups 'handle' the raw material of their social and material existence" (p. 10). Hebdige (1979) distinguishes between this anthropological definition of culture and aesthetic/value based definition of culture, for example being versed in opera, ballet and literature makes a person "cultured." (pp. 6-9). I will

[18] A hat company that was a symbol of hip-hop style in the 1980s and today.
[19] A popular rap artist that was signed to Def Jam records.

be discussing culture from a perspective of communal existence throughout my dissertation. I discuss hip-hop more as a genre community (Lena, 2012) than a culture to allow my focus to remain on the perspective and practices of the members of the community. However, it is an important sentiment embedded in the aesthetic/value based definition of culture is evoked, on occasion, by hip-hoppers to determine what is and is not "real" hip-hop.

The next challenge, in determining subculture/sub-community, is to distinguish between "dominant" or parent culture – for the lack of a better term – and subculture. Clarke et al. (1976) states that the "dominant culture of a complex society is never a homogeneous structure. It is layered, reflecting different interests within the dominant class…, containing different traces from the past…, as well as emergent elements in the present" (p. 12). In short it is the parent culture. Whereas, for a subculture to exist it must be able to be distinguished from its parent culture, as a sub-set of the larger culture (p. 13).

As with the member of any community, hip-hoppers center on the outputs of the creative aspects of hip-hop, such as producing goods for its participants to consume. Cultural goods are often placed in the public sphere as a commodity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972/2007). Thus, at the root of cultural studies is a critical perspective founded on Marxist perception. Hall (1996/2007) asserts that Marxism introduced power dynamics, questions of class, capacities of capital, and production of knowledge into the field of cultural studies (p. 36). However, there is less of a direct relationship with Marx than there is between Gramsci and cultural studies with his notion of domination through cultural hegemony (p. 37-39). For Hebdige (1979), hegemony is manifested when "a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert 'total social authority' over subordinate groups" by controlling normative power, which is maintained by the dominant class's succeeding in defining normal ideology (p. 16). Thus, people establish subcultures in

opposition to hegemonic power. The members of subcultures attempt to defeat beliefs imposed by hegemony by presenting a set of competing norms (Hebdige, 1979, p. 16-17).

While hip-hoppers exhibit many instances of opposition to hegemonic power—including political, fashion, economic—let me briefly explore two specific cases where hip-hop resists power. The first example explored by hip-hop historians, such as Jeff Chang (2006), relates to how early hip-hoppers would siphon electricity from lampposts to provide power to sound equipment (p. 352). This action was born of a practical need for electrical power; it also served to liberate control and domain over resources.

**Subculture and Post-Subculture: Tension or Potential Collaboration**

The exploration of hegemony and cultural studies is a more expansive one than what is presented above. I provided a brief exploration of hegemony and cultural studies to frame the comparison between the subculturists and the post-subculturists. The tension between subculture theorist and post-subculture theorist was the impetus for my inclusion of a research question about hip-hop as a subculture. I view this tension between the subcultural and post-subcultural perspectives as an important lens through which I interpret my findings. Since the subculture/post-subculture debate shapes my readings, let me present the opposing sets of theory. Traditional subculture theorists identify subcultures as a point of resistance (Chambers, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Potter, 1995). Members of subcultures communites are resisters to the aforementioned "dominant" culture and hegemonic power. According to Clarke et al. (1976), subcultures take shape around activities or concerns and they possess no distinct world of their own, as they operate inside the parent culture's apparatus (p. 14). From my perspective, the debate between subculturists and post-subculturists provides the foundation on which my other research questions rest.

Hebdige (1979) asserts that subcultures challenge dominant ideologies. These challenges take the form of repositioning signs (p. 17). Re-assigning meanings to objects can be a way for a subculture to create an identity and oppose the parent culture (p. 18). As can be seen with Potter's (1995) analysis of hip-hop as resistance, hip-hop can make visible the once invisible, e.g. urban zones vacated by white flight (pp. 118-120). While subculture theorists make resistance an important—if not the most important from my perspective—characteristic of subcultures, not all subsets of the parent culture take this oppositional stance. Indeed, there are some subordinate cultural forms that in no way act in opposition to the dominant cultural system; those in power often encourage, and even create, "niche" groups often for the purpose of creating marketing opportunities (Hills, 2002, pp. 44-45). These niche markets, such as Trekkies[20], serve as subgroups that are distinct from the parent culture and band together around a common consumption activity, but lack the resistance aspect that is central to classic subculture theory.

*It is extraordinarily cold for a rave, usually these affairs are suffocatingly hot. The subfreezing temperatures and lack of enough jet heaters are not deterring the usual spectacle of glow sticks, colorful plastic bracelets, and pacifiers[21]. Excessively oversized, even for a hip-hopper, Jnco Jeans[22] and furry hats litter the landscape of the abandoned building. While this look is common, it is far from a required uniform at this event. In fact, despite having multiple signifiers, ravers seem to draw their style from a diverse array of cultures and subcultures.*

[20] Trekkies are a niche group built around consumption and fan identity of the science fiction franchise Star Trek. They are not joined together by resistance and class distinction but rather their passion for a mass distributed product. They are not resisting the parent culture but rather a subset of the parent culture.
[21] Glow sticks, plastic bracelets, and pacifiers were all style markers of a group of ravers known as Candy Ravers.
[22] Jnco was a popular jean company in the early 2000s, known for oversized pant legs. They are associated with rave and goth culture.

*So when I am approached about my DMX[23] shirt by a young white male in a Wu-Wear[24] hat, I am unshocked. He asks me if I am a hip-hop fan and wants to talk hip-hop. We both indicate that raves are just something we go to but we much prefer rap music. He continues to talk about how he just likes going to parties where there is music. Our conversation comes to an end and as he walks away, I notice long strings hanging from the sides of his pants. I have learned that these are clear style markers for rave dance culture, in the same way as Wu-Wear is a symbol of hip-hop culture.*

There is also a strong emphasis on class distinction in subculture theory, often concerned with working class or underclass populations (see Clarke et al., 1976; Chambers, 1976). According to Clarke et al. (1976), "there are some problems in deciding whether we can speak of middle-class subcultures in the same way and within the same sort of theoretical framework" (pp. 57 & 60). Because the phenomena under investigation cannot always be explained using the framework of subculture theory—i.e. the idea of resistance or class distinctions—a new group of theorists exploring "sub"-cultural entities developed what became known as post-subculture theory (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003).

According to Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003), two main trajectories exist in the field of post-subculture theory. The first attempts to move beyond the limits of classic subculture theory in order to open up analysis of new subculture formations. Subscribers to the second trajectory seek to abandon the concept of subculture altogether and introduce more accurate terminology for describing social structuring (pp. 5-6). Theorist's that adhere to the latter trajectory, in a desire to locate new terminology to deal with social organizing, created tribal theory. Tribal theory is less static than subculture theory; it moves away from division along "traditional structural

[23] DMX is a rapper from Yonkers, New York that gained fame in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
[24] Wu-Wear is a clothing line developed by New York hip-hop group Wu Tang Clan.

determinants" – such as class, gender, and religion – in favor of more open, fluid, part-time structures built around consumption habits (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003, p. 12). Post-subculture theorists respond, in a very direct sense, to the shortcomings they perceive in subculture theory.

The key contribution of the post-subcultural perspective is the organizing perspective of neo-tribes. These organizational forms are less rigid and are centered on "appearance and form" (Maffesoli, 1996, p.98). The idea is that the concept of neo-tribes allows for more diverse understandings of youth culture to be realized. In terms of culture and music, subculturalists placed a great deal of emphasis on the link between musical taste and style, while post-subculturists find no fixed relationship between musical taste and visual presentation but rather report a more fluid formation that recognizes the role of consumer choice (Bennett, 1999c, pp. 613-4). Maffesoli (1996) recognized that humans are participants in numerous tribes and that an individual's existence could only be understood through a holistic examination of the multitude of tribal experiences (pp. 145-8).

Another critical contribution of post-subculture theory is the idea of lifestyle. Lifestyle is the "sensibilities" that lead one to make consumption decisions. Where subculture theory focuses on style and consumption being "determined by class," the concept of lifestyle allows for these decisions to be viewed through the lens of individual expression (Bennett, 1999c, p. 604). In turn, this allows for new cultures to arise that are pluralistic and contradictory, accounting for the complexity of life (Maffesoli, 1996, pp. 96-100).

Another advancement in understanding social organizing by post-subculturists is the introduction of the concept of "scene." As opposed to a joining place revolving around class distinctions as traditional subculture theory would have it, scenes are locations, physical or otherwise, that bring people together based on taste and aesthetics (Bennett, 2011, p. 496). It is the

art that binds scenes together not the communal concerns of justice or resistance. For Harris (2000), scene "re-contextualises musical texts, institutions and practices within the social spaces in which they are enmeshed" (p. 27). Scene allows for a post-structural analysis that I use to understand spatial and temporal aspects of culture.

To look at hip-hop as scene, as opposed to a subculture, allows for the practices to be examined in multiple ways beyond resistance to hegemonic forces. Taking the model presented by Harris (2000), the concept of scene allows for consumption practices to be examined through a different lens than the critical cultural approach of the subculture theorist. An example of this in my own field research is the phenomenon of Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All (OFWGKTA or Odd Future). To view OFWGKTA strictly through the lens of resistance to normative culture, would discount the various modes of consumption deployed by the group and their fans, such as purchasing high-priced exclusive merchandise.

Post-subculture theorists developed a response to gaps in the theorizing about subcultures. These gaps are not necessarily flawed theorizing, but may be due, in part, to changes in how social structures organize themselves. Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003) indicate two developments since Hebdige's (1979) seminal *Subculture: Meaning of Style*. The first is the "reterritorialization of global diasporic Black and Asian culture […; and the] second [is] the actual physical movement of temporarily or permanently dispersed peoples and populations […] around the globe" (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003, p. 17). The movement of people and cultures creates transnational, or globalized, youth cultures and new cultural hybrids, which are at the center of post-subculture theory.

Bose (2003) points out that post-subculturalists also question one of Hebdige's main assertions, that style is used in subculture as a form of resistance. Post-subculturalists also question

the existence of a "subcultural" authenticity (p.169). Instead of authenticity, some post-subculture theorists advocate looking at "cultural capital" as an identity marker instead (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003, p. 17). By using "cultural capital" or other more fluid markers, the manipulation of hip-hop authenticity, or at least what resembles authenticity, can occur. In other words, white hip-hoppers can re-interpret or selectively emphasize the dimensions of hip-hop authenticity, which I consider in detail below.

However, post-subculture theory is not without limitations. Bose (2003) claims that a complete removal of class or race as factors in social formations misrepresents cultural structuring (p. 176). Adding to Bose's sentiment, Weinzierl & Muggleton (2003) state, people cannot "ignore ongoing relationships of ethnic subordination and exploitation, for these help to sustain racialized representations of 'Otherness' upon which the hegemony of dominant groups rest" (p. 18). In fact, the "style surfing" and hybrid identity that post-subculture accounts for may be a limited privilege for sections of the "dominant cultural groups" (Bose, 2003, p.170). This critique is coupled with Blackman's (2005); Blackman argues that post-subculturism lacks "explanatory power at the level of the social" (p. 17). The class aspects accentuated by subculturalist voices and the consumption aspects that propel post-subculturalism can be overlaid to observe localized relationships between lifestyle, race, class, and gender (Bennett, 2011, pp. 502-3). I place my research at the intersection of class-oriented theories advanced by subculturalists and the fluidity and hybridity of post-subculturalism. It is my desire to situate the participants of my research at the center of their experience, hip-hop's social practices, and the market influences on their re/presentation and conceptions on hip-hop authenticity. It is hip-hoppers oscillation between these, sometimes competing/sometimes complementary, poles that constructs their cultural perceptions.

I have been shaped in my own theorizing about the hip-hop community[25] by two competing theories on youth cultures, subculture theory versus post-subculture theory. Hebdige (1987) establishes hip-hop as a subculture, resistant to the dominant culture with unique forms of expression. However, as subcultures are established they gain attention, maintain the spotlight for a period then either fade away or they lose their distinctiveness because their central features are defused into the larger culture (Clarke et al., 1976, p. 14). The literature that makes up these theoretical frameworks provides a great deal of insight to answer the question: **RQ1: How does tension between subculturalists and post-subculturalists influence the understanding of how the hip-hop community is shaped by hip-hop music and art?** The answer to this question provides the landscape for the waters of hip-hop to flow. The degree of diffusion into the larger culture, along with the evident hip-hop sub-communities, creates various manifestations of hip-hop authenticity. Subsequently, white hip-hoppers can pick and choose from the different variations of hip-hop authenticity.

### The Re/presentation and Conceptions of Hip-Hop Authenticity

*As I reach the later years of my undergraduate education, my racial identity presentation shifts from being a social concern and becomes more of a scholastic concern. As I read more about hip-hop, I see why the distinction between blackness and hip-hop is blurred. I see why, though offensive, the employees at FYE were not entirely wrong for generalizing my experience in the way that they did. Reading about hip-hop and its ties to the African Diaspora, I gain a clarity about and see complexity in hip-hop that makes my re/presentation of a hip-hop identity confusingly sensical.*

[25] I am using the term communities to represent the organization of a group of people around a particular genre of music. This term is adopted from Jennifer Lena (2012) concept of genre communities.

In chapter 5, I argue that hip-hop has deviated a great deal from its origins; however hip-hop's roots are thoroughly embedded in the hip-hop community. Interpretations of meaning inside hip-hop have shifted over time, due to expansion into mainstream music and establishment of sub-genres. However, hip-hop's heritages provide a lens and a language that shape modern readings of the culture. Despite dramatic changes in the landscape of the hip-hop community, hip-hop's ties to African American culture remain central to debates over hip-hop authenticity.

**Hip-Hop and African Diaspora**

The birth of hip-hop has been debated. Hip-hop scholars credit the creation of hip-hop music to a Jamaican-born party DJ named Clive Campbell. Campbell played house and block parties in the South Bronx, New York, in the late 1960s and early 1970s under the alias Kool Herc (Hebdige, 1987, pp. 136-138; Ogg & Upshal, 2001, p. 13; Chang, 2005, pp. 67-70). Herc differed from other deejays at the time, because he only played short sections, called the break, of lesser-known songs as opposed to playing an album's popular songs.

Although Herc is largely credited with the creation of hip-hop, there was a long tradition of deejaying in Jamaica that laid the foundation for hip-hop's birth in the South Bronx (Hebdige, 1987; Keyes, 2002, p 50; Chang, 2005). Jamaican dancehall deejays incorporated large sound systems to "try and blow other sound systems away" (Hebdige, 1987; Keyes, 2002, p. 51). Sound system competitions were the format for what came to be called, and rightly understood as, deejay battles in the Bronx during the 1970s. The link between New York hip-hop culture and its Jamaican predecessor did not end with sound system battles. In fact, in Jamaica, the DJ was less associated with playing music from records and more associated with "toasting," which parallels—or was the precursor to—hip-hop's emceeing (Hebdige, 1987; Keyes, 2002). Toasting evolved from "talking over" live performances to toasting over "dub," or instrumental versions, of songs.

This established stars like U-Roy, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Mutabaruka (Hebdige, 1987; Keyes, 2002, p. 54). Dancehall culture, which emerged in Jamaica and the West Indies, explains why many hip-hop originators have West Indian heritage – e.g. Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Kool Herc (Hebdige, 1987, pp. 137-139; Keyes, 2002, pp. 50-60).

Hip-hop's ties to Afro-Caribbean culture are only part of its link with the African Diaspora. According to Perry (2004),

> [h]ip-hop music is black American music…. It is constituted as such because of four central characteristics: (1) its primary language is African American Vernacular English; (2) it has a political location in society distinctly ascribed to black people, music, and cultural forms; (3) it is derived from black American oral culture; and (4) it is derived from black American musical traditions. (p. 10)

Each of these characteristics is emblematic of African/African American traditions, but none is more clearly visible in hip-hop than the oral aspect.

The African/African American tradition of storytelling was handed down from generation to generation and came to America with enslaved Africans (Dyson, 1993/2004, p. 66; Stapleton, 1998, p. 220). "Transported from Africa and ripped from the security of their homes the black slaves in America still found a way to create vibrant stories" (Perlstein, 1992, ¶ 4). Dyson (1993/2004) furthers the argument that African oral tradition is evident throughout history and around the world from the Griots to rap.

> Rap can be traced back to the revolutionary verse of Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets, to Pigmeat Markham's 'Here Come de Judge,' and even Bessie Smith's rappin to a beat in some of her blues. We can also cite ancient African oral traditions as the antecedents to various contemporary African American cultural practices. (p. 61)

Dyson's and Perlstein's assertions about the precursors of rap are corroborated by Ards (1999/2004, p. 312).

As discussed by Perry (2004), the language and lyrics are not the only aspect of hip-hop's expressions that draw on the lineage of African American culture. Hip-hop as a musical, as well

as lyrical, art form draws from a history of improvisation and experimentation in African American music (Dyson, 2007, p. 35). This improvisational/experimental legacy can be seen clearly among jazz and bebop artists that predate hip-hop history (Hebdige,1987, p. 147; Rose, 1994, pp. 5-6).

**Hip-Hop as resistance.** Resistance has been a central feature of hip-hop culture, as it has been for many subcultures (Clark et al., 1976; Hebdige, 1979). This resistance is evident in the early stages of the promulgation of the culture and its arts. According to Hebdige (1987), "hip-hoppers 'stole' music off [the radio] and cut it up. Then they broke it down into its component parts and remixed it on tape. By doing this they were breaking the law of copyright. But the cut 'n' mix attitude was that no one owns a rhythm or a sound" (p. 141). While this resistance was in direct defiance of the law, there was also more indirect or symbolic resistance visible in hip-hop. Whether through music or video, hip-hoppers have resisted the desire of the parent culture to wipe out its history. Potter (1995) points out that sampling and making visible previously vacated urban zones is a way that hip-hop music re-inserts history, particularly African American history, back into the consciousness of its listeners. By providing a soundtrack to urban strife, rappers make it possible for suburban, white listeners to become acutely aware of their race, history, and social position. Thus, Rose (1994) asserts that "rap offers alternative interpretations of key social events" (p. 18).

During the course of hip-hop history, rap artists have taken on issues ranging from anti-minstrel messages (Ogbar, 2007, p. 16) to the linking of hip-hop to the African Diasporic past (Potter, 1995, p. 149) to more current aspects of black and African American concerns. Many of the issues found in rap lyrics include the black experience—past, present, and future—and racism (Alim, 2002, pp. 289-290). According to Sullivan (2003), "[d]uring the 1980s, [the] genre of rap became more noticeable, and many rappers turned to more overtly political themes. They

addressed gang violence, police brutality and other politically charged issues, such as poverty and racism" (p. 607). The politics of rap remains central in rap music. African American political consciousness is so prevalent in rap music that Chuck D, of rap group Public Enemy, dubbed rap "the black CNN" (Ards, 1999/2004, p. 313).

Kitwana (1995) divides hip-hop music into three distinct subgenres—recreational rap, conscious rap, and sex-violence rap (pp. 32-33). However, all three of these hinge on depictions of "black Urban life." Rappers that fall into third of these subgenres, often referred to as "gangsta rap," claims to be the reporters on "the black CNN," that is rap music. "West Coast style rap that narrates experiences and fantasies specific to life as a poor young, black, male subject[...] have defined the gangsta rap style" (Rose, 1994, p. 59). While conscious rappers brings to light African American politics, history, and nationalism, the politics of gangsta rap are rooted in the desires of oppressed black men and women, who seized the dialogue about their experience (Baldwin, 1999/2004, pp. 162-167).

**Commercialization/commodification of hip-hop.** As I mentioned, it is difficult for me to analyze hip-hop strictly as a subculture, as set forth by Hebdige and others. The commercialization of hip-hop presents a manifestation of the community that requires various readings. At this point in hip-hop's history, it is so embedded in commercial music culture that the influence of commodification has left an indelible mark on any contemporary exhibition of the art form. The commercialized commodification of hip-hop causes some dissonance in modern hip-hop circles. Take for example the Michigan hip-hop duo, Binary Star's song *Honest Expressions*. In the song, Binary Star member, One.Be.Lo[26] laments the commercialization of hip-hop. However, he makes a clear distinction that his issues are not with commercial success but the quality of music. This

[26] One.Be.Lo went by the One Man Army while part of Binary Star

hierarchical take on hip-hop authenticity markers will also be seen in the comments by my participants.

The rise and spread of hip-hop can be largely attributed to the vast commercial success it has had in a relatively short time. A similar meteoric rise had been seen in African American culture with jazz, rock n' roll, soul and R&B (Rose, 1994, p. 5). The commercialization of hip-hop culture, more specifically its music, has created a number of intended and unintended consequences. Hip-hop music's first break into the mainstream was when Sylvia Robinson's Sugarhill Records' released "Rappers Delight" (p. 3). The success of this record ushered in a music industry feeding frenzy that still exists in rap music. According to Stapleton (1998), "as rap music expanded to being mass produced, hip-hop spread across the nation" (p. 228) and beyond (see Bennett, 1999a, 1999b; Nayak, 2003).

The potential of hip-hop art as an economically potent form of entertainment drew the attention of the music business, as well as other corporate entities; for example, it has been used in commercial advertising (Blair, 1993/2004, p. 497; McLeod, 1999, p. 136). Radio and video music channels initially rejected hip-hop music—primarily writing it off as a fad (Rose, 1994, p. 6). MTV moved past these initial concerns when the channel's executives saw that the video show *Yo! MTV Raps* was marketable to white middle-class youth (Samuels, 1991/2004, p. 152). "MTV's acceptance and gatekeeping of rap music has dramatically increased rap artists' visibility to black, white, Asian, and Latino teenagers, but it has also inspired anti-rap censorship groups and fuels the media's fixation on rap and violence" (Rose, 1994, p. 17).

The commercial success and commodification of the culture/community by everyone from shoe and clothing companies, such as Nike and Tommy Hilfiger, to fast-food outlets, such as McDonalds, has had a spreading, splintering, and cross-pollinating effect on hip-hop. Hip-hoppers

criticize corporatization of hip-hop as a diluting of the message, while the splintering of hip-hop undermines the locus of control over the hip-hop community. Hip-hoppers believe that this gives control of the images of hip-hop and black America to media conglomerates (Rose, 2008, pp. 17-21).

Additionally, the spread of hip-hop has also resulted in the emergence of subgenres, such as conscious rap and gangsta rap (Kitwana, 1995), sprouted regional artists creating their own localized space (Baldwin, 1999/2004, p. 172; Foreman, 2004b) and created hybrid genres (Rose, 1994, p. 17). This localization is further fueled by the globalization of hip-hop. There are localized hip-hop cultures with their own distinct set of norms from France (Swedenburg, 1992/2004, p. 586), to England (Bennett, 1999b; Nayak, 2003), to Germany (Bennett, 1999a), to different regions within the U.S. (Baldwin, 1999/2004, p. 172; Foreman 2004b, p. 204) and around the globe.

Regionalism and a desire to access the white market has allowed for multiple voices to be produced under the hip-hop banner. Failures by white artists to gain hip-hop credibility, such as Vanilla Ice, were matched by other white artists viewed by hip-hop as authentic, such as 3rd Bass (Swedenburg, 1992/2004, p. 585). Despite early successes and failures by white rap artists, "some [black] rappers have equated white participation with a process of dilution and subsequent theft of black culture" (Rose, 1994, p. 5). While this sentiment has waned in recent years, the participation of whites in hip-hop remains a point of discussion. For example, Lord Jamar[27], in an interview with VladTV[28], stated that whites were "guests" in hip-hop while discussing white rapper, Macklemore.

Mistaking hip-hop culture for African American culture or popular culture for African American culture can be problematic. The influx of white consumers has altered hip-hop as an

[27] Lord Jamar is a member of New York rap group Brand Nubians.
[28] VladTV is an internet based hip-hop news site that is primarily disseminated via YouTube.

African American art form. According to Samuels (1991/2004), "[w]hat whites wanted was not music, but black music, which as a result stopped really being either" (p. 153). While this is a particularly negative view of the repackaging of rap music to white audiences, the central claim that current hip-hop has deviated from hip-hop's African American roots, obviously seen in lyrical themes. It should be pointed out that hip-hop was influenced not only by African Americans, but also by Puerto Rican culture (Kitwana, 1995, p. 12; Ogg & Upshal, 2001p. 15). "According to pioneers like Kurtis Blow, DJ Kool Herc, and Grandmaster Caz, hip-hop always sought to be inclusive, an idea that many say started with Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation" (Kitwana, 2005, p. 44). Bambaataa, in particular, sought to include all in his transnational vision of hip-hop culture including white punk rockers. The multi-ethnic/multi-racial origins of hip-hop are utilized to defend white hip-hoppers authentic membership in the community, such as Buckshot's[29] response to Lord Jamar's "white people are guests in hip-hop" argument.

Despite the fact that earlier rap artists insisted that hip-hop was a trans-racial/trans-ethnic culture, it was firmly rooted in the black community and was marketed as such. Underwritten by corporate entities, marketers of hip-hop framed the black community by accentuating the aesthetic of gangsta rap. This amounted to the selling of "black criminality" as authentic hip-hop, which is deeply problematic (Samuels, 1991/2004, p. 152). Such an approach reinforced an essentialization of African Americans and mischaracterized the black "underclass" (Watkins, 1998/2004, p. 561). While addressing debates inside hip-hop, Rose (2008) states that "[s]ome claim that hip-hop is fueling… a self-destructive, anti-educational attitude that reduces chances for already at-risk, economically fragile youth" (p. 75). I see the controversies of representation in hip-hop fueled by the corporatization and mass marketing of hip-hop outside of the original community and context

[29] Buckshot is a member of New York hip-hop duo BlackMoon and rap collective Boot Camp Clik.

as simultaneously problematic and beneficial to hip-hop. The creators, marketers, and distributors of hip-hop, in the corporate model, are not only perpetuating stereotypes, but also undermine the psyche of those it is misrepresenting. Though hip-hop can function as a liberating force, it also contributes to reducing black people to caricatures that reinforce systems of racial oppression (Ogbar, 2007, p. 35). Indeed, Lusane (1993/2004) asks his readers to realize that hip-hop is not the entity that will destroy black America and race relations, nor is it its savior (p. 361). I see the relationship between corporations and the hip-hop community as problematic but also deeply complex. Further, white participation in the hip-hop community is equally complex.

**Hip-hop and Whiteness/White Consumption**

Establishing the connection between the African diaspora and hip-hop followed by the subsequent commercialization/commodification of hip-hop culture has clearly led to the growth of the white fan base. A deeper look at white consumption of hip-hop and the role of white consumption is important for understanding the dynamics of hip-hop authenticity. The size of the white hip-hop market, the ways in which whiteness is promoted in hip-hop, and the effect hip-hop has on white consumers are evident in the responses of my participants and my observations made in the field.

Data for the consumption rates of hip-hop by whites or any other sales demographic is difficult to assess with any certainty. Many people "in the know" have attempted to quantify record sales to whites. Chuck D, in the early 1990s, approximated that 60 percent of the hip-hop audience was white (Sullivan, 2003, p. 609). This number is very similar to the 2006 survey cited by Rose (2008), which indicates that whites make up 60.1 percent of the sales of hip-hop while blacks were only 25 percent (p. 88). When citing a *Forbes* Magazine article Kitwana (2005) states "that of an estimated 45 million hip-hop consumers between the ages of 13 and 34, 80 percent

were white" (p. 82). However, due to the under counting of bootlegs and the limited number of chain stores in poor communities, which are disproportionally black and Hispanic, the percentage of white consumption may be exaggerated (Rose, 1994, p. 7). Despite the fact that the size of the white hip-hop audience may be exaggerated, it is undeniable that white consumption of hip-hop has made an indelible mark on the production and marketing of hip-hop.

The marketing of hip-hop to white America has created space for white hip-hop stars. It is proposed by Dawkins (2010) that the most successful white rapper, Eminem, has maintained his popularity by filling the niche of directly marketing to white suburbia. It is Eminem's ability to remain unchallenged in his niche that allowed him to close the door on other "transracial artists" (p.480). The tapping into broad acceptance was made easier for Eminem, not only because of a broad white hip-hop fan base, but also his ability to highlight his poverty and whiteness—in an African American created/dominated culture—that allowed him to incorporate narratives of struggle for his own use (Hess, 2005, p. 385) to distance himself from his white privilege. This also allows Eminem to conform to tropes of hip-hop while addressing white listeners directly (p. 386). Despite the success of Eminem and other white rappers, they remain a point of ridicule among some in hip-hop culture (Hess, 2007, p. 160).

While authenticity is the central issue in how anyone identifies or interact with hip-hop culture, it is critical to examine the effects that hip-hop has on the white consumer. Conversely, it is also important to explore the ways in which hip-hop has been affected by white consumption. While both of these concepts were alluded to in chapter 1, I address the former, here, in order to provide proper grounding for the justification of my dissertation project.

A study by Thompson and Brown (2002) indicates that there is a positive political effect on white consumers of hip-hop music. "[W]hite rap music listeners tend to be more racially tolerant

and politically liberal [… than …] non-listeners" (p. 101). This echoes Kitwana's (2005) study of white hip-hop activists. Thompson and Brown, along with the reflections of Kitwana, are further supported by a study performed by Zillmann et al. (1995). These researchers found that "radical rap may prove capable of fostering social cohesion among inner-city youths" (p. 24). This indicates the potential for hip-hop to work in positive ways toward interracial understanding.

On the other side of the argument, Rodriquez (2006) and Sullivan (2003) indicate that the role of existing social structures get in the way of progress in the field of race relations made available by white consumption of hip-hop. Black "style and dress has become a way for whites to connect with blacks without actually having any face-to-face contact" (p. 610). The worry is that without real interracial interaction, hip-hop can be used to perpetuate stereotypes (see Samuels, 1991/2004; Rose, 1994 & 2008). The fact is that white rappers, and fans, cross the spectrum of hip-hop culture. Harkness (2010) rightly points out that "[m]irroring the dynamics within the larger hip-hop culture, there is a clear philosophical division between the White rappers" (p. 78).

**Hip-Hop Authenticity**

*I love my "Rap Music in African American Culture" course. I used to be left with no ammunition while others maligned the music I love; now I have the knowledge base to defend the merits of rap music. I learn in the early days of the course that hip-hop—along with its musical merit—is actually a benefit to society.*

*One day in the first couple of weeks of the semester, I notice where a young woman has written in the corner of the board that next week a group called Binary Star would be performing and hosting an emcee battle. I jot the information down in my doodle covered notebook. After a*

*year of raves and punk music shows, I am getting to attend a cultural event that revolves around my music.*

*The day of the show/emcee battle has come, however none of my friends have the time and/or the desire to attend with me. My only recourse is to take the bus. I find the bus schedule online and organize for someone to pick me up after the show. I, with eager anticipation, wait and wait. The bus drive seems to take forever, stopping every few moments to drop-off or pick-up a rider. After traveling less than 8 miles in 30 minutes and walking four more blocks, I arrive at the small venue only to wait for the door to open.*

*The crowd is more racially diverse than the raves or punk shows I attended. The music, already vibrating the windows, provides me with the comfort of familiarity. It is the same as the music that vibrates my eardrums as I walk to class each day. I have called myself a hip-hopper for a while now but I now truly feel as if I am one with the culture.*

The existence of a white hip-hop audience must be coupled with a conversation of identity markers within hip-hop. All markers fall under the umbrella of the concept of authenticity. According to Dyson (2007), "hip-hoppers [from the beginning] were heavily invested in specifying what's real and what's not" (p. 6). The concept of authenticity is so embedded in hip-hop culture, that nearly all hip-hop scholarship addresses authenticity either implicitly or explicitly.

I use McLeod's (1999) scholarship as my primary definition for hip-hop authenticity. However inside the framework provided by McLeod, I also incorporate other research to further explain his dimensions. Other scholarship on hip-hop authenticity fits well into the dimensions provided by McLeod. In McLeod's research, he identifies six "semantic dimensions" of hip-hop authenticity—[1] "psyco-social dimension," [2] "political economic dimension," [3] "social locational dimension," [4] "racial dimension," [5] "cultural dimension," and [6] "gender

dimension"[30]. In short, he documents the ways in which hip-hoppers frame an authentic hip-hop identity. Using McLeod's six dimensions of hip-hop authenticity as my framework, I present relevant literature dealing with these six overlapping binaries. I argue later that McLeod's dimensions are not as significant today as they once were, however the discourse used to establish them remains engrained in hip-hop. This is related to the fracturing of hip-hop as a single community and a merging with the dominate culture, however seen in my findings that many of the dimensions remain part of the hip-hop vernacular, despite being reinterpreted by contemporary hip-hoppers.

There is a great deal of emphasis placed on setting trends in hip-hop, McLeod's [1] "psycho-social dimension" addresses this directly. The psycho-social dimension places being "true-to-self" [authentic] and "following trends" [inauthentic] on opposing poles of this binary (p. 140). An example of violating this trope of hip-hop authenticity would be becoming a fan of an artist once they gained notoriety. As can be seen in my findings, discussed Chapter 4, artist and fan alike reference the importance of long-term fandom. This is a prime example of emphasizing the rejection of following trends. While, the "true-to-self" authenticity manifests in many forms this is one of the clearest references to this dimension.

Just as with the psycho-social dimension, practitioners and participants of hip-hop must negotiate [2] the "political-economic" (pp. 141-142), which is divided into underground [real] and commercial [fake]. This dimension often manifests itself in the discourse of "selling out." A clear example of this would be the perceived authentic hip-hopper signing commercial record contracts. Take for example the rapper Common. Common by many measures is a "real" or "authentic" hip-hopper but, as pointed out by one of my participants, Common has an endorsement career with the

[30] As I move through each dimension, I place the bracketed number to indicate which dynamic is being highlighted. The overlap of the dimensions can cause confusion, so I use this numbering device for the purpose of clarity.

likes of the Gap, clothing company. Common navigated this binary of authentic hip-hop and commercial hip-hop, due to contradictory relationships between commerce and resistance seen in hip-hop.

This clear anti-commercialism aspect is seen in other literature on hip-hop (see Samuels, 1991/2004). Dyson (2007) points out that this underground versus commercial divide is rooted in white appropriation of hip-hop (p. 7). Commercial indicates having to respond to white executives to reach a broader [insert white] audience. Issues that arise in debates about commodification are filtered through the code language of "underground." Jeffries (2011) found that the flaunting of money and aspiration of wealth was undesirable in an artist by hip-hoppers and thus inauthentic. However if the artists were viewed as skilled or technically proficient at their craft, that trumped the flaunting of money. Skill over money flaunting allows a commercially successful rapper whose central lyrical theme is financial success to be viewed as "real" by virtue of their ability as an emcee (p. 147).

Dyson (2007) points to another deep divide in hip-hop, which indicates the emphasis on location and space (see Foreman, 2004b). McLeod (1999) labels this dimension [3] "social location," (pp. 142-143) which is split between the streets [real] and the suburbs [fake]. Because of the link between race and space—largely due to white flight and the expansion and development of white suburbs—social location dimension is closely linked to McLeod's [4] "racial dimension" (pp. 140-141). Embedded into this racialized undercurrent is the issue of hip-hop's essentialization of black men (see Judy, 1994/2004). The epitome of black masculinity oscillates during different time periods, during the early 1990s it was the black nationalist followed by the ghetto or thug authentic (Ogbar, 2007, p.68), while the new millennium has ushered in the black-street-entrepreneur turned business-mogul (some prominent examples being Jay-z, 50 cent, and P-

Diddy). There is, however, a desire even for this newest incarnation to be connected to the streets. Dyson (2007) describes this division as "ghettocentric authenticity" versus "bourgeois Negro expression" (p. 7). These various images of black men are not exclusive to hip-hop, in fact there is a direct correlation of black masculinity in hip-hop to 70s Blaxploitation films and 1980s television (Henry, 2002, pp.114-115).

Dyson continues his analysis by noting a generational divide. This divide was initially the civil rights generation versus the hip-hop generation (Perry, 2004, p. 4) but as hip-hop has aged there has developed an intracultural generation gap. McLeod (1999) addresses this in his [5] "cultural dimension," in which "old school" marks the real or authentic side (pp.143-145). This dimension is not clearly parsed by age but it indicates a generational mentality or perspective on hip-hop culture. The old-school marks a connection with the culture, while the opposite is the commodified version of hip-hop culture. This is complicated by the fact that hip-hoppers have always commodified their art, in fact Kool Herc charged for the parties to buy school clothes. I see the tension as a battle for control of the hip-hop commodity and also the representation of the hip-hop community.

The authenticity marker that is relevant to the identity of white hip-hoppers is that of racial identity, where black is real and white is fake (McLeod, 1999, pp. 140-141). This is implicitly seen in many of the other markers. For example commercial, mainstream, and suburbs – all of which are "fake" – are associated with the white experience of hip-hop in the United States. This racial dimension provides little room for whites to be seen as real or authentic. Some white hip-hoppers adopt African American style and even African American Vernacular English (Cutler, 1999) to reduce the authenticity gap. Some invest in, or involve themselves with African American politics and activism. As mentioned above, according to Kitwana (2005) these white hip-hop

activists come in two varieties: those who got involved in hip-hop through their activism and those who got involved in activism through their hip-hop (pp. 171).

McLeod's (1999) dimensions of hip-hop authenticity are greatly intertwined with racial authenticity. However the sixth dimension of hip-hop authenticity is [6] the "gender dimension" (p. 142). This dimension places "hard" [real] and "soft" [fake] at opposing poles. This dimension not only functions as a gender gatekeeper, making it easier to be male and authentically hip-hop, but also is used to box-out gay men from hip-hop authenticity. The connection between perceived "feminine" traits and inauthenticity creates a barrier for women, transgender women, and gay men to face automatic inauthenticity/exclusion from hip-hop. I do not delve into this very important aspect of the hip-hop community. However, I do not want to diminish the impact of this dimension. Due to the fact that my participants were almost exclusively male, including all ten of my in-depth interviews, the gender dimension of hip-hop authenticity is not fully substantiated in my findings.

Potter (1995) rejects essentialized racial identities and thus rejects the notion of an authentic hip-hop racial identity (p. 139). While I agree that essentializing racial identity and experiences is problematic, by ignoring shared racial experiences a person can fall victim to, an equally problematic, embrace of a color-blind ideology (Rodriquez, 2006) that discounts the role of racial prejudice, generally, and the link between hip-hop and African Diaspora, specifically. There are those—usually associated with black liberation hip-hop—who attempt to be cognizant of white privilege and race relations. These people want to keep, as Chuck D puts it, their "nature in check" – referring to the Nation of Islam's beliefs about the "white devil" (Potter, 1995, p. 138). Harrison (2009) argues that hip-hoppers—in the San Francisco Bay Area—recognize the instability of racial identities. However, he observed that his participants did more to continue racialized scripts than dismantling them. Furthermore, "[s]uch affirming scripts must not be

thought of as unyielding sets of authentic demands to which every member of a designated racial group is expected to conform, but rather as constellations of principles that give shape to the politics and sensibilities associated with various racial identifications" (p. 172). It is the multiple perspectives on race and hip-hop, along with the link between hip-hop and the African Diaspora that make white hip-hop authenticity such a complex issue. As seen in the work of Rodriquez (2006), how whiteness functions in general can influence how whites conceive of hip-hop authenticity.

Hip-hop authenticity manifests itself in many ways but hip-hop remains deeply connected to the African American community. To address: **(RQ2) In what ways do white hip-hoppers conceptualize authenticity in hip-hop?** and **(RQ3) In what ways do whites re/present an authentic hip-hop identity?** The link between race and hip-hop makes for a space to negotiate hip-hop authenticity for white hip-hoppers. However, race is not the only dimension of hip-hop authenticity. How race is accentuated and de-emphasized by white hip-hoppers provides a fascinating look into conceptions of hip-hop authenticity and the functioning of whiteness in hip-hop.

**Critical Race Theory and White studies: Framing White Hip-Hoppers Conceptions of Race**

*My fair skin being abused by the hot Florida sun is not going to stop me from performing my masculinity. It is senior spring break and it is important that I behave in a manner consistent with my gender identity. I play the part of a male youth as I unartfully attempt to engage some women at the pool. With every ounce of cool I can muster, I re/present everything I have seen and heard that will make these young women think I am worthy of hanging out with for the evening. I lean, much like LL Cool J, on the steel fence surrounding the hotel pool. I regurgitate used up and played out lines, when I feel a splat on my arm. The splat is the runny, white excrement from a*

*seagull. There is no coming back from having bird droppings on you, so I throw my bottle of St. Ides and walk away without saying another word.*

*After cleaning up my arm, I was approached in the hallway of the hotel by a young man claiming one of the maintenance staff saw me break the bottle at the pool. He was very kind to me, asking me if I could clean it up. He also indicated that he believed my denial over that of the Hispanic worker that observed my tantrum. The mentioning of the workers ethnicity led me to believe that I was not getting thrown out of the hotel because I was white. I shamefully and silently cleaned up after myself.*

My objectification of the women at the pool was shaped by my race as well as my masculinity. I had benefited from my white privilege and performed the learned behavior of sexism. Despite the fact I reaped the rewards of racism and gender in different ways, I generated my power at the pool that day from the same oppressive source, white masculinity. Crenshaw (1989) points out, the "praxis of both [feminist theory and antiracist politics] should be centered on the life chances and life situations of people who should be cared about without regard to the source of their difficulties" (p. 166). While the primary focus of my dissertation is to investigate racial authenticity, masculinity becomes highlighted in my framework to enhance white male hip-hoppers' authenticity in a community where their race undermines their cultural authenticity. In the discussion chapter, I expand on the importance of understanding gender in hip-hop and propose possible future research that would be emboldened by balancing the emphasis between race and gender.

**Critical Race Theory/Studies**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) analyzes the intersection of race and power. This "[c]ritical analysis of race seeks to foreground the interconnections between race, power, and law as a

corrective to an incomplete understanding of the terms under which race is negotiated" (Harris, 2002, p. 1234). While Cheryl Harris' work discusses the role race plays in the legal system, the centrality of race to hip-hop culture creates another important context to see how race is negotiated. I rely on whiteness as my theoretical lens to answer my fourth and fifth research questions, however I first discuss Critical Race Theory's legal and sociological heritage. The development of CRT has led to the creation of White Studies. I review the progression of the field to allow for a richer understanding of my actual lens and look at the function of race to set up my review of whiteness and White Studies.

Predating the advent of Critical Race Theory, scholars explored how racial structures formed. Many of these theorists were African and African American liberationists motivated by the problems of slavery, segregation, and colonialism. The works of these mostly male scholars dealt with dismantling racial hierarchies and advocating action. "It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that [Critical Race Theory] becomes an important intellectual and social tool for [… the] deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourse, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (Ladson Billings, 1998, p. 9).

One of the earliest scholars of race, Du Bois (1897), theorized the formation of race by breaking it down into multiple stages of development. According to Du Bois, the first stage of development concerned groups of nomadic tribes.[31] During this stage the physical differences, in terms of outward appearance, between humans were large. The tribal stage was followed by tribes forming cities and then cities into nations. At this stage, "myriads of minor differences disappeared, and the sociological and historical races of men began to approximate the present

[31] Tribes in the traditional sense, not to be confused with Maffesoli's neo-tribes.

division of races as indicated by physical research" (p. 6). So, according to Du Bois, while the differences, both physical and social, within nations decreased, the differences between nations became more pronounced.

Taken together, Du Bois (1897), and Dyson (2007) identified the sources of racial classifications and explain why they were established and maintained, and both asserted that racial divides serve to produce power relations and place whiteness at the pinnacle. The issue of race became intimately tied to white supremacy. West (1981/2001) charts the discursive features of the "white normative gaze" as a tool of white supremacy. The white normative gaze is the historical emphasis that values whiteness. Because of the emphasis placed on whiteness, it becomes the standard by which all is judged. Issues of equality regarding "beauty, culture, and intellectual capacity" for black people could be attributed to white supremacy's normative gaze. This perspective is reinforced in modern discourse that, according to West, supported a false authority of science, "Cartesian notions," and the discovery of classical antiquities. "The idea of white supremacy emerges partly because of the powers within modern discourse" (p. 92). Prior "historiographies" of race reduced their investigations to non-discursive structures.

Scholars have traced how racialized classifications and racism were formulated and maintained throughout history (Du Bois, 1897; Dyson, 2007; West, 1981/2001). Without this work the essential labor of critical race scholarship could not be accomplished, which identified how race/racism functions in order to properly oppose systems of racial oppression.

Some important work that illustrates how race functions is that of Stuart Hall. I adhere to Hall's (1996) argument that race is a floating signifier. By floating signifier, Hall means that race works more like language than scientific or sociological ascription. Skin color and other physical characteristics work as symbols whose meanings are culturally interpreted and constructed. In

fact, these meanings, like the meanings of words, shift in different contexts and situations. Meaning is relational, not essential, and meaning cannot be "trans-historically fixed." Thus, race is constantly redefined through place and time. These redefinitions can be seen clearly when comparing race classifications, such as between Brazil and the United States. Brazil has a far less racialized caste classification system, allowing for a spectrum that accounts for multi-racial reality (Harris, Gomes Consorte, Lang, & Bryne, 1993). Racialized constructs vary in different social situations in Brazil. For instance, utilizing the Brazilian system "full siblings can have different racial identities depending on their phenotypes" (p. 452). By contrast, The U.S. uses a system built on bloodlines and ill-conceived white racial purity, often referred to as the "one drop rule." For example, someone of mixed heritage, like President Barack Obama, is considered black in the U.S., instead of being considered a multi-racial person. "Race only becomes 'real' as a social force when individuals or groups behave towards each other in ways which either reflect or perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of subordination and the patterns of inequality in daily life" (Marable, 1993, p. 114).

Hall's view that race is a symbolic construct and not a scientific one is echoed by Gilroy. Gilroy (2000/2007) points out that since science has made great strides in understanding DNA, pseudo-scientific understandings of racial categories that remove our individuality, as well as our potential for a collective humanity, can be dismissed (pp. 267-270). Current understandings of genetic coding provide evidence of human sameness that replaces the racial typologies built on difference. Looking at race as situational and fluid prevents essentialized racial constructions, but raises issues of the best way to analyze race and removes collective identity. Despite its fluidity, race is constructed around shared experience, usually from outside conceptions of racial identity. An example of this shared experience that is addressed in hip-hop lyrics is police misconduct and

brutality toward members of the African American and Latino American communities. Despite police interaction happening in isolated incidences in various cities and towns, the result occurred with some similar outcomes due to preconceptions of other races. So despite race distinctions being fluid, members of a race share experiences due in large part to racism and racial prejudice.

The fluidity of race can be attributed to other systems that influence people's interpretations that disallow a strictly race-based analysis. Hall (1980/2001) identified two trends for describing the creation and function of race: economic and sociological. These are differentiated based on where the emphasis placed. But, as Hall reminds us, both must be considered to provide a clear understanding of everyday realities. Economic analysis can be overly reductive and sociological analysis might not pay enough attention to how economic class affects racial construction. According to Gilroy (1987) economic factors have played a vital role in the construction of race relations. However, they do not play an exclusive role in race formation. Marable (1993) points out that Afrocentric scholarship, and Critical Race Theory in general, "rarely reflect[s] the actual complexities of local cultures and divergences of language, religions and political institutions, and tend[s] to homogenize the sharply different social structures found within the African diaspora" (pp. 120-1). This is similar to arguments made about whiteness studies by Hartigan (2005b).

Of particular importance to my study is the fact that race as a social construction serves to support white supremacist constructions of racialized hierarchies (West, 1982/2001; Du Bois, 1897; Dyson, 2007). In particular, my study of whiteness informs understanding white hip-hoppers. White studies as an aspect of Critical Race Theory exposes how "whiteness" developed (see Roediger, 1994/2001) and demonstrates how it functions (see hooks, 1992; Kendell, 2006). Twine and Gallagher (2008) divide whiteness studies into three waves. The first two waves are marked by the foundation built by W.E.B. Du Bois and largely examined the establishment of

whiteness and its link to employment and citizenship (pp. 7-12). The third wave of whiteness studies investigated the multiple ways in which whiteness manifested and maintained power during the post-Civil Rights era. The third wave is also marked by the incorporation of varying research methods (pp. 12-15). It is these three waves that allow for a more complete understanding of how whiteness functions today. It is the construction and function of whiteness, coupled with the changing dynamics in hip-hop that allow white hip-hoppers to successfully negotiate hip-hop authenticity.

**Construction and Function of White[ness]**

As had been the case for millennia, Europeans established categories of race (Hall, 1980/2001, West, 1982/2001), especially as part of emerging scientific approaches that attended colonization. These classification systems (or taxonomies) spanned history and used different moments in science, [sic] to align with social structures, in an attempt to explain and define difference (Wander et al., 1999; West, 1982/2001). Apartheid, segregation, and slavery, among other things, were justified by these arbitrary racial classifications (Du Bois, 1897, Dyson, 2007). These imprecise, but deeply held, taxonomies became salient in court cases that determined an individual's race and attendant rights (Harris, 1993).

I examine U.S. white ethnic identity because to ignore it "is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it" (Roediger, 1994/2001, p. 327). The term "White ethnic identity" conflates race and ethnicity into a single idea. According to Roediger (1994/2001), white ethnicity arrived through a rather unevenly emerging "pan-ethnic ideology" built in the United States around rhetoric about white immigrant heritage and immigrants' common value systems, accomplished largely over the last two centuries by ignoring individual cultural distinctions (p. 328). I review

the gradual transition from prewhite/not-yet-white ethnic identities to a collective white identity in order to contextualize how whiteness functions today.

Many people who are considered white in present American society were excluded from this group at one time. Common examples of delayed inclusion as whites are the Irish who were considered closer to black than white into the 1900s (Roediger, 1994/2001) and Italian Americans who were included in this "in between" racial classification, as well (Garner, 2007, p. 66). Though these not-yet-white immigrants were viewed as subordinate to others considered to be white, they received more access "to civil rights and political power" than African Americans. This access, in turn, led to greater job opportunities (Roediger, 1994/2001 pp. 329-330). According to Kendall (2006), by the end of World War II, previously not-yet-white groups were able to gain "access to jobs and financial assistance (for instance, the GI Bill) that African Americans, Japanese Americans and many Chinese Americans, American Indians and dark-skinned Mexican Americans did not" (p. 44). Roediger (1994/2001) attributes this access in large part to the ability to pass as white.

According to Roediger (1994/2001), the distinction between black and not-yet-white created a hierarchical classification structure. The various immigrant groups that made up the prewhite, or not-yet-white, ethnic identity strove to be white, while at the same time identifying and even sympathizing with African Americans (p. 333). Roediger further illustrates that the not-yet-white and African American built ties filled with tension. Much of the anger of not-yet-whites, resulting from being discriminated against, was directed downward as hatred toward the more oppressed black community rather than upward toward the "full" whites from whom the oppression was coming (p. 333-334). Crenshaw (1988) explains that a tension between poor whites and non-whites is maintained by the comparison to the "other" or non-whites (p. 1372). Eventually

race emerged as much as a set of "human traits"—with whites associated with positive traits and blacks burdened with mainly negative stereotypes—as a set of physical characteristics (p. 1373). In this binary paradigm of positive/negative characteristics, negative characteristics of whites became framed by "pre-white" identity, such as the discourse that Jewish people are stingy (example provided by Williams, 1989, p. 2146-2151). This allowed whiteness to be free from negative human traits. Hatred by marginalized whites toward racially oppressed groups is a phenomenon still observable in today's society.

The not-yet-white mentality remains in current society, though not through ethnic classifications, however, but through class distinctions. Wander et al. (1999) assert that poor whites often lack full access to the privileges of whiteness. Whiteness not "only lets millions of nonwhites fall through the cracks but also millions of whites" (p. 21). Even with existing class divisions among whites, interracial coalitions between poor not-quite-white and non-white communities fail to materialize as a social or political force.

The central cog in racial inequality is the existence of white privilege. Whites gained their privilege through years of racial discrimination in both directly racist and more subtle ways, such as through seemingly race neutral policies. Race and racism are ever shifting and evasive constructs (Hall, 1996). In fact, race and racism are complex and cannot be explained simply though the lens of privilege and access, especially with the lasting effects of slavery and segregation that continue to contribute to racial inequality today (Garner, 2006, p. 262). These inequalities have been intensified by government policies—enacted since the abolishment of slavery and legal segregation—that contributed to an imbalance of power based on race (Lipsitz, 1995; Kendall, 2006; Roediger, 1994/2001). For example, Lipsitz (1995) draws attention to federal government organizations, such as the FHA (Federal Housing Administration) that created

policies that caused gaps between different racial groups' accumulated wealth (p. 376). The result of federal government policies were further exacerbated by "urban renewal" projects, such as "[f]ederally funded highways designed to connect [predominantly white] suburban commuters with downtown places of employment [that] destroyed already scarce housing in minority communities" (p. 374). Lipsitz continues by demonstrating how these renewal projects not only funneled money to the established white community, they also displaced many urban nonwhites. Another effect of these renewal projects was that they increased the number of whites moving to the suburbs—known as white flight.

This flight to the suburbs contributed to the conflation of diverse European ethnicities into a single white identity (pp. 372-373). Thus, whites benefit not only from "skin" privilege (Kendall, 2006, Frankenberg, 1993/1997; McIntosh, 1995), but also from government housing policies and other policies of neoconservativism – contributing to the privileges associated with wealth accumulation (Lipsitz, 1995). Even those whites who have not accumulated "true" wealth have the "consolation prize" of whiteness. Harris (1993) correctly points out that whiteness is a "social construct predicated on white dominance and Black subordination" (p. 1761).

Additionally, the housing policies considered by Lipsitz provide whites the "native" claim to the suburbs. As Nagel (2013) notes, such a claim provides whites with a discursive advantage when analyzing who belongs and who does not belong in these suburban neighborhoods. As previously white only suburbs change their racial make-up, white residents still create shifting boundaries that cast doubt on the legitimacy of non-white residents. Through notions of "merit," non-white residents of previously white spaces receive varying degrees of tolerance. On one end is a "'live-and-let-live' attitude that is more about acceptance of certain kinds of racial others than about celebration of diversity" (p. 632). However, this acceptance is based on a set of "middle-

class credentials" (p. 634). Those not perceived to have earned a meritorious set of credentials, such as "law breaking" immigrants and people brought into the district through housing assistance, fall on the other side of this acceptance boundary (pp.634 – 636).

Harris (1993) and Lipsitz (1995) point out that equal rights programs designed to correct years of imbalanced capital distribution, such as Affirmative Action, were often attacked during the 1980s and 90s by contesting workplace quotas and diversity-centered admission policies. Though affirmative action was framed by neoconservatives as reverse racism, in actuality "[a]ffirmative action is based on principles of antisubordination, not principles of Black superiority" (Harris, 1993, p. 1785). The attack on equal rights programs, along with changes in tax codes benefited whites – by supporting the accumulation of wealth by those that already held capital. Furthermore, a dis-investment in American cities, caused by white flight, decreased property values in now predominantly black and Latino urban centers (Lipsitz, 1995, pp. 377-379). The growing wealth gap between non-whites, particularly blacks, and whites was further exacerbated by existing social inequality (Oliver & Shapiro, 1997). This created what Lipsitz (1995) terms a "possessive investment in whiteness." According to Chang (2005), the sociopolitical conditions, outlined by Lipsitz (1995) that exacerbated the wealth gap along racial lines, were the same conditions that sparked the environment that birthed hip-hop culture in the South Bronx, populated predominately by African Americans and Latino Americans.

As is clearly shown in the literature, not only have policies and social norms regarding immigration, housing, suburban migration, and urban renewal aided in the construction of a pan-ethnic white identity, there are an equal number of social norms that maintain power. Kendall (2006) and McIntosh (1995) provide a number of direct privileges granted to white citizens of the United States. One of the powerful privileges granted to whites is that "most of the other power

holders and decision makers share [their] skin color" (Kendall, 2006, p. 71). These white power holders include those that control the popular media. Not surprisingly, then, in order to understand the role of race in hip-hop, one has to understand the framing of race in other mediums. Media presents whiteness as "rational" and authoritative. As seen in media and pop culture critiques of whiteness, mass media is used to maintain whiteness and provides examples of white privilege in action (Giroux, 1997; Roediger, 1997). "[T]he media, politics, education are still in the hands of white people, still speak for whites while claiming – and sometimes sincerely aiming – to speak for humanity" (Dyer, 1997, p. 3).

Locations associated with non-whites are presented by popular media, including news reporting, in negative ways (Warren, 2001; Giroux, 1997). According to Giroux (1997), popular media – through movies, television, and even the news – represent urban locations so that they "decontextualiz[e] and dehistoriz[e]" depictions of blacks and Latinos by reinforcing stereotypes of "intellectual inferior[ity], hostil[ity], and childish[ness]" and place the rationality and structure of whiteness as black and Latinos peoples' only hope (p. 299). Warren (2001) adds that the media code these urban locations as "jungles of danger and terror" (p. 41). The dehumanization of black and Latino people is not limited to fictional media, but can also be found on the news. Kendall (2006) contributes to the argument of dehumanizing media by pointing out that black victims of Hurricane Katrina were described as *looters*, while white victims *found* the items they possessed (p. 82). This phenomenon is not limited to the Katrina tragedy, but can also been seen in the coverage of violence occurring in white communities versus black communities. Bonilla-Silva (2012) points out that media coverage of shootings in white schools creates empathy for the victims, whereas shootings at urban schools are framed to reinforce issues of violence in urban

areas (pp. 182-183). As the literature shows, the media serve as a critical tool that functions to maintain the social hierarchy of race in the United States.

Discourse around race is critical to maintaining the power of whiteness. Because of the way race manifests in the U.S., being white is not a concern for most whites. Frequently, whites are not even conscious of their race (hooks, 1992; Kendall, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993/1997; Wiegman, 1999; Dyer, 1997). However, according to hooks (1993), "[w]hite people were regarded as terrorists, especially those who dared to enter that segregated space of blackness," by black Americans (p. 170). Because of the terrorizing effects that whites have on the black community, there has been, and still is, a tradition in the black community of collecting data and analyzing the "white Other." The data collection and analysis, described by hooks (1993), is historically not seen among whites. This obliviousness to whiteness, as well as other races and the whole concept of race, becomes evident in the language of whites when discussing race.

White racial obliviousness can be directly linked to how the discourse of whiteness is constructed and maintained. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) identified the predominant rhetorical strategies employed by whites when talking about race. The discourse of whiteness is often linked to power by invoking narratives about majority/minority membership (p. 298)—e.g., the explicit linking of "white" to status or the pretense that they represent the majority of Americans. Additionally, whiteness allows whites to not identify their race (p. 299). Nakayama and Krizek also point out that the discourse of whiteness leans heavily on "white" as a scientific classification (p. 300). For some whites, there is a conflation of their racial identity and national identity— e.g. white means "that I'm of American descent" (p. 300), while others refuse to label themselves racially (p. 301). It is also common for whites to evoke their perceived ethnic identity when examining race—e.g. "I am Irish" (p. 302). While these rhetorical strategies can seem a bit

mundane, they are critical to the maintenance of whiteness, especially when coupled with features of white privilege and the color-blind ideology (see Gallagher 2003).

Crenshaw (1988) points out that most people in contemporary society adhere to the dominant narrative that racial discrimination no longer exists. This perspective allows for racial discrimination to continued, unchecked. (p. 1347). While Lipsitz (1995), among others, clearly articulates that social inequalities exist to this day, whites use rhetorical strategies, which is clearly linked to color-blind ideology, to distance themselves from those social inequalities. However, a person "is aware of race, deciding to ignore it or not pay attention to it is not the same as being color[-]blind" (Carbado & Harris, 2008, p. 1210). It impossible to actively not notice race. Further, the result of the color-blind perspective can cause the reinforcement of a post-racial meritocracy. "The most significant aspect of Black oppression seems to be what is believed about Black Americans, not what Black American believe. Black people are boxed in largely because there is a consensus among many whites that the oppression of Blacks is legitimate" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1358). Kendall (2006) demonstrates how the color-blind ideology is used in discourse to perpetuate the myth that everyone is on an equal footing (p. 52). By indicating that race does not matter, a color-blind ideology leaves out the historical and current injustices that are linked to racial classification. Lipsitz (1995) states that individualism, added to the color-blind ideology, creates narratives of young whites as victims of policies designed to correct racial inequality, such as Affirmative Action. According to hooks (1993), many of the holders of the liberal ideal, color-blindness, consider themselves anti-racist and thereby "unwittingly invest in the sense of whiteness as mystery" (p. 168). The perception of color-blindness allows for whites to believe that social condition is due to merit. Crenshaw (1988) points out that people must look at racial inequity to force whites to "confront myths about equality of opportunity that justify for them whatever

measure of economic success they may have attained" (p. 1381). The color-blind mythology prevents a legitimate assessment of opportunities afforded by race. While whites benefit from a color-blind perspective, such as in college admissions (see Carbado & Harris, 2008) and employment opportunities (see Williams, 1989), Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll (2008) show that whites are not extreme outliers, in terms of race-neutral ideologies, when compared with all races (pp. 418-419).

Although race-neutral ideologies are seen across all races, they provide whites with an advantageous discursive space. Much like the neoconservative argument against Affirmative Action policies, when conflicts arise structural benefits are viewed by whites to be held by non-whites despite a reality that structural benefits still remain firmly with white folks (Bucholtz, 2011; Foster, 2009). Race-neutrality also allows whites to blame conflict directly on non-whites. According to Foster (2009), some whites see claims of racial discrimination as a source of interracial tension not the result of racism. Additionally, whites point to the concept of "black pride" as discriminatory toward whites (p. 696). It is when these attitudes of race-neutrality are coupled with victim blaming, such as blaming an interracial couple for discrimination of their bi-racial child (see Bonilla-Silva, 2012, pp. 185-186) that allows racism to be normalized.

Even in spaces where race can be easily masked, such as the internet, people are not in a "color-blind" or race-neutral arena. As pointed out by Carbado and Harris (2008), the internet can create a space where racial identity is concealed. However, this does not mean that the internet is a color-blind space. Thus color-blindness remains a mythology even in the digital age. Despite the absence of visual cues, race remains present. First, people are still aware that those being interacted with have a race. Second, race is not only visual markers but is also defined by prescribed "traits." This allows the internet interaction to contain non-visual racial cues. Third, "if in the context of an

internet exchange the person with whom we are interacting does not expressly indicate their race, and if their racial identity is not otherwise discernible, there is at least some evidence to suggest that we will presume that that person is white. The fact of that racial presumption precludes the possibility of color[-]blindness" (p. 1210).

These three facts of color-blindness in digital interaction can be seen in the case of Spark Master Tape[32]. Even though Spark Master Tape is an anonymous rapper, he[33] was subject to the "Guess the Race" game on many message boards. His anonymity prevented visual cues to determine his race, however that did not prevent people from guessing his racial identity based on the type of music he made or the fact he distorts his voice on his recordings. Even when interacting on the internet, one will exploit other tools to discern race. What makes the Spark Master Tape situation unique is that in hip-hop white is not necessarily the default race.

According to Nakayama and Krizek another strategy functions to mask the "historical and experiential knowledge of whiteness" (p. 300). This dehistorization allows for a dismissal of the events and policies that created the racial hierarchy (see Lipsitz, 1995; Roediger, 1994/2001; Roediger, 1999; Wander et al., 1999). Nakayama's and Krizek (1995) point out, which other scholars support, that the power of whiteness lies in racial classifications. So, in order to dismantle racist structures, the language and images that are used to maintain their existence must first be identified.

**Debates and Controversies in Whiteness/White studies**

Debates within White studies revolve around whether or not whiteness serves as an anti-racist area of theory or achieves its expressed goal of deconstructing racialized hierarchies, while

[32] Spark Master Tape became part of the internet consciousness after the conclusion of my data collection.
[33] Despite being anonymous at the time my research was authored, Spark Master Tape has referred to himself as "he." So I will be using the male pronouns when discussing Spark Master Tape.

other critiques question the motivation of White studies scholars. Garner (2007) presents some potential pitfalls for using whiteness as a "paradigm." By reinforcing whiteness through white studies, white identity becomes essentialized (p. 8). Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll (2009) conclude that "whiteness studies is a notoriously multifaceted, even contradictory field, and whiteness itself a similarly complicated theoretical construct. Multifaceted in both its meanings and uses, the concept of whiteness can be rendered as visible or invisible, an identity or the absence of identity, a normative cultural ideology or a subjectivity that believes that it transcends cultural time and space" (p. 419). This sentiment can also be seen in Hartigan's (2005a) critique of essentialized analysis of whites. Hartigan maintains that racial analysis, even in White studies, should be situational not essential. Hartigan's (2005) argument is built on the premise that whites are not always in positions of power in interracial interactions. It is equally problematic when whiteness is too "fluid" or "contingent." This sentiment is shared by Bucholtz (2011), when he encourages that any understanding of race must be viewed in a local context (p. 400). While this presents the opposite issue of essentializing, it can be damaging to an accurate understanding of how "white" functions. Whiteness loses its explanatory power when viewed as fluid (Hartigan, 2005a, pp. 8-9).

While some critics are concerned with the fact that "whiteness" is either overly simplified or overly complex, others contend that White studies treats "white" as if it is unlike any other racial category. The problem facing scholars that fall victim to this issue is how to represent white discourse, while not reinforcing it (p. 9-10). Similarly, Garner (2007) also argues that research on whiteness functions as a "recentering" of whiteness. Some whiteness scholars get away from the anti-racist purpose of White studies and move to a simple "dissection" of different groups of white

people (p. 10). The contention here is that the act of identifying whiteness as a racial location does not necessarily make ones scholarship anti-racist (p. 11).

While Garner's (2007) critiques of whiteness are more warnings than full-blown critiques of the field, Hill (2004) questions the underlying driving force behind White studies. For Hill, critical scholarship must be viewed through the lens of the current state of academia. Hill makes the point that "like whiteness… humanities scholars are trying to learn how to occupy our own absence" (p. 139). White studies merely reflect the ongoing struggles faced by faculty due to university cutbacks. With universities cutting positions, the need to be perceived as productive, and the emphasis on diversity in the institution, creates a need to venture into new research areas such as White studies. Hill (2004) asserts that "white professors jockey for continued relevance in the multicultural academy, and do so on administrative decree. But the difficulties implicit to the task of making whiteness visible are difficulties one cannot simply shake on demand" (p. 175).

Hill makes excellent points about the state of the academy and the "diminished public funding and the demise of universal access to higher education" (p. 142). However, it is an unjustified leap to claim that White studies' existence is due solely to paranoia about one's position in academia. Studying whiteness, according to hooks (1993), has existed in the black community long before the advent of Critical Race Studies. In fact, Hill's attack on whites who use whiteness for positioning flies in the face of the fact that some of the earliest whiteness scholars are non-white (see hooks, 1993; West, 1982/2001). Also, the comparison of whiteness to humanities scholars, trying to find their place in the reality of modern higher education, undermines the power that white privilege plays in the lives of non-whites and whites.

Garner's (2007) warnings only establish a need for more diverse productions of whiteness scholarship, with the central goal of deconstructing racism. Yet, it may be true for white scholars

that the "anti-racist white subject" is an impossible goal (Wiegman, 1999; Lipsitz, 1995). In fact, Hughey (2010) notes that both white supremacist and antiracist whites are guilty of cultural superiority and essentialization (p. 1297). Nevertheless, it is a credible goal to attempt. According to Hill (2004), the risk of whiteness studies is that "bringing whiteness to the fore in order to interrogate its normative grip runs afoul of the desire to displace it" (p. 178). Though pointing out this conundrum is valid, ignoring its grip is equally undesirable (Frankenberg, 1993/1997; West, 1982/2001; McIntosh, 1995; Kendall, 2006). Even after the election of America's first Black president, it remains important that advocacy for racial equality remain. "The challenge faced by civil rights constituents and other stakeholders is to find new ways to talk about the reproduction of racial inequality in a political era in which race is left off the table by the very representatives they have supported" (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1337).

I focus on hip-hop and race for my dissertation. Hip-hop's clear connection to African American culture and black America, while being largely consumed by white males, makes the use of critical race studies essential. Whiteness studies will be the centerpiece for this theoretical lens, I will look at the development of the white ethnic identity and look at the discursive strategies of whiteness, including the functioning of "color-blind" perspectives analyzed in Rodriguez's (2006) research on a conscious hip-hop scene. In order to understand whiteness, I consider race in a broader sense. This inextricable link of race and hip-hop created by hip-hop's origins and its white consumer base lends credence to the questions: **(RQ4) How does whiteness influence white hip-hoppers' authenticity?** and **(RQ5) How does hip-hop influence how whites understand race?** The diverse make-up of the hip-hop community creates interracial interaction but the question remains whether it creates actively anti-racist or progressive whites.

## Contribution of the Dissertation

Through my research, I seek to contribute back to the body of scholarship from which I draw. While identifying places that my project can make original contributions, I break it into two major areas: to the study of hip-hop, and to the area of White studies.

### Contribution to Hip-Hop Studies

In spite of increasing amounts of researchers dealing with hip-hop culture on a wide range of topics, significant gaps within the body of research still remain. Sullivan (2003) states that "black and white adolescents are influenced by rap in different ways. These differences need to be further examined and interpreted" (p. 619). The majority of hip-hop scholars, both social theorists and field researchers, deals with African American culture. Even with a growing literature concerning the perspective of white hip-hoppers, opportunity for further investigation on this topic remains. I contribute to this body of literature, with my dissertation, by providing a new temporal and locational context.

Some of the researchers of white hip-hoppers theorize how whites consume/participate in hip-hop and the effects on the hip-hop culture (see Samuels, 1991/2004; Rose, 1994; Baldwin, 1999/2004; Swedenburg, 1992/2004). Potter (1995) adds to this tradition by theorizing about the white experience in, and with, hip-hop culture, yet this work still lacks substantial white voices. Considering the percentage—albeit estimated and not closely quantified—of the hip-hop population occupied by whites (see Sullivan, 2003; Rose, 2008; Ogbar, 2007; Kitwana, 2005; Rose, 1994), a more thorough job thus needs to be done exploring their perceptions. Using ethnographic data – in the form of interviews and full participant observation – in conjunction with autoethnographic data, I explore racial presentation, racial perceptions, and perceptions of hip-hop

authenticity. The addition of post-subcultural theory, allows me to analyze contemporary manifestations of hip-hop culture.

There are five studies that are foundational for constructing my research design: Kitwana (2005), Rodriquez (2006), Harrison (2009), Harkness (2010) and Jeffries (2011). While the works of Rodriquez (2006), Harrison (2009), and Harkness (2010) provide substantial grounding for the research I have conducted, I make two major contributions to the work these scholars have accomplished. First, I incorporate both subcultural and post-subcultural theory to add understandings to the social formations they investigated. This is not a shortcoming in their research, just a potential for insight from my work. Second, I engage the idea of scene which allows me to differentiate between my work and the contribution each of these ethnographic studies. Rodriquez (2006) worked in the Northeast United States, Harrison (2009) looked at the distinct hip-hop scene found in the San Francisco Bay area, while Harkness (2010) looked at rappers in Chicago. I locate myself in a different time and space so my ethnographic research contributes to the overall body of hip-hop scholarship.

A research project that my dissertation resembles is Rodriquez's (2006) investigations of white fans of conscious rap music, which uses color-blind ideology as its theoretical lens. While his research is important, there are ways to address its limitations and expand the body of knowledge on this subject. Through the use of subculture and post-subculture theory, I present the multiple hip-hop communities today. As seen in the literature there are many different manifestations of hip-hop, whether it is genre (see Kitwana, 1995; Baldwin, 1999/2004), hybrid genre (see Rose, 1994), regionalization (Baldwin, 1999/2004; Foreman, 2004b), or globalized hybrid (see Bennett, 1999a, 1999b; Nayak, 2003). It cannot be denied that there are many hip-hop identities. Rodriquez (2006) himself alludes to the importance of expanding the scope of the

research concerning race and white hip-hoppers. “Racial ideology is experienced in distinct locations, even as it is shaped by discourses circulating at a national level and spiraling out of the racialized social system” (p. 663). I Follow the lead of whiteness researchers, such as Hartigan (2005a & 2005b), and the observations of Rodriquez (2006), I look at the dominant discourse in a very specialized locale, both temporally and spatially, to examine the national discourse on race in a distinct environment.

Another way I expand on Rodriquez’s (2005) research is the additional focus on a fuller sense of whiteness. While color-blindness plays an important role in the racial perceptions and racial identity of whites, whiteness and white privilege move in and around the color-blind ideology but are broader conceptual lenses. By broadening the view of the lens, different and significant conclusions can be made. I not only view my findings through theorizing about whiteness, but by using literature about hip-hop and subculture/post-subculture, as well. While there is no need to necessarily replace or refute Rodriquez’s findings, there is a need to build and expand on them. By beginning with what Kitwana (2005), Rodriquez (2006), Harrison (2009), Harkness (2010), and Jeffries (2011) contributed to the understanding of hip-hop, I help fill in some voids in the complex structure called hip-hop culture.

Authenticity is a critical concept in hip-hop culture (Baldwin, 1999/2004; Dyson, 2007; Judy, 1994/2004; McLeod, 1999; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994; Swedenburg, 1992/2004). With very few exceptions the theorizing and research done concerning the question of authenticity has been focused on hip-hop culture, in general, or African Americans specifically. The significance of White consumption rates indicates the need for further exploration of whites’ sense-making process of the concept of authenticity, or at the very least their gauge for authenticity. Race is one of McLeod’s (1999) dimensions of authenticity, but it also plays a vital role in many of his other

dimensions. While many scholars have interpreted the effect that authentic racial identity or essentialized racial identity has on African American hip-hoppers, very little research has been done investigating white hip-hoppers and authenticity. While Hess (2005) investigates notable white performers' negotiation of authenticity and Cutler (1999), Potter (1995), and Kitwana (2005) provide ways some whites cope with authenticity, I directly address white conceptions of authenticity among white fans, participants, and practitioners of hip-hop.

**Contribution to White[ness] Studies**

Whiteness studies scholars inform my data collection and guide the analysis of my participants' presentation of hip-hop authenticity. Moreover, there are also ways that I contribute, with my dissertation, to the area of White studies and the theorizing about whiteness. Lipsitz's (1995), Roediger's (1994/2001, 1997, & 1999), Wander's et al. (1999), and West's (1982/2001) scholarship were all critically important when analyzing my data. I agree with Hall (1996) and Hartigan (2005a & 2005b), among others, that race is situational. Race as a symbol cannot be fixed in one location; it takes on different meanings at different times and shifts meanings based on conditions. Despite the fact that reading race is fluid and situational, I ground my research with existing critical race theorists to examine whether hip-hop's unique racial dynamic results in developing a progressive racial perspective among whites.

Even more critical for my contribution to White studies is the scholarship that deals directly with how whiteness is maintained. One of the methodological approaches of White studies which I use in this dissertation is that of media and popular culture analysis. I must understand the way that media produces images reinforce white identity and white supremacy in order to digest the discourse and behaviors of my research participants for my dissertation. The participants, undoubtedly, interact with mass media, so the media outlets will shape their socialization of race.

Giroux's (1997) work is important, especially his critique of *Dangerous Minds* – a movie based in an urban school with hip-hop music and imagery as its backdrop – deals with some of the same images that are perpetuated by popular hip-hop culture. Awareness of media is critically important not only during data analysis, but also during data collection.

Though I am informed by previous White studies research, I also makes contributions to the field of White studies. I use certain data collection methods in an effort to ground my theorizing in the voice of those being analyzed. According to Hartigan (2005a), because white identity is different in different social situations "it is critical that antiracists attempt to ground their insights about whiteness in an ethnographic orientation toward their subjects" (p. 241). I heed this call of using ethnography in order to ground the theory about white hip-hop identity in the particular orientation of my research participants. I also share the aim of Twine and Gallagher (2008) to continue "to dismantle racial hierarchies so that someday we live in a racially just world in which children will no longer understand the meaning of the term 'racism' or white supremacy" (pp. 19-20).

**Shaping the Field(work)**

*The style at this show differs slightly from the ones I experienced at raves and punk concerts. The pants are a little baggier than at the punk shows, in general. The pants are a little more structured than at raves, in general. While I notice slight differences in style, the clothing across the three cultures—rave, punk, and hip-hop—are more similar than different.*

*The social organizing of the show is easy to pick-up on from my prior experiences at punk shows and raves. In the front are diehard fans trying to get as close as they can. The next tier is dancers and in the back is the social layer. While these distinct groupings varied in size and make-up, the particular dancing varied but overall the placement of the audience was the same. Making*

*this event different for me is something visceral, a sense of comfort vibrated in my chest. The basslines of the songs are like the warm feeling of soup on a cold day. After getting my bearings, I walk to the merchandise table I passed on the way in and started consuming hip-hop in the most literal sense.*

Following the model set forth in Rose's (1994) work, my dissertation is based on face-to-face engagement with the population I seek to re/present. Potter (1995) states that academics "have to come closer to a full engagement with hip-hop culture, though inevitably they tend to take from it chiefly what is of interest to their own work" (p. 151). By using ethnographic field research methods, I can insert actual hip-hopper's perspectives easier than in distant theorizing without direct interaction with hip-hoppers. The method, I have chosen, allows for perception checks about interpretations of the data as well.

For the purposes of my dissertation project, it is crucial to view all data about hip-hop identity through the lens of authenticity (see McLeod, 1999; Dyson, 2007). It becomes even more important when examining white hip-hoppers, due to the emphasis on racial authenticity (McLeod, 1999). Though previous theorists and journalists have ventured into the realm of white authenticity (Cutler, 1999; Potter, 1995; Kitwana, 2005), little work has been done attempting to gather whites' interpretations of hip-hop authenticity. Filling this void is a significant contribution of my research. As proposed throughout this chapter, I utilize my fieldwork to answer five primary research questions.

Using subculture and post-subculture theory, I attempt to place hip-hop as it is currently constituted with, beyond, or between these two paradigms by asking "**(RQ1) How does tension between subculturalists and post-subculturalists influence the understanding of how the hip-hop community is shaped by hip-hop music and art?"** The literature investigating hip-hop and

white hip-hop leaves vacant the answers to: **(RQ2) In what ways do white hip-hoppers conceptualize authenticity in hip-hop?** And using McLeod's (1999) assertion that black is authentic and white is inauthentic: **(RQ3) In what ways do whites re/present an authentic hip-hop identity?** and **(RQ4) How does whiteness influence white hip-hoppers' authenticity?** and **(RQ5) How does hip-hop influence how whites understand race?** My research questions are the backbone for my research. I use my research question to make my methodological choices. I also keep them in mind as I analyzed my data and address the questions specifically in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 3 "METHODOLOGY: DON'T SWEAT THE TECHNIQUE[34]"

*I find myself sitting in my customary place for small gatherings. I am right next to the stereo, riffling through CD cases and books to be sure the best music available, in my opinion, is being played. Why shouldn't I take on this task, my taste in music is superior to these clones that listen to the same old lame music. I am not concerned with their opinion because their opinion is wrong. It is my knowledge and experience that matters. My position, as self-proclaimed DJ, also functions so as to bring people to me to socialize about music. As usual, I take this opportunity to tell people what they should enjoy musically.*

A lack of self-awareness is problematic for a young Dale, sitting in the corner of the room. I undoubtedly came off as a pretentious jerk but also lost out on the multiplicity of perspectives and knowledge that each of my fellow partygoers brought to the conversations I dominated. I have become more self-aware and am consistently taking measures to improve my own self-awareness. I keep in mind this flaw of my youth, as I constructed the methodology for my research project. Through autoethnography, I am committed to self-reflexivity. Through my writing I hope to encourage critical examination of my white, male hip-hopness, even when I do not fully do so.

In this chapter, I will take a brief moment to address my perspective as a researcher, specifically the relationship between researcher, participants, and readers. This is critical because my paradigmatic perspective shaped my fieldwork and data display. I use equal parts interpretation of other white hip-hoppers and a re/presentation of my own hip-hop authenticity in my research. I then justify my data collection strategies and describe those techniques. After discussing my analysis procedures, I address my use of autoethnography and how it influences my writing.

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[34] *Don't Sweat the Technique* is an album and song by Eric B. and Rakim, a DJ and Emcee duo from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The title is used here to metaphorically represent that the hip-hop arts—emceeing, deejaying, breaking, and graffiti art—are equal parts creative art and skilled craft. The same can be said about research methodology.

## Paradigmatic Positioning

I pointed out in the introduction that there is a transactional perspective to epistemology that is embedded in the history of hip-hop from the act of sampling to the value of battling. My desire to fall within hip-hop's paradigmatic framework drove my choices to select ethnographic methods. That same desire places me directly in the ontological, epistemological and methodological perspective of the critical theory paradigm and constructivism paradigm, as laid out by Guba and Lincoln (2004, p. 26-28). For all these perspectives—hip-hop, critical theory, and constructivism—the transactional nature of knowledge allows for the distinction between ontology and epistemology to fade away (p. 27).

Much like hip-hop, those that take seriously the critical and constructivist paradigms "are still seeking recognition and avenues for input" (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 35). My methodological choices are also informed by issues of control. It is my desire to shift the locus of control to my participants and to my readers, in the spirit of constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, pp. 175-176). This attitude toward control is also congruent with the early years of hip-hop, when it was very much a participant-oriented culture, driven by those that were making and consuming the art (Hebdige, 1987; Rose, 1995; Ogg & Upshal, 2001; Keyes, 2002; Chang, 2005).

Positioning myself, and hip-hop, in this way is absolutely essential to the proper selection of data collection, analysis, and presentation techniques. First, I chose ethnography because of "the ethnographic assumption of a heterogeneous nature to human beings, and the value of scholarship that promotes diversity and inclusion" (Berry, 2011, p. 174). It is the diversity of life and the transactional desire in the search for knowledge that reinforces my position as an ethnographer. My desire for reflexivity and to express a particular reality is central to evaluating ethnographic research (Richardson, 2000, p. 257). The reflexive nature of ethnography requires me as a

researcher to "interrogate each of our selves regarding the way in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes of our own lives" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183).

In regard to my position as a researcher, I will move on to my specific strategies for my research. For Goodall (2000), ethnography "is the result of a lot of reading, a disciplined imagination, hard work in the field and in front of a computer, and solid research skills" (p. 10). Chapter 2 reflects my preparational reading, now I lay out the specific technical and creative decisions I made to conduct, analyze and present my research.

**Justification of Ethnographic Data Collection Strategies**

The primary goal of my data collection is to allow me to capture the experiences and perceptions of white hip-hoppers as they cope with their racial identities in a community that views their racial identity as inauthentic (McLeod 1999). Potter (1995)states that hip-hop scholars must be "on speaking terms" with hip-hop culture (p. 152). It is my position that the best way to get on speaking terms with a culture is to speak with and observe those participating in the culture using ethnography. According to Hartigan (2005a), because white identity is different in different social situations "it is critical that antiracists attempt to ground their insights about whiteness in an ethnographic orientation toward their subjects" (p. 241). I am following in the tradition of previous research on hip-hop culture by using interviewing and observation (see Rose, 1994; Kitwana, 2005; Rodriquez, 2006; Harrison, 2009; Harkness, 2010; Jeffries, 2011). While hip-hop scholarship exists that documents the perspective of hip-hoppers, there remains space for additional work that considers different scenes, and different moments in time. The ever-changing tapestry of hip-hop culture has created opportunities to view hip-hop through different lenses. I use a cultural studies perspective, particularly subcultural and post-subcultural theory, along with

White studies to provide a new understanding of the functioning of hip-hop as a culture and genre of art.

There has been analysis of the concept of authenticity among white hip-hoppers – e.g. Hess (2005) and Cutler (1999). I add an anthropological perspective to the work of Hess (2005) by directly engaging white hip-hoppers. By building on Hess' analysis of the lyrics and public persona of Eminem, Vanilla Ice, and the Beastie Boys, a richer understanding of how white hip-hoppers cope with authenticity can be achieved. Cutler (1999) charts the linguistic tendencies of white adolescent hip-hop fans who adopt African American Vernacular English. I use her model of direct interactions and add a transactional quality through member-checking interviews.

As mentioned in my review of literature, found in chapter 2, there exists a small group of researchers' work that emphasize ethnography in the study of white hip-hoppers (Rodriquez, 2006; Harrison, 2009; Harkness, 2010; Jeffries, 2011). While not all of these researchers focused exclusively on white hip-hoppers—Harrison (2009) and Jeffries (2011) studied hip-hop as a whole and explicitly account for white hip-hoppers—they all provided a structural foundation for my research. By employing different theoretical perspectives and locating my study in a different place and time in hip-hop history, I have identified some exciting findings and was able to draw new conclusions, which allows for a deeper understanding of hip-hop culture and its progress. I also incorporate my own experience through autoethnography. Including autoethnography alongside the interviews, observations and ethnographic details of my participants allows me to underscore a fundamental equality between myself and my participants, understanding them to be "co-researchers"—something which Orbe (1996) has long advocated. At the same time, I am motivated to make my data collection choices that reflect my commitment to dislocating power

hierarchies, particularly trying to avoid the supposed objective positioning of the scholar researcher as sole, or primary, creator and purveyor of knowledge.

## Description of Ethnographic Data Collection

*My hip-hop DJ friend is spinning[35] his going away party. Despite being a hardcore hip-hop head[36], I cannot talk him into playing any Immortal Technique, C Rayz Walz, or even Talib Kweli[37]. Though slightly irritated by the fact that I had no influence over the music, I completely respected the energy created by his song selection. At the end of the night, as I am complaining about his play list, he explains to me that "sometimes deejaying is about rocking the crowd."*

### Data Collection Strategies

It takes understanding others to "rock" a crowd. My friend used years of data collection by playing various records in various settings. In the same way, for me to understand white hip-hop culture, it took me observing various hip-hoppers in various settings. I divide my research into the three main stages of any research project: data collection, data analysis, and display of data. While the first two stages, in many studies, occur simultaneously in a cyclical nature (Spradley, 1980; p. 29), I consider them separately – first the collection then analysis because data cannot be analyzed until the data has been data collected. Thus, each of these stages is addressed individually. In the section pertaining to data collection, I review site selection, participant selection, central data collection strategies, and how data is collected to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. I divide my data collection activities into site and participant selection, participant observation, and interviews.

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[35] Spinning is a slang term for deejaying.
[36] A hip-hop head is terminology for a person that is passionately devoted to knowing hip-hop culture.
[37] Immortal Technique, C Rayz Walz, and Talib Kweli are all artists that were considered "underground" hip-hop during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

**Site and participant selection.** According to Sullivan (2003) "black and white adolescents are influenced by rap in different ways. These differences need to be further examined and interpreted" (p. 619). Since there is potential for building on the literature on white hip-hoppers, I placed myself in a position to interact in various situations with white fans, participants, and practitioners of hip-hop culture. I use previous ethnographic research that focuses on, exclusively or partially, white hip-hoppers—Rodriquez (2006), Harkness (2010), and Jeffries (2009)—to inform my data collection procedures from selection through analysis.

The cultural site for observation must meet certain criteria to ensure ease of data collection (Spradley, 1980, pp. 45-52; Lofland et al., 2006, pp. 18-31). After reviewing literature on ethnography, and looking at previous research on hip-hop, I have determined that live performances, or shows, by hip-hop artists are an ideal location for observation. The shows are public settings that "offer relatively open opportunity of observation" (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 36). The venues for these shows are locations where permission to gain entry is not required.

At the shows I am allowed for unobtrusive active participation (see Spradley, 1980, pp. 48 & 60) as an audience member. As a site for data collection, I am provided by these shows a relatively un-complex set of events that are part of a larger network of social situations (Spradley, 1980, p. 46). These shows are located where the desired participants congregate. I visited the field for full participant-observation 20 times over an 11-month period. I selected shows based on a number of characteristics. Because my target participant was 18 years of age or older, the majority of the shows I attended were 18 and up events. On the occasion that I attended an all ages event I only collected data from those that were marked as over 21 by the venue via bracelets or hand-markings. The venues ranged from less than one hundred person capacity to nearly 10,000-person capacity. Because the size of venue is closely linked to the size of an artist's fan base, the

selection of various venues provided me exposure to fans of artists at different levels in their career. I also located events in different areas of the metropolitan region, from affluent suburbs to major university towns, and of course in the urban center.

According to LeCompte and Schensul (1997), there are ten data collection techniques (pp. 128-130). By using multiple data collection techniques, I can ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which will be detailed later. For now, I identify different techniques employed for my dissertation project, and review the technique's contributions to the data set. I use observation and ethnographic interviewing for my data collection in my dissertation. I check my interpretations of the data collected during my observations and elicit additional information from my participants in my interviews.

**Participant observation.** I made Observations at the cultural sites as an active participant observation. Though observations are always made from the researcher's point of view (Schensul et al., 1997, p. 95), the participants are the center of this research. So, the observations focus on the events and activities that happen at the cultural site, while the setting is noted to frame the interactions. Naturally, it was important to take fieldnotes and to keep an ethnographic record of the goings on at the site (Spradley, 1980; Schensul et al., 1997; Emerson et al., 1995). I drafted condensed fieldnotes using my Blackberry phone. These notes consisted of behavioral observations and brief onsite interviews. To follow best practices for ethnographic research I expanded my notes immediately on arriving home for the evening in a MS Word document (Schensul et al., 1997, p. 116). All participants that I had direct interaction with were informed of their rights and provided their informed consent verbally and written form (Appendix A was given to attendees of the shows and Appendix B was given at the in-depth interviews).

When available I recorded audio memos on my phone to supplement my written notes. However, while in the field I never recorded the voice of any of my participants. The recording of my participants only occurred during one-on-one interviews. In addition to fieldnotes, I also recorded a separate document of research notes during and between shows as space for my own self-reflection (see Schensul et al., 1997, pp. 72-76). I used the combination of fieldnotes, analyzed fieldnotes, and researcher journal entries to make more focused observations on subsequent visits to the field (Spradley, 1980, p. 128).

In addition to my field observations, I draw from lyrics by white rappers. These lyrics were selected by compiling a list of white artists observed in the field as well as artists listed by participants in onsite and in-depth interviews. The lyrics I use, from the artists observed, are not treated as a separate textual analysis, as seen in Jeffries (2011), but rather placed alongside other data collected in the field as cultural products (LeCompte & Schensul, 1997, p. 46). I analyze the lyrics in exactly the same way as all other ethnographic data outlined below.

**Interviews.** While participant observations functioned as the backbone of my ethnographic data collection, I coupled that with interviews with participants from the field and others that consumed hip-hop in other ways for three reasons. First, I used the interviews to triangulate my field observations. Second, I was able to gather a deeper understanding of key participants' perspectives through my interviews. Third, I interacted with hip-hoppers that did not have, or rarely had, engagement in the culture via shows at the present moment in their lives in my extended interviews to expand the my data collection to different portions of the hip-hop community.

The interviewees consisted of white hip-hoppers known before the research project, white hip-hoppers approached for participation at the events, and word-of-mouth suggestions made by other participants. The interviews were open-ended interviews; however, I constructed an

interview protocol to guide the interview (Schensul et al., 1997, p. 135). The interview protocol, provided in Appendix C, was there to guide the interview, but I also allowed the interviewee to disclose what they felt was important. The questions in the interview guide were designed to elicit information related to the experience of the participants, such as personal history, cultural knowledge, or description of practices (LeCompte & Schensul, 1997).

I conducted 10 in-depth, open-structure interviews ranging from 45 minutes to nearly two hours in time. Of the 10 interviews, eight were participants that attended shows that were part of my data collection, although one interview happened before the show was attended. The other two had attended hip-hop events, just not ones I was able to include in my data collection. Prior to the interviews, I provided an information sheet detailing their rights as a participant. I also reviewed the information verbally before the interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. During the transcription process all identifying information was removed and the recordings were destroyed.

I utilized an open structure for the interview to allow for asking questions that facilitated checking my observations against my participants' feelings, thoughts and perceptions. These types of questions came in four basic forms. The first was domain elicitation (Schensul et al., 1997, p. 136), such as "Can you list some subgenres or subgroups of hip-hop?" I also asked for sorting or ordering of information (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 101) by asking them to arrange the different roles being played at an event. To aid with rich description I frequently asked questions that evoked a narrative of experience (Schensul et al., 1997, p. 138) or description of key events (seen in Tonso, 2006), commonly asking about their initial experiences with hip-hop culture. While I used a standard interview protocol, I added questions about events observed during my field research to gain insight on the event from my participants. By asking questions about the data I collected, I

could check my perceptions and build trustworthiness/rigor into my research project. The interview protocol was constructed with my RQs in mind. I asked the interviewees directly about authentic versus inauthentic hip-hop and hip-hoppers. I also directly asked questions about race, both related to and un-related to hip-hop. There were also a number of questions related to their experience with hip-hop to address hip-hop as a culture/subculture. In the interviewees' responses to these questions, about their experiences, facts were revealed about their re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity.

**Building in Trustworthiness during Data Collection to Ensure Quality**

I made my data collection choices by applying the best practices for ethnographic research but also with potential contributions that could be made to research on hip-hop. I made these choices to assure Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness were incorporated throughout the process. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and replace the post-positivistic concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (p. 300). Through ethnographic research, I cannot respond directly to post-positivistic standards of rigor, by incorporating Lincoln and Guba's criteria, my research findings can reach a very high level of trustworthiness. I review the criteria particularly appropriate to data collection choices, credibility and transferability, now. The other criteria, dependability and confirmability, which are more relevant to data analysis and display, I review later.

The first criterion for trustworthiness, credibility, requires a number of steps to be taken during the data collection process. I insured credibility by: (1) Extensive time in the field, at a number of locations, and in varying contexts, which ensured prolonged engagement with, and continual observation of the cultural site (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). I attended 20 shows, of

approximately 3 to 4 hours each, over one calendar year. Between standing in-line before the shows, observing the event, and hanging back to talk to participants after the show, I spent over 70 hours directly engaged in participant-observation. (2) I used my observations to help shape my in-depth interviews. (3) The interviewees were asked about the cultural sites as well as about specific events from my observations, in order to triangulate the data (p. 305) and do member checks (pp. 314-315).

Transferability, the second of the four criteria, cannot be established during the data collection stage of the research project, per se. The goal of transferability is to allow the readers to understand my impressions/observations clearly. This allows them to make the decision if my research and/or theories are applicable to their cultural site. Transferability requires thick description in the display of data (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 316). However, providing thick description *starts* during data collection. I took fieldnotes and kept a detailed record of field activities allowed for easy presentation of thick and accurate description of the cultural site. My fieldnotes were joined by my researcher journal, where I could make suggestions for more specific observations were noted. I used notes to allow for more refined and more detailed observations during my next entry into the cultural site. Even though trustworthiness cannot be established during data collection, I created a design to build rigor at this stage.

**Data Analysis Strategies**

Data analysis and data collection are not mutually exclusive. I used Spradley's (1980) cyclical research design, in which one is in a constant state of "asking ethnographic questions," collecting data, recording data, and analyzing data, only to be followed by asking more questions. Further, there is a continual stream of informal analysis throughout the fieldwork process.

Despite being done concurrently, I examine my data analysis strategies separately from my data collection for clarity. According to LeCompte and Schensul (1997), analyzing means getting the collected data "organized, sorted, coded, reduced, and patterned into a 'story' interpretation that responds to the questions that guided the study" (p. 148). I divided the analysis into three sections for my research: diagramming, coding, and social scientific framing. By doing this, I was able to engage the data at different times for diverse purposes to prevent me from settling on a single interpretation that remained unquestioned.

**Analysis through Diagramming**

The first stage of my analysis process was the use of diagramming. According to Lofland et al. (2006) diagrams "concisely order or represent the relationship among two or more elements or aspects of a setting that have been determined to be descriptively or theoretically relevant to its operation or functioning" (p. 212). The diagramming process for my dissertation project consisted of two steps. The first was creating a domain analysis. The second one took the domains and organized them into taxonomies.

Domain analysis begins with identifying cultural patterns (Spradley, 1980, p. 85). During the interviewing process, I requested lists of domain elements elicited during interviews and coupled them with information gathered from the field. Following Spradley's model, I ordered and joined domains to create taxonomies (p. 112-120). This stage involved ordering the previously determined domains into subtypes (Lofland et al., 2006). Spradley (1980) states that the most crucial element of creating a taxonomy is that the initial taxonomies are tentative and that additional data collection should be done to "check out your analysis" (p. 119). I check the trustworthiness of my findings by making additional observations as I solidified my taxonomies.

**Analysis through Coding**

Lofland et al. (2006) divides coding into "initial coding" and "focused coding" (p. 201). I employed the domain and taxonomic analysis as the initial coding for my data. By having open-ended initial coding through domain and taxonomic analysis with no preconceived categories, I made space for the research participants' voices to be established. The next stage of coding I performed focused coding by applying the research questions to the data. Through staged coding, I was able to pose more "focused and analytical questions" (p. 201). Also, during the focused coding stage, I analyzed the data sets for emergent questions generated by observations. I also began to construct a few relevant comparisons across data using componential analysis (Spradley, 1980, pp. 130-139). Because of the cyclical ethnographic research design, I diagram and conduct subsequent focused coding throughout the data collection process, honed and narrow my observations at the cultural site.

**Analysis Using Theoretical Lens**

After I organized the data sets, via domain and taxonomies, and coded them, via application of initial and derived research questions, I used the theoretical lens laid out in chapter 2 to assist with the sense-making process of my findings. By looking at previous research, particularly on white hip-hoppers, I am "acknowledging their work and relating [the dissertation's] research to theirs… [which is an] important means for demonstrating [a] commitment to building generic framings that moves beyond historic local particulars of individual cases" (Lofland et al., 2006, 178). I incorporate theory with my data to create a dialogue between past and present research that creates a continuing body of knowledge. Also, I compare my research to previous scholarship to allow for space to demonstrate how the findings of my dissertation can be expanded and applied beyond the localized setting(s).

I employed prior scholarship and theory at two distinct moments in my dissertation process to help ground the research. First, prior to entering the field, I conducted substantial secondary research to help formulate my study and establish my theoretical lens. Upon conclusion of my data collection, I revisited and added to my review of literature to create a more substantive discussion of the significance of my research.

**Building Trustworthiness during Data Analysis and Display to Ensure Quality**

Returning to the conversation about trustworthiness, I made decisions about data analysis and subsequent display of data to ensure rigor is thoroughly established for the dissertation research project. As established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), an important aspect of establishing trustworthiness is member checks. In the field and in my in-depth interviews, I drew on my participants' insights on the culture and events to inform my own analysis. Doing my analysis I left myself space to check initial perceptions with my research participants. My use of member checks ensured that my interpretations were grounded in the perceptions of the participants.

I designed my analysis to be broken into stages for a couple of reasons. First, I analyzed in stages to provide opportunity to triangulate findings. The triangulating of my data set is discussed in the section about data collection and trustworthiness. However, further triangulation is built into the design by the analysis techniques. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that there are three other modes of triangulation besides method. Those modes are sources, investigators, and theories (p. 305). I combined multiple sources during the interview and observation process, as well as multiple sets of theories that were incorporated into the analysis through social scientific framing. Second, I analyzed in stages to break the data analysis into the diagramming, coding and social scientific framing levels. I used these stages to allow for three different levels of theorizing for my research. Through diagramming, I incorporated the participants' theories about the culture. In the

coding of data, I compared the participants' theories with my theories by using research questions and hypotheses posed before and during my data collection process. Finally, I joined the theories of the participants and my theories with theories from cultural studies, Critical Race Theory, and previous hip-hop scholarship.

I established transferability through thick description (p. 328). I laid out how my data collection procedure functioned to provide rich description, allowing the reader to assess transferability. I used rich description of the cultural site, activities, and participants to meet established in my benchmark ethnographic studies on hip-hop (Rodriquez, 2006; Harrison, 2009; Harkness, 2010; Jeffries, 2011). Just as I did while reading those previous studies, my reader can make precise comparisons to previous literature and can begin to see patterns develop across data sets, thus making it easier for the reader to apply the theories advanced by the dissertation project to localized particulars.

At all levels of my research, I established dependability and confirmability through the activities that made up my research method. For dependability and confirmability, I employed thorough and consistent checking of the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 316-327). Not only did I perform my own audit, but my data analyses were also checked by others to assure consistency from my fieldnotes through the write-up of my findings. These audits were made easier by creating a well indexed audit trail and having multiple ways to track data collection and data analysis. To assist with the audit trail I constructed a key (Appendix D) to provide clarity for outsiders doing quality assurance. The three distinct stages of data analysis – diagramming, coding, and social scientific framing – were important for providing an audit trail. I followed established practices in my research design to assure analysis in an effective and rigorous manner, but was limited by temporal and spatial factors of ethnographic methods. By bringing in the

cultural product of lyrics by white rappers, I was able to mitigate my limitations of space and time to avoid a snapshot effect with my data. However, being a white hip-hopper, I also employed autoethnographic data to provide a quasi-longitudinal perspective to my study.

## Incorporation of Autoethnographic Data and Creative (Non)fiction

Throughout the course of my work, I attempt to re/present my findings so that they occupy the blurred space between researcher and participant. I draw from different scholarly writing strategies but strictly adhere to no single method. My ultimate goal is to correctly and accurately present my theorizing about hip-hop culture as a hip-hop researcher and as a white hip-hop participant. I sample from many data presentation approaches to not only detail my fluid perspective on the hip-hop community but to accurately depict my participants' influence on that perspective. In this subsection, I address the balancing of my role as a researcher and participant. I then look at the role of writing on making these two positions simultaneously evident to my readers.

### Issues Faced by Researcher

I have sought to maintain an open, intimate and approximately equal relationship between researcher, participant and reader. By incorporating my autoethographic vignettes alongside my field data and throughout my dissertation, I give my research the aforementioned, quasi-longitudinal aspect, but this also repositions the traditional social scientific authoritarian voice. I use autoethnography to directly account for, and respond to, specific concerns. The first concern is the relationship between my participants and me, particularly that of insider/outsider status. The second area of concern is the relationship between the reader and me.

**Researcher/Participant and Insider/Outsider Positioning**

In sociological and anthropological field research, scholars have long been concerned about issues arising from studying across cultural groups (see Anderson, 1993; hooks, 2004; Tillman, 2002). According to Tillman (2002), when studying across race, race must be considered at all levels of research design (p. 3). In fact, cross racial sensitivity is of the highest importance when members of the "dominant" group – for lack of a better term – are studying other races, ethnicities, or genders (Anderson, 1993). This point is echoed by hooks (2004), when she states that "[i]t should be possible for scholars, especially those who are member of groups who dominate, exploit, and oppress others, to explore the political implication of their work without fear or guilt" (p. 150). Though studying across cultural groups has been done with great success (see Orbe, 1996), it is still shaky ground for researchers to walk on.

This cross-cultural ground has been avoided by researchers studying groups in which they already have membership. However, this exacerbates issues of insider/outsider status. Spradley (1980) rightly points out that it is likely that "the participant observer… will experience being both insider and outsider simultaneously" (p. 57). Lofland et al. (2006) express the importance of being an insider to gain access to cultural knowledge, while remaining an outsider provides analytical distance (p. 41).

The issues of insider/outsider are central to my dissertation project because I am self-identified as a white hip-hopper, so I share two cultural affiliations with the research participants. According to Gallagher (2004), my affiliation with the participants can be "methodological capital" to gain access to data (p. 207). However, sharing cultural affiliation can be problematic due to the other cultural affiliations that I do not share – such as being a scholar (p. 209). As a researcher, I did not misinterpret the data. There was also the danger of being too close to the data

for proper analysis. Engaging in the above mentioned measures to assure rigor functioned to avoid issues created by my insider perspective. A device I employed to assure correction of this issue was member-checking. I sought out participant perspectives to verify my analysis. Despite the issues created by my insider status, I also exploited it as a benefit for my research – i.e. access to psychological data via autoethnography.

**Incorporating Autoethnography**

For Allen, Orbe, and Olivas (1999), autoethnography creates space for self-reflection, describes the researchers own lived experience, and blurs the distinction between subject and object (pp. 404-405). I lean on inward reflection, required by autoethnography. Inspired by Adams and Holman Jones (2009), I use my own autoethnographic data to [1] create a place to display my cultural knowledge and, as mentioned in the introduction, [2] provides an opportunity to engage in writing that illuminates the process of social scientific analysis. My autoethnographic vignettes "hinge on the push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural and political concerns" (p. 374). While displacing concerns of temporal limitations, I use autoethnography to allow myself to make visible to the reader my unconstrained perspective and gives me space for even richer narrative to be added to my ethnographic data.

For my research, I used autoethnography in a number of ways. First, and foremost, I used autoethnography as additional data to complement data collected from the research participants. Second, I use the practice of self-reflexive autoethnography to identify my participation in the field through the researcher journal. In chapters 4 and 5, autoethnographic writing is a way to introduce concepts of creative (non)fiction to displace authority. The primary device related to creative writing to make my writing more relational and evocative is extended metaphor. "The use of metaphors and similes make for richness of writing" (Caulley, 2008, p. 440). The extended

metaphors throughout the final two chapters of my dissertation are also directly linked to my desire to have my observations wrapped in informality and make for an engaging read.

**Writer/reader relationship and using creative (non)fiction.** My use of autoethnography provides opportunities to inject new and alternative forms of writing. I uses "realist tales" that position the scholar as observer of the cultural site (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 46). I displayed the findings for my dissertation to carve space for the reader to view my renderings as interpretations – which is what they are – as called for by scholars advocating for poetics (see Glense, 1997; Richardson, 2002). While I did not personally incorporate poetics, as such, into my findings, I did closely adhere to the essence of the technique. My writing was designed to add the effect of creating a more engaging narrative for the reader (Goodall, 2000, p. 40). By making my writing more evocative and subjective, I create intimacy between my research and reader (Pollock, 1998, p. 86). Through a rigorous data collection and analysis procedure and devices, such as italicizing my autoethnographic vignettes, I am able to bridge one gap between the humanities and social sciences.

An important aspect of my writing is to aspire to the goal of Van Maanen's (1988) impressionist tales. I do not solely rely on impressionist tales. It will be the "doing" of my research that will be revealed in my periodic impressionist tales (p. 102). They are woven in with autoethnographic vignettes, realist tales, and lists of observations. A bricolage of data presentation types allows for a critical evaluation of this text by my readers. By using multiple modes of data presentation, I hope to make clear the different positions from which I view hip-hop. I am a long-time participant and a distant observer. My interpretations are informed by my experience as a white hip-hopper but also as a scholar. I intend for this duality to be expressed in my writing.

## Concluding Methods Defense

While considering my research design, I made strategic decisions to assure the trustworthiness of my findings, create critical space for the reader to engage my research, and present a complex view of what it means to be a white fan, participant, or practitioner of hip-hop. When designing ethnographic data collection it is important to establish practices that improve the research quality, via trustworthiness checks. In this chapter, I described how the methodological and analytical choices made for my dissertation ensure that rigor is built into my study. The methodological and analytical choices were not based on rigor alone; the decisions were also made with the goal of tone. Through a mixed method technique—bridging autoethnography and ethnography, along with the incorporation of previous hip-hop literature—I have created space for the convergence of previously applied and new theories to shed light on contemporary hip-hop culture.

It is my unique position as an insider/researcher that allows my findings, recounted in chapter 4, to open new avenues of understanding for hip-hop culture in the present and beyond. I maintain the position that I am presenting my interpretations of hip-hop, the hip-hop community, white hip-hoppers, and my own whiteness. I took all available measures to mitigate my voice drowning out the realities of the white hip-hoppers involved in my research, while still building a forward-thinking research project, in terms of perspective and presentation. By writing from the subjective – instead of the assumed "objective," from which social scientists typically write – I am able to present a more evocative and engaging narrative. However, I make this writing decision to places even more importance on making sure the data have suitable trustworthiness checks.

*I take a break from plucking away at my prospectus for my dissertation. This moment of frustration and procrastination is spent being "productive." I am attempting to locate sites for my*

*field research. I feel overwhelmed by the task of figuring out my space as a hip-hop devotee after years removed from active participation. Actively being involved in a hip-hop culture/scene shaped who I was for a long time. I attended shows, observed the practices of others, and I applied the knowledge to belong to the sea of people that took on the hip-hop label. However, the sea that I soaked in was now missing. It had evaporated from my everyday practices leaving just a small puddle of music consumption in its place.*

*I always described myself as a white hip-hopper, wading deeply in everything the hip-hop community had to offer. I questioned this membership now for the first time. Thinking, "I don't even know where to start looking to identify my path for collecting information. Where do I cast my net, so as not to solely re/produce my narrow sliver of hip-hop experience?"*

*Out of fear that I would simply reinforce my already existing beliefs and understandings of hip-hop, I jumped into a whirlpool of information—hip-hop message boards. "What's new out there?" flooded my thoughts. So I began tapping away at the keyboard like water dripping from the corner of a roof. The rhythmic tempo of my typing was only broken by opening a new window to find out about the tide of new artists, new styles, and new avenues of distribution I ran across. It was all new to me, my less substantial participation during my 3 years as a PhD student left me with no ship to navigate this vast ocean of hip-hop I had never explored.*

*Hours of searching, drifting away from the task of my prospectus, led me to unexplored streams that washed away at my previous conceptions of hip-hop. Names I had never heard of, such as Das Racist, Tyler the Creator, and Hoodie Allen, were becoming part of my hip-hop lexicon. Names that I knew, but had underestimated their importance, such as Danny Brown, Lil B, and Wiz Khalifa, littered the banks of the stream. What the hip-hop community looked like now is vastly different than the narrow bay of hip-hop in which I once participated.*

## CHAPTER 4 "FINDINGS: THE ROOTS' UNDONE[38]"

*It is Fourth of July weekend; I sit on the edge of a small lake in rural Michigan. The water was murky and still. I banter with my future father-in-law's friends and smack at my mosquito bitten ankles. It is a time-honored white hip-hopper tradition of brushing off jokes about wanting to be black that I've dealt with incessantly since I was in elementary school.*

*"Hey, Eminem, pass me a beer," I hear from the bearded middle-aged man in his biker vest. The mocking tone in his voice matches my memories hearing "What's up, Vanilla Ice?" when I was younger. I take his comments in good spirit because the conflict of joking back is not worth my time. The stale jokes are followed with veiled shots of being a race-traitor in the forms of questions.*

*"Why do you like that rap crap?" comes from another grizzly biker.*

*I reply, giving a similar type of response to the question of my vegetarianism, "I don't know, I just do. I like the beat and rapping is an interesting form of expression." This response is a purposeful avoidance of talking about, what I feel are, the positive aspects of hip-hop. I feel unable to address the aspects of hip-hop from which I have benefited, such as learning about the politics of race and race dynamics. I do not say, "Hip-hop is a black art form that has influenced me to dive into the history and sociology of race in America and around the globe."*

*I do not make that statement, I tell myself, "because these old men are not ready for a discussion on race." That would cause a tidal wave of unpleasant conversations and just reinforce everyone's perception that I want to be black. Instead, I just flail around trying not to drown in the pool of mockery.*

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[38] Hip-hop band The Roots released their thirteenth album, Undone, in 2011, the year I did my data collection. Undone also describes my old perceptions of hip-hop and hip-hop authenticity as a result of my data collection.

*I spend the entirety of these exchanges staring out at the lake. The stillness of the water resembles the lack of movement on how I am perceived and how I perceive myself. The water is so tranquil it is difficult for me to imagine that there are small streams that flow to rivers, to other lakes, and to oceans. The water is constantly changing and flowing from location to location. The water takes the form around the land that exists but remains the same lake water.*

The lake of a white hip-hop fan occasionally gets stones skipping across creating a few ripples but always returns to calm waters. It takes following the streams and rivers to other lakes and oceans to see the alternate manifestations of white hip-hopness. Through ethnographic fieldwork and reflections on my experience as a white hip-hopper, I observed the flow of hip-hop through multiple formations. In this chapter, I re/presents my impressions of the hip-hop community, generally, and white hip-hopper authenticity, specifically.

I divide this chapter into four sections. These sections are divided by my research questions posed in chapter 2. The first section, I will describe data that relates to how hip-hop is structured and how it should be viewed. The next two sections, I will present the data pertinent to white hip-hopper's authenticity by addressing how they conceptualize and re/present hip-hop authenticity. The chapter concludes with me exploring whiteness and white hip-hoppers perceptions of race. It is important to note that this chapter is a bricolage of data that is designed to reflect my changing interpretation of hip-hop authenticity, particularly white hip-hop authenticity. This captures *my* informed impression of hip-hop as a community through autoethnographic vignettes, descriptions of my observations, and narratives of events that occurred during my data collection. To accurately re/present my data and self, I organized my findings non-linearly. By grouping observations, events, and participants' voices together thematically, as opposed to chronologically, I more

clearly reflect my informed opinion on the state of hip-hop and the concept of white hip-hop authenticity.

**Hip-Hop Subculture/Post-subculture Community**

I am entering the building to my most anticipated show of my data collection. I walk in and there is a distinct rush of energy that consumes me. The venue is a large open room with a bar on one end and a raised V.I.P. section on the opposite. The music in the venue is thumping loudly, as I lead three show-goers into their, as they described, first "real" concert.

I whisper to Travis, one of the hip-hoppers I am with, "Look to your right?" It was Bizarre, Eminem affiliate and local rapper. "You see that guy over there with the hair in two braids sticking up like horns," I continue. "That is King Gordy. He was the rapper being interviewed in the scene in *8 Mile* when Eminem beat up Wink at the radio station."

I continue to point out local celebrities. "There is Danny Brown, you'll hear about him soon. He's up-and-coming…. Over there is Nick Speed, he produced the second track on the *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* soundtrack."

The crowd poured into the venue to see the only group that was slated to perform, Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All (OFWGKTA). The internet buzz around OFWGKTA was peaking at this moment. The swirl of conversation was about their appearance on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* two months earlier. How they shutdown streets in Boston because of Tyler, the Creator, OFWGKTA's de facto leader, getting the fans so worked up.

I am having a difficult time controlling my excitement. As a hip-hopper, I was attending a show it seemed everyone wanted to attend. Zack, another show-goer I talked with, said, "I drove 5 hours and bought this ticket on StubHub[39] for $65 to see Odd Future." He indicated he would

[39] StubHub is a ticket resale website.

have paid more if Earl Sweatshirt, another member of OFWGKTA, was not missing. And I was standing here having only paid the $15 face value for Odd Future's first visit to the Midwest United States.

I am having a difficult time controlling my excitement. As a researcher, the phenomenon created by Odd Future has slowly altered my theorizing about what it means to be a hip-hopper. Along with my attending Lil B and Das Racist shows, Odd Future has washed away much of the residue of my traditionalist hip-hop perspective. Tyler, the Creator, Earl Sweatshirt, Frank Ocean, Syd tha Kyd, and the rest of Odd Future symbolize an alternative stream in which to be an authentic hip-hopper.

Syd tha Kyd, OFWGKTA's openly gay deejay, plays a snippet of Tyler's song *Yonkers* and the crowd flows to the front of the stage like a tsunami. I am pushed forward in the wave of people. The crowd that was just seconds ago an appropriate social distance from me was now leaning on me and pushing me into others. I had attended hundreds of rap shows and never had I experienced a crowd at such a fevered pitch. I had attended hundreds of rap shows but none seemed to matter to the crowd like this mattered to the fans that drove hours and greatly overpaid to participate in this show.

Chants of "Wolf Gang… Wolf Gang… Wolf Gang" erupts from the crowd. While a number of the show-goers are there to see what the deal with this internet sensation is, the vast majority are clamoring for the music of a group that has been maligned for lyrical content that reflects homophobia in hip-hop and reinforces the perception of violence with murder and rape fantasy.

The chants turn to screams, I turn my head toward the stage to see Tyler in a green ski mask opening to the song *Sandwitches*. While the fans near the stage are enthusiastic, those at the

bar are passively observing. The set continues as I walk around and talk to various people in the club. Derek, a local deejay and emcee, is unimpressed with the Odd Future. “I’m not really with all this rape shit they talk about,” he emphatically stated. “They say these kids are punk rock but this is not The Clash or The Ramones.”

I look back at the stage just in time to see something hit the ground on the stage. Tyler yells, “Who the fuck is throwin’ bottles? This n***a throwin’ glass bottles on stage is gonna get fucked up.” This statement by Tyler sets off Derek.

Derek continues to belittle Odd Future, “How can you be mad about getting bottles thrown at you when you claim you ‘don’t give a fuck’.” After lecturing me about how Iggy Pop did not get pissed when bottles were thrown at him, he stated, “you can’t get mad when you say the shit they do.”

I point out that no one would want to be in danger. “This is just a show and you can’t throw dangerous shit at them.”

The show continues after a great deal of posturing by the members of OFWGKTA. The energy ebbs and flows peaking with Tyler performing *Yonkers*. During *Yonkers* the crowd participates in a call-and-response session with Tyler.

“FREE!” “EARL!” “FREE!” “EARL!” gets exchanged between Tyler and the crowd to recognize the absence of Earl Sweatshirt.

I then hear Tyler scream into the mic, that is entirely too close to his face for proper sound quality, “I got all the black b**ches mad cuz my main b**ch vanilla…” He was breaking into his track *French*. About a minute into *French* the show takes a turn I did not expect.

“WHAT THE FUCK?” Hodgy Beats, an emcee in OFWGKTA, screams.

“Who keeps throwing bottles on stage?” Tyler aggressively asks the audience.

"Why don't you come up here and get beat the fuck up, my n***a?" asks Hodgy.

Now in the back of the venue standing on some high-rises, a fellow show-goer turns to me and asks, "What happened? What the fuck is going on?"

I respond, "Don't worry this shit will be on YouTube[40] before you get home."

The situation continues to escalate until another bottle gets tossed from the back of the venue and breaks at the feet of, a now shirtless, Tyler, the Creator. "This n***a is going to fuck it up for the rest of you."

The members of OFWGKTA continue to lecture the crowd as a fan crowd surfs on stage. The fan is pushed back into the crowd and as the hands of the crowd wash him back up on the stage's shore, Hodgy dives into the crowd and begins punching the fan. Security flocks to the location and pulls Hodgy back on stage. I am in shock by the unusual turn of events.

After Syd refuses to return to the stage and Tyler's inability to get the track started on the computer Syd was using, Odd Future walks off stage and the show is over. On the way out the door, a small segment of the crowd starts to chant, "Pussy Gang… Pussy Gang… Pussy Gang."

Standing in the street outside the venue, I sense that the majority of the anger is directed at the bottle throwers. However, there are also a number of the participants that place the blame on Odd Future. Derek said, "That was dumb, they could have started a riot…. You can't just shut a show down like that."

Eric felt "That wouldn't have happened if this was some real hip-hop." He continued by placing the blame on "hipsters" that "come into our scene and act stupid." The hipster comment seemed to be directed at both Odd Future and the fans.

[40] A video website.

As seen in the above narrative, I will highlight key events providing insight into how these events were viewed by the participants and myself. I couple these key events with description of the site, activities, and artifacts useful to tell the story of my data collection. In this section, I weave together descriptions of seven types of shows I attended—[1] "hipster"[41] shows, [2] national headliners in small venues, [3] white, national headliners in college towns, [4] local headliners, [5] national headliners, careers started pre-2000, [6] white, national headliners in working-class suburb, and [7] national headliners, large venue—with data gathered that provides insight into the way hip-hop is organized sociologically and is consumed.

I intend to set the framework through which to understand the landscape of hip-hop. It is evident in my research that hip-hop has multiple subgenres and hip-hop sub-communities. In the first section of the chapter, I present my observations and interpretations from the field with regard to how the subculture is manifested. I present and make distinctions between the types of shows I attended then I present my findings about the existence of subgenres/communities and cross-genre work being done in hip-hop. This data is vital to start the debate over the subculture versus post-subculture lens but also to show the space in which white hip-hoppers navigate hip-hop authenticity. I will provide my conclusions to my research questions in the following chapter. For now, I am displaying my findings.

**Digital Consumption, "Hipsterism," and National Acts Shows**

Shows that were headlined by Lil B, OFWGKTA, and Das Racist were important to my theorizing about hip-hop. They opened my eyes to the important relationship between hip-hop, hipsters, and social media. For this reason, I am joining the description of "hipster" shows with my findings on digital consumption to illustrate this relationship. I am also including my visit to

[41] I label these shows as "hipster" shows because at these events the discussion of "hipsters" was prevalent.

white, national headliner shows[42] and national headliners in small venues[43] to the exploration of digital consumption because this is how I organize these concepts in my mind after visiting the field on 20 occasions.

**"Hipster" shows.** I arrive at a small urban venue. The capacity is around 200 or 300 people. This show is not far from the local university and is part of a larger complex. As I enter the venue, to the right of the stage; there is a bar immediately in front of me. Behind me are stairs that lead to an outside deck area where people are smoking and talking. Next to these stairs is a slightly raised area with merchandise being sold by a local vendor but nothing from the artist[44].

As I stand at the stairs waiting for the ticket taker to scan the bar code on my ticket, I see that the venue has an area to place flyers for other upcoming shows at that venue. I do not recognize any of the flyers as being for hip-hop artists.

After my ticket was scanned, I walk around the venue with the crowd engaged in socializing. I do notice a small group of young, white males sitting away from the venue's main floor playing cards. I had never seen people playing cards at a show, but then again I had never seen a show by a group of New York rappers named Das Racist.

Das Racist is made up of two emcees, Heems and Kool A.D., and a hypeman[45], Dapwell. All hail from Queens, New York. Heems and Dapwell are of East Indian decent and Kool A. D. is of Afro-Cuban and Italian decent. The show-goers described Das Racist as having a sizable "hipster following." This was also the case with later shows I observed by Lil B the BasedGod and Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All.

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[42] White, National headliners shows that I attended were Hoodie Allen, Chris Webby, and Macklemore.
[43] National Headliners that preformed in small venues were Big KRIT, XV, and Blue Scholars.
[44] Odd Future was the only headlining artist that I classified in the "hipster" show category that had merchandise tables.
[45] A hypeman is a person that is there to perform with the artist to add energy to the show. However, a hypeman contributes little to no work of their own.

Despite sharing this label there was a distinct difference in the make-up of the crowd for Das Racist, as opposed to OFWGKTA and Lil B. At Das Racist, there were substantially more people at the bar—indicative of an older crowd. While all three shows were predominantly male crowds, Odd Future and Lil B had the highest percentage of nonwhite crowd members. I estimate that about 60% of Lil B's crowd, 75% of Odd Future's and 90% of Das Racist's crowd was white.

The fashion at these shows had a distinct "retro" feel. While there was a cross-section of fashion choices some clothing items were flat-bill, snapback hats, RayBan glasses, 1980s and 1990s vintage sweaters, skinny jeans, Vans skateboarding shoes, and vintage sports gear, such as throwback jerseys and Starter jackets. There were also a number of tee-shirts promoting other musical acts, both hip-hop and non-hip-hop. Some noted artists were DangerDoom, Pink Floyd, Anti-Flag, Easy E, Tribe Called Quest, The Police, Odd Future, The Clash, Notorious B.I.G., NWA, Lil Wayne, and the Mighty Mighty Bostones. At "hipster" shows, the crowd were dressed no differently than seen on the average college campus, with two major differences. First, at the shows there were more baseball hats and designer shoes, such as Air Force Ones and Nike Dunks. Also, the fans of OFWGKTA had a large amount of clothing that they customized to support the band by writing the initials of the group or drawing Odd Future's signature upside-down cross on hats or other items.

The clothing styles across and within shows are indicative of diverse hip-hop fashion, multiple hip-hop communities, and a blend of hip-hop with mainstream culture. According to G.M., a local emcee, "I mean nowadays there is a range. There is hipster hip-hop style, there is gangsta hip-hop style. Shit, people don't even have style, but style has always been a part of hip-hop to me. You know a baseball hat, jeans, tennis shoes, sweatshirts, hoodies have always been hip-hop to me. Back in the day, hats tilted or came with their own style. But now it's more accepted

it's more of a mainstream style. I would say hip-hop style is more diverse, now. But it's mainstreamed too. Like when Run DMC said my Adidas, everyone wanted Adidas. Or LL Cool J rocking Troops, everyone wanted to rock Troops. It's the same thing it's a style. It's definitely style based, it's one of the biggest things in hip-hop, I'd say."

G.M's observation is clearly reflected at "hipster" shows. The convergence of mainstream style and hip-hop style can also be seen in the music choices played before the show starts and between sets. Music from old school hip-hop, like the breaks on Steinski's Lessons, are joined by a live P.A.[46] set of electronic music and deejays playing current pop artists, such as LMFAO, New Boys, Cali Sway District, Wiz Khalifa, Lil Wayne, Drake, Soulja Boy, Jay-z and Kayne West. The Crowd cheers wildly for Waka Flocka Flame *and* the Wu-tang Clan, despite these two artists being from different time periods and whose followings represent even dramatically different sub-communities of hip-hop. Travis Porter's *Make it Rain* provides the music for a Cook Off[47] proceeded by the electronic dance anthem *Put Your Hands Up [for Detroit]*.

Despite being predominantly white audiences, the "hipster" shows consist of very few white performers. OFWGKTA is an all-black group from Los Angeles, California. Odd Future is the only group to play at their shows. Opening for Lil B the BasedGod, a black emcee from Berkley, California, is two local, black emcees, Big Shan and Danny Brown. While Das Racist's openers were the most diverse, there only had one white emcee opener, Mobil.

After Danny Brown left the stage with his group the Bruiser Brigade, there was a long period before Lil B the BasedGod made it down to the stage. The very eager crowd was awaiting Lil B's first appearance in the city. I stood by a young white couple. Roxanne, female and white,

[46] Live P.A. or live personal appearance is a reference to a deejay or music producer doing a live composition of music.
[47] Cooking is a dance that Lil B is attributed as the founder. The cook off is just a competition between show-goers to see who can perform the best cooking dance.

is wearing an Anti-Flag tee-shirt, skinny jeans and combat boots. Her boyfriend, Johnny, also white, is wearing skinny jeans that are cut off to be shorts, a studded belt, cloth Vans shoes, and a Members Only jacket. He also has a Mohawk.

I ask, "Why did you come to this show?

Roxanne stated, "I normally go to indie rock or punk shows but Lil B is just cool. I saw an article about him on Pitchfork and I like his positive philosophy."

Despite the appearance of Johnny, he did not identify as a punk rocker. Johnny claimed, "I got into hip-hop a lot a few years back when I was skating with my friends. Now that is all I listen to. There is a bunch of dope ass hip-hop out right now…. I was here a few weeks back to see Kendrick Lamar."

Johnny provides great insight for my inquiry about authentic hip-hop. For Johnny, "With the internet you just get exposed to all sorts of stuff from all over the world…. Kids just younger than us just like what they like."

**Music websites.** As mentioned by Johnny at the Lil B show, the internet has altered the way in which music is consumed. This is very prevalent in hip-hop. Websites such as Masked Gorilla, Hip-HopDX, 2DopeBoys, AllHipHop.com, and DJ Booth Network were all mentioned as websites that specialize in news on hip-hop and an outlet to distribute hip-hop music through downloading or streaming audio.

Especially for hip-hoppers that do not live in an area with live shows or a hip-hop scene, music websites play a role. For Donny, a white hip-hopper that lives two hours from the closest hip-hop scene, the internet becomes the connection to the community. Donny states, "I start with ohhla.com, Original Hip-hop Lyrics Archive. I would always go on that because I always wanted to know the lyrics. You know with Bone Thugs you couldn't understand them but you always

wanted to know the words. That really got me started on the website stuff. AllHipHop.com is one that I go to. I don't know, I think it's called Hip-HopDX.com…. I go there just to keep up, I like to hear remixes and stuff. I will read some of the stuff that people put on what they think about the songs and stuff."

Donny's theory about the internet exposing people to multiple genres is supported by other participant mentioning music websites that are not specific to hip-hop music, such as Pitchfork and Consequence of Sound, which exposed them to new hip-hop music. Music websites provide just one avenue for hip-hoppers to get exposed to music. One attendee of the Lil B show indicated that he found Lil B on Pitchfork but then started following him on Twitter.

Social media, discussion boards, and locations for sharing media are also central to hip-hoppers' consumption. Sites and applications, such as Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, are joined by discussion boards to expose people to the styles and music of hip-hop. According to Brad, "I'm always on the internet participating in message boards and checking out new music…. a lot of my friends listen to hip-hop, so I let them know what's new." While Nate points to his primary interaction with other hip-hoppers is via the internet. He says, "I discuss hip-hop with people of like minds on the internet. Specifically a site called reddit.com. There is a large community of hip-hop fans there, so I speak with them."

The role of internet interaction is important for all genres but is specifically influential to the consumption of music, products, and community norms for hip-hop. Lil B creates a lot of buzz around himself through a prolific amount of self-exposure generated on the internet. While white hip-hoppers indicate the great exposure the internet provides, Interviewee #10, Dennis indicates a dangerous element to open exchange. Dennis says of message boards, "They frequently degenerate

into folks saying hateful things about others on there…. I hate that homophobic shit in hip-hop. Stop calling people f****ts[48], it makes you look stupid and makes hip-hop look stupid."

With applications like Twitter and Tumblr, artists can go directly to fans, circumventing putative gatekeepers. Without gatekeepers, hip-hop as a single subculture flows freely into sub-communities of hip-hoppers. As previously mentioned this is a strategy used by Lil B to get his voice out but MC BrakeFast, a local battle emcee, indicates that it is also a great way to see what other hip-hoppers are doing artistically. He checks comments on stuff he posts because "as somebody who creates the stuff it's nice to see who is out there and what other people are doing. The proliferation of information because of the internet and because of the non-traditional means of distribution. It's so much more a level playing field right now."

**Downloading music.** Individual lakes of local hip-hop communities are able to converge through internet streams. For example, an artist from City A can promulgate the styles and sound of their scene to hip-hoppers across the globe without the support of any media outlets. They can even create their own scene built around them, as seen with OFWGKTA and their passionate following. The internet waters flow from different regions, different genres, different sub-regions, and different subgenres. With the internet being the primary site of interaction with the hip-hop communities, the use of streaming and downloading music to drink from these waters is an important feature.

*In high school, finding new music in my rural town was difficult. I read liner notes and grabbed the newest Source Magazine. In college things are different. My dorm room has access to high speed internet and my roommates told me about this new music sharing site, Napster. Far away from my home, I spend hours standing in the downpour of digital downloads.*

[48] Throughout the dissertation, I will be censoring words that I am not comfortable saying or typing because I find them socially damaging.

*While my roommates were at the library studying for BIO 100, I am on the message boards of Napster and various hip-hop websites studying my way to hip-hop bona fides. Despite a rural upbringing with no hip-hop scene supporting me, I still developed into the hip-hop encyclopedia in my room, then my floor, and at parties across campus.*

*The download cue read like a wish list for an old-school and underground hip-hop fan as my roomie Mitchell returned from class. "Dude, I need something new to listen to. What you got?" Mitchell asks.*

*"I just downloaded this Deltron 3030 album; you want me to burn you a copy," I reply.*

*The brief exchange with Mitchell had become indicative of my relationship with many of my new college friends. The kid they once mocked for his rural drawl had now studied his way to being the source for all things hip-hop. I went from commercial consumption to swimming in the deep sea of local and underground hip-hop.*

My ascent among my friends as the source for all things rap and hip-hop was backed by an unquenchable thirst to learn everything I could about hip-hop. I went to every show I heard about, bought every book and magazine I could find, but an important aspect of my growth was from the access provided me by music sharing websites. The role of the download has expanded and plays a primary role of consumption for hip-hoppers. Washing away the standard bearers the continuity of hip-hop outlined by Hebdige (1987) is called into question.

Participants in my study indicated that downloading music, illegally or legally, is their primary form of obtaining music. General forums, like Bit Torrent file sharing sites, allow hip-hoppers to download an artist's entire catalog at once. While websites, such as DatPiff.com and DJBooth.com, provide a legal outlet for artists to release mixtapes and albums to be made available for free to their fans. In fact, groups like Odd Future built their fan base by making free downloads

available. As an attendee to a show I observed told me "Odd Future is the best shit out right now and you can get all their stuff for free off their Tumblr." During his set, Hoodie Allen explicitly gave credit to internet exposure and digital downloads for his career taking off.

Along with being able to download music for free, there are also for-pay downloading and streaming music available via the internet. Participants in my study use streaming audio and video, on sites like YouTube, to make playlists, check music they have been recommended, and to preview a new album. Donny, the interviewee that lived far from any hip-hop scenes, reflected on how streaming also provides previews to decide on purchasing a download. "If I know a new album's music I will go on to listen to some of the tracks. I download quite a bit every month going out and buying some iTunes cards."

**National headliner, career started post-2000, small venue.** An audience that drew from many backgrounds flow out the back of the venue. They experienced a number of rap acts, such as Smoke DZA, Freddie Gibbs, and Big KRIT that are receiving "buzz" on the message boards and hip-hop websites. The flood of people going for the door was standard procedure for shows and once the final act was done and the lights came on, the show-goers rushed to the door. This time was different in one significant way. Freddie Gibbs, the final opening act for the show, was standing near the exit taking pictures and signing autographs. A large number of the overwhelmingly male and white crowd was standing near Freddie waiting for their chance to interact with the star.

One show-goer wearing pleated chino shorts and a Freddie Gibbs tee-shirt, said of his picture with Freddie, "This is going to be my Facebook profile pic."

The young fan, in his high school tennis team shirt, khaki pleated shorts, and Sperry deck shoes, looked as if he came from a young Republican's golf outing explained to me his admiration

for Freddie Gibbs. He said, “Gibbs is intelligent gangsta rap.” He explained how his brother always said that Dr. Dre and Snoop ruined gangsta rap and that gangsta rap going commercial took all the consciousness out of street rap. When I asked what drew him to Gibbs he said that it “is an escape from my life, it’s something I haven't experienced.” He continued by claiming that when he listens to it, it puts his stress into context. “I don’t have it so bad.”

What appeared to me as a fish-out-of-water situation, based on the young man’s appearance, turned into an analysis of the value of gangsta rap. What struck me is the influence that individual artists have to shape the norms of the community. The access granted by the internet has not replaced the artist as the setter of trends and the validator of authenticity. While blogs and other internet based music sites work to spread community norms, artists remain the predominant voice to what is and is not hip-hop through social media, traditional media, and live interaction.

I stood there in my jeans, tee-shirt, and fitted baseball hat with a hammer and sickle embroidered where a team logo belongs listening to the interaction between Freddie Gibbs and the small pack of fans encircling him.

After a nearly 20 minute session of pictures and autographs, Freddie allows the final fan to drink in his presence. As he walks by me back to the artist room, I hear Freddie’s deep voice say “Nice hat, man.” He was talking to me.

I respond as cool and laidback as possible, “Thanks, dude. Nice Set.” I am immediately resituated as a fan through the exchange. I receive a sense of validation from another hip-hopper. I am not researching white hip-hoppers. I am a white hip-hopper. I am no different than the young Freddie Gibbs fan explaining the value of gangsta rap.

To get a cross-section of hip-hop, I diligently searched for various artists playing shows in the area for my data collection. The next group of shows all feature non-white headliners that tour

the nation in small venues. The headliners in this category have less exposure than the national touring acts that preformed in large venues. The label “underground” was frequently used to describe these acts.

As I approach the Old Speakeasy, a venue that I have attended too many times to count, I see that the line is short. As I wait for the door to open I strike up a conversation with two white couples behind me. One couple, Tom and Julie, wore a NorthFace zip up jacket with jeans and a blouse with jeans, respectively. The second couple, Todd and Erica, wore jeans and loafers with a button down striped shirt and a skirt and blouse with high-heeled boots, respectively. During our conversation the female show-goers talked to each other as I talked to the males from each couple.

Tom said “I don’t know shit about most of these performers; I’m here to support my friends.” He indicated that he was at the show to see Joe Reynolds and Jack Kennedy. He also said he listens to rap that is on the radio but usually he likes Jack Johnson and Dave Mathews.

Todd said, “I’m here to drink some beer and support my friend Joe.”

I asked about the headliner XV, a rapper from Kansas, but all four had never heard of XV.

As I make my way into the venue and give my ticket to the man at the door, I notice Todd and Tom heading to the bar. They seem to have noticed some friends. As I began observing the make-up of the crowd, I notice that there are a large number of folks that fall into the category of Tom, Julie, Todd, and Erica. They are attending this show to support their friends. They socialize throughout the event, even during Joe Reynolds and Jack Kennedy’s set they continue to behave as if this is a bar night, as opposed to a concert. The preshow music is not by a deejay; it is prerecorded. They play two albums back-to-back in their entirety. One is by a group called Whole Wheat Bread—an all-black pop-punk group from Florida.

Joe Reynolds and Jack Kennedy perform with a female guest singer. One of the members of the group is black. He plays guitar and sings, the other is a white male and he raps but only covers other people's songs. The white female singer only joins them on stage for covers that require female vocals. As the set continues, I notice a divided crowd. The friends of the performers are cheering loudly while the other members of the audience stand disinterestedly. They call for the audience to put their hands in the air, again only receiving a reaction from the show-goers specifically there to see them. One of their covers was Eminem and Rhianna's *Love the Way You Lie*.

During the break in the performance, the crowd thinned substantially. Those that were there to support their friends—Reynolds and Kennedy—left, leaving a younger crowd of show-goers in their wake. The divided sea at the venue illustrates the main communities that are flowing into the realm of hip-hop.

The make-up of the crowd at the national headliner shows at small venues was very similar to the "hipster" shows. They were overwhelmingly male and white. I classified 65 to 85% of the show-goers at these shows as white. The show that was headlined by Seattle rap group, Blue Scholars, was an outlier in terms of race. Whites were in the majority at every show I attended, but for the first time in my data collection the largest non-white racial/ethnic group wasn't black. Participants that I perceived to be Asian made up 15 to 20% of the crowd. This is significant because both Bambu and the emcee from Blue Scholars are Filipino American.

The clothing at the events is diverse. Some brands of clothing that I noticed were Abercrombie, Hollister, LRG. There was also a lot of sports related gear including basketball shorts and a Kevin Durant OKC Thunder jersey. Common clothing for men are tee-shirts and jeans. There are also a lot of hats including snapback starter hats and fitted baseball hats. A few of

the people attending the shows have on backpacks. There are a lot of retro Nike shoes, such as Jordans, Air Force Ones, Dunks. The fashion at these shows was even more typical of young white males than the "hipster" shows.

I watched performer after performer opening up for Big KRIT come to stage. There are so many performers that they only get a short time on stage. Many of the acts cut into the limited time they have to promote their social media presence. After interacting with the audience Harlem emcee, Smoke DZA, ends his set by encouraging the continued interaction by following him on Twitter. The rap group that proceeded DZA, local group DRG, repeatedly throughout the set referenced their social media sites. Group member Lock states, "We on everything, Facebook, Twitter, everything."

**Social media.** As I interviewed white hip-hoppers at shows and in-depth at other venues, a recurring theme of the role of social media came up. Hip-hop artists and fans both use social media to stay connected to what is going on in the hip-hop community. Participants indicated throughout my data collection the importance of exposure through social media. Like many of the other artists at the shows I attended and observed, white, local emcee Gameboi, told the crowd to visit his Facebook, Bandcamp, and Twitter during his set. Fans indicated the use of social media to keep up with information from their favorite artists. The fans find out about new music and shows that are coming up directly from the artist.

Artists use social media to build their following as well. Lil B and OFWGKTA were both specified as benefiting greatly from exposure via social networks. For example, multiple participants indicated that they discovered Odd Future when the video from their performance on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* was shared on Facebook and Twitter by others.

William, a college-age, white, hip-hop fan, praised Lil B the BasedGod for his use of social media. “He [Lil B] figured out this social media thing before any one…. He had like a hundred Myspaces to upload all his music, for free.” He continued to talk about how B was an early adopter of Twitter and uses it extensively. “BasedGod tweets so much…. It’s like constant exposure, no middle man.” Also during his description of Lil B, he talked about his presence on Reddit.com and how his memes had made him a “cult icon.” “I swear Lil B will take over the world before Odd Future does.”

For the participants in my study, social media removed the gatekeepers between the artist and consumer. Social media sites, in the mind of many participants in my study, replaced traditional media outlets and provide an opportunity for exposure to many other artists. This does not completely remove the role of traditional media. Radio, television, and music websites were frequently mentioned as a point of initial exposure to artists.

**White national headliner, college town.** “I found out about this on Twitter,” a young woman in front of me in line says to her friends on the phone. “This is a campus event…. How are you missing this?”

At the conclusion of her conversation, I approach her to talk about hip-hop. I feel that I could use more female interviewees for my study, due to the disproportionate amount of men at the shows I have attended thus far. Her excitement for Hoodie Allen, a white emcee from New York, gives me the impression that she would be at least a great person to interview to gather information about this event. After telling her my purpose, I ask, “Why are you so excited to see Hoodie Allen?”

Her reply, “I don’t really listen to rap music that much. This is just a major event everyone is going to.” She continues to describe how this is more a social event than a concert for her. “I love music and dancing…. This is just where all my friends are going to be tonight.”

This interaction stood in stark contrast to my next conversation. Before the first set, a couple of white male, first year college students joined me on the seating next to the outside wall. Jim was wearing a tee-shirt and jeans with cloth Vans shoes. Garrett wore a hooded sweatshirt and fitted baseball cap with jeans and basketball shoes. During a conversation with them we talked about their taste in music.

Jim noted that he especially liked Talib Kweli and Nicki Minaj. While Garrett said, “I only listen to hip-hop.”

Garrett was from a rural area and shows didn’t come to his area. After disclosing that neither had been to many hip-hop shows, in fact this was Garrett’s first live show, I began to inquire deeper about their music consumption. I probe about where they get new music to listen to, “How do you follow hip-hop and participate in the community without going to shows?”

According to Jim, “You can get anything you want off the internet. I watch videos and debate hip-hop with people on comment sections for videos on Youtube. I download mixtapes.” “The best shit comes out on mixtapes, most artists’ albums they put for sale are lame…. Lil Wayne is the perfect example. His mixtapes are fire but his albums suck,” Garrett shared. The other example they provided was Wiz Khalifa. Both agreed that Khalifa’s Orange Juice and Kush mixtape was better than his radio hit.

The hip-hop community for them existed in a digital space. They consumed and learned about cultural norms through electronic forums. Jim and Garrett accumulated knowledge of hip-

hop norms, such as the commercial/underground divide, with little to no interaction with a live hip-hop scene.

This set of shows is different from the previous non-white national headliners because of the significantly higher percentage of white fans in the crowd. It is also different from the white, national headliner show that occurred in a working class suburb due to differences in content of the artists and fashion.

The shows in this group—Macklemore, Chris Webby, and Hoodie Allen—drew almost exclusively white audiences. All of the shows were over 85% white. While all the shows I attended were majority white, these three shows were the least diverse in terms of race. They also had the fewest non-white performers. Only when an all-black group of emcees, BSD, were performing was there a majority of non-white performers on stage.

The fashion style was very similar to that of the non-white, national headliner shows. Male audience members wore hoodies and baseball hates. There was a lot of sports gear. However where basketball team clothing was most prominent at the previous shows, hockey team clothing was prominent at this show. There were also a number of show-goers wearing knit skull winter hats, snowboarding jackets, NorthFace jackets. Their shoes were basketball sneakers or skateboarding shoes. There were some skinny jeans but they were high end skinny jeans. Many female show-goers wore mini-skirts and short tight dresses, while other female attendees wore tennis shoes, combat boots and Ugg boots. Oversized sweaters, button down blouses, and tee-shirts were common. Also, skinny jeans and stretch pants were worn by female show-goers.

For the music between the artists' performances, only Macklemore's show had a deejay. The others played prerecorded music, ranging from Nas, Jay-z, and Kanye West to Wiz Khalifa

and Lil Wayne. During the Hoodie Allen show, there was some pop music from Lady Gaga and the Black Eyed Peas.

The deejay that played between sets at the Macklemore show was Dante LaSalle, a local, white emcee and deejay. He played a cross-section of music but focused on hip-hop. He played a lot of local artists such as Slum Village, Phat Kat, and soul/R&B singer Meyer Hawthorne. Along with Meyer Hawthorne, he played other non-hip-hop as well. Notably, he played Vampire Weekend's *Diplomat Son*, which is a romantic story between two wealthy young men. However, the deejay made no reference to the content of the song. The deejay played hip-hop from the 1990s and early 2000s with the non-hip-hop and local hip-hop. He played Gangstarr, Rakim, LL Cool J, DMX, Kanye, Jay-Z, Biggie, and Wale.

I detect the influence of other music communities' influence on hip-hop. There is a confluence between many cultures and popular music. This point of confluence where hip-hop style is blended with general contemporary fashion, where different musical influences flow together, and where hip-hop fans refuse to just drink from one well of music will be addressed later. The shows considered above grew out of soil watered by a digital-age of vast choice that diminishes, but does not remove, the importance of interacting with other hip-hoppers in the physical world at live events.

**Live Interaction, Local Scene, and "Old School" Artists**

The lessening position of physical interaction with a hip-hop community though live performance does not mean that this has been completely washed away. Through my data collection, I attended a number of hip-hop shows where the live interaction was still privileged and a community convened at these live events to participate fully in hip-hop. I have grouped these

shows into three categories. Shows that feature local artists as headliners[49] were held in venues with a low capacity and shows with national acts as the headliner[50] whose career started prior to the year 2000 are the first two groups. These shows were placed together because of the emphasis placed on the "old-school" at these events. The third group is a group of one show. It stood out due to its location, a working-class suburb[51], its headliner, a white, old-school emcee named Lil Wyte, and the distinct style that was worn by the show's attendees.

*I do not feel like a part of the hip-hop community. My friends are beginning to look at me for new music and I spend much more time studying hip-hop culture on the internet or in magazines than I do at shows. My roommates and friends would rather go to some house party off campus than join me in some dive, seeing some local rapper I just discovered.*

*With my headphones over my ears, I stare out the window of the city bus. I am eager to get to the show. This will be the fourth time I see One Man Army[52], a local emcee that is part of Binary Star, and the Subterraneous Crew this semester. I cannot wait to get in to experience hip-hop. The shows are always marked with something new I have never seen. My first event featured a rap battle, the second a deejay battle. Last time I spent my $5 to see One Man Army, I was introduced to local groups Athletic Mic League and The Almighty Dreadnaughtz.*

*All alone in my quest for "that real hip-hop," as they say on my favorite records, I have just enough money to get on the bus and get into the show. I will have to walk back to campus after the show with no money. This becomes a more daunting proposition when I hear the rain tapping on the roof of the bus.*

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[49] The local shows were headlined by Matt, Madio, Nikki P, Kadence, and One.Be.Lo.
[50] National headliners with long careers were Twista's and Devin the Dude's shows
[51] The majority of shows attended for my study were in a college town or a major urban area. The other three shows that occurred in the suburbs, besides Lil Wyte, did not differ in a noticeable way from the college and/or urban shows.
[52] He now goes by the moniker One.Be.Lo.

*I get off the bus to walk the final half mile or so to the venue, the light rain begins to soak the hood of my canvas army surplus jacket. When I arrive, I notice this is not a Binary Star/One Man Army event. This is an event at which One Man Army and the Subterraneous Crew are an opening act. The headliner is a national act, Sage Francis, a white emcee from Providence, Rhode Island. While it will be cool to see this artist I knew little about, this means the cost of admission would be higher. Instead of the standard $5, this show is $12 at the door. I was seven dollars short and I am at least 7 miles from home.*

*Determined to get into the show, I stepped out of line to start asking for money. As I turned away for the door person and before the bouncer could grab me to force me to the back of the line, I hear "I got him, its only $7."*

*I respond to the girl who just covered me to get into the show, "Thanks."*

*Her reply provides a sense of hip-hop validity, "Anything for hip-hop."*

*For the first time, I felt part of a scene. The months and years following that show, I would become a regular at local hip-hop events. When I went to shows, I was at least acquainted enough to talk to the other regulars, as opposed to standing alone in the sea of people. My journey in the wilderness trying to move from a rap fan to a "real" hip-hopper seemed complete, to me in a way. I had found the lake and now I was invited to dive in the water.*

There would be many other points of validation through interactions with artists and being referenced as an expert on hip-hop but this moment stands out as acceptance into a community. Local hip-hop becomes a central point for hip-hoppers to establish their identity and build community. As mentioned by a number of my participants, live events have become a place to see their friends and socialize due to the time they have spent as hip-hoppers.

**Local headliner.** I drive to the show with JD, a local deejay and a central informant for my data collection. JD and I weave through what seems to be an upper-middle-class neighborhood. It is not well lit and difficult to see. I am looking for a long driveway to an old house that has been converted into the lodge for the Black Elk's Club, a fraternity and social club for African American men. JD informs me on our way, "The Elk's let people use their basement to throw shows. They have a little bar down there and an open room." He continues, "I've only really seen hip-hop and jazz down there."

I respond, "That's cool, how big is their basement?"

"It is alright sized, maybe 100 people or so. It will be mostly hip-hop heads[53] and a few hipsters…. The thing is though you can't wear a hat because of Club rules," he informs me.

"That's going to be strange; I don't think I've ever been to a show without my hat."

JD comforts my worries, "It was a little weird at first but after a while you don't notice."

When we find the driveway we park. The person promoting the show is an acquaintance of JD's named Micah. After giving Micah our $3 cover, we make our way down a narrow stairway. We get downstairs and socialize with the performers and their friends; they are the only ones to have arrived at this point. During our conversations, JD declares Micah as an authentic hip-hopper despite not being able to rap. "When he'd get in the cyphers and freestyle, he wasn't good but you could see that he loves hip-hop…. He's at every show, up front, always supporting." For JD, real hip-hoppers had a passion to learn about the culture. They wanted to be part of it and they cared about hip-hop music and art.

Besides JD's praise of Micah, the conversation had little to do with hip-hop. It was just a group of friends chatting about banal topics and making jokes. One of the emcees and a couple of

[53] Hip-hop head is a person that is passionate about consuming and learning about hip-hop. They do not necessarily need to create hip-hop but they do need to be extremely informed consumers.

others I was friends with from my time going to shows but for the rest of the guys I didn't know, yet I was comfortable. A feeling of community persisted despite being unfamiliar with each other.

The sense of community persisted throughout the night. Because the Club was non-smoking, the majority of the crowd would venture outside so the smokers could smoke. When the next act was about to start their set, Micah would pop his head out and call all the audience back inside. The group of former strangers would flow back into the building. Through the prodding of Micah and an aura of respect that surround the event, questions about "real" hip-hop and authenticity seemed out of place.

While I had little conversation about authenticity, the attendees of this show were "real" hip-hoppers without a doubt. At this show it did not seem to matter to anyone if they were viewed as authentic or what authenticity should look like, everyone was there to enjoy and support local hip-hop.

The four shows I attended that I grouped in the local headliner category differed from my other trips to the field in three ways. First, the venues at which the events were held were smaller and thus had far fewer attendees. The One.Be.Lo show is the only event that the attendance broke 150 people. The second difference, which is related to the first, is the sense of familiarity and community at the events. Due partially to the size of the event, but also due to the people that attended these events, the shows had a more social atmosphere than my other visits to the field, from my observations. While socializing at the other shows was generally kept to small, 3 to 10 people, groups, at the local headliner shows the was more cross group socialization. The final difference, due to the size and atmosphere, was the ability to have sustained conversations about the hip-hop live experience.

There were two types of venues that held the local headliner show. One type was a mid-sized venue, 100 to 500 person capacities, on off nights. The second was very small venues with capacities near or under 100 people. None of the venues made presale tickets available and charged relatively little for cover charges, $3 to $12. One of the events was a fundraiser for a local marijuana dispensary.

As previously noted, socializing with other hip-hoppers is a major activity at the events. Local shows had more cross-racial interactions. I asked Carson, a primary informant, "What do you do when you go to these shows?"

"I socialize; do a little drinking but not much other than that. Some of my friends that rap have merch tables I would work but not many people do merch tables anymore." Carson continued to describe his activities at show, "I will occasionally flyer for shows that my friends are promoting or playing but again with the emergence of Facebook there aren't as much flyers handed out either, anymore. But I am usually just there to watch the show and hang with friends."

The social aspect is a central feature to these shows. One attendee said, "These are all my friends. It is like a social thing for me…. I've been around for so long that it's kinda a reunion when one of my friends performs." While the crowd was attentive to the music and supported the person performing, they did not rap along with lyrics as much as was seen at other types of shows.

The make-up of the crowd at these events was older and more racially diverse. While white show-goers were still in the majority, the estimated percentage of white attendees was closer to 60%. The older crowd could be seen through primary observations. First, three of the five local headliner shows were 21 years and over shows. The majority of the other shows were 18 years and over. At the two shows that were not 21 and over, there were very few people marked as minors with an "M" on their hands.

All of these shows had deejays playing music between sets. While these deejays spun[54] hip-hop records, they also played non-hip-hop, such as Dave Brubeck Quartet, Coldplay, Prince, and David Bowie. The hip-hop was predominantly underground and old-school. Some old-school artists being played were Boot Camp Click, EPMD, Brand Nubians, Pharcyde, KRS-One and Dr. Dre. Some contemporary underground hip-hop played at these shows included Blu and Exile, Talib Kweli, The Roots and Binary Star.

**Factors for audience make-up.** I went to visit, Mitch, a local, white emcee. While talking about my upcoming data collection, he excitedly invited me to his next show. "Mad people you know will be there. You can link up with them for your research," he reasoned.

"That's a great idea! Good looking out," I replied.

As I walked into the dive bar in a University town, I immediately see some people I knew from when I had more regularly attended shows. Mitch was right this would be a great place to connect with white hip-hoppers. I see JD, a white, local deejay and primary informant for my study, sitting with Percy, a black, local emcee.

"What's going on?" I ask them.

They replied with typical small talk and a bragging about our children. Percy points out, "It is crazy we are now all fathers, man." As JD and I are agreeing with how strange it is that we have grown from kids meeting up at hip-hop shows to having kids of our own, Darius, a long-time local hip-hop fan who is white, and Carson, a white hip-hop fan and primary informant for my study, join us.

The conversation is about various topics, from what each of us are doing now to reflecting on shows we once all attended. We critique new hip-hop and analyzing the racial make-up of

[54] Spinning or spun is slang for playing records.

shows. As a group we settle on two major variables that affect who goes to a hip-hop show. The first was the artist that was performing and the second was where the event was held.

JD provides the example of a dead prez show he attended, "They went on tour, I don't know how many years ago this was – shortly after *Let's Get Free* came out I think. They toured with Youngbloods and Killer Mike, and A-Alikes opened up. The show was in a venue in an urban area. Probably due more to Youngbloods and Killer Mike then dead prez, that show was far more African American and more from the City then the suburbs were going to that show."

JD's experience was supported by Carson, "If the show is by more commercially successful artists, the makeup of the crowd seems to be more diverse. Folks of all types would go to a Wiz Khalifa show or that Twista show. When it comes to more underground artists, it depends greatly on the artist. Stretch Money or the Eastside Chedda Boys have predominantly black fan bases, white folks like One.Be.Lo."

It was pointed out by Percy, "When I started rapping 15 years ago, there weren't as many white people at shows period." Everyone agreed with Percy on this point.

My major take away from the conversation is that hip-hop consists of a number of sub-communities[55]. The particular hip-hop sub-community that a white hip-hopper was from could drastically affect the amount of interaction he or she has with non-whites through hip-hop. This has implications across all four of my research questions. Selective participation in the hip-hop community changes how one perceives of and re/presents hip-hop authenticity.

The observations provided by the group supported my own observations. However, it should be noted that while the percentage of non-white attendees did change from show-to-show,

[55] I blend the idea of subgenres with that of sub-communities for my research. The subgenres of hip-hop provide distinct, however not exclusive, communities that follow that subgenre of hip-hop. These communities for the lack of a better term will be referred to as sub-communities or sub-hip-hop communities.

white people were in the statistical majority at all but one show I observed, Devin the Dude. Devin the Dude was located in a small venue in an urban area, which supports the hypotheses advanced by my participants.

**Live interaction.** I view the live interaction as important to both hip-hop and my research. First, it would be a completely different study, if I had not used the "live event" to gather data and locate interviewees. Also, it shed a light on the interaction between fan and artist. While the internet and social media play and important role in establishing the fan/artist dynamic, it is cemented via the live performance. An interested person needs to look no further than OFWGKTA for proof that live interaction with the artist is still valued. Odd Future developed their following online but still had fans paying over four times the face value of the ticket and driving hours just to see them perform.

For infrequent show attendees, often the major factor for not attending many shows was location. The major reason for attending shows seldomly was due to living in a rural area and/or an area with very little live hip-hop. However, that did not diminish the importance of the live event. One attendee at the Slaughterhouse and Yelawolf show claimed, "This is my first show, I drove two hours to see Yelawolf."

One interviewee, Donny, went to shows periodically but it remained a major event for him. He stated, "One of my really good friends and I became friends through hip-hop and stay connected through that. We try to do something every year. Last year we went to Chicago and we saw JayZ right before he dropped Blueprint 3. Busta was there. Ciara was there. I don't remember who the other person was. So we do that but honestly if it's not Rockafella I haven't seen a lot. The last concert I went to was Kanye. I saw Lupe and NERD and some girl, I forget. I hate girl rappers just threw that in there. Probably about once a year. There are some that I would like to see in my

lifetime. I'd like to see Ludacris. I've seen Bone Thugs. I've seen Eminem. Up in Smoke is probably my favorite tour I've seen cuz that's when West Coast was so huge and it had every artist you could think of at the time that I loved. So that was easily the best concert that I've seen. I am strictly there to consume alcohol and rap along with their lyrics."

The artist performing is also seen as important for frequent attendees to live hip-hop events. When discussing going to shows the number of times a person had seen a particular artist was often mentioned. It did not matter if it was a commercially successful artist, such as Wiz Khalifa, a commercial artist with moderate success, such as Slaughterhouse, or an underground local artist, such as One.Be.Lo, the importance of seeing a particular artist was mentioned frequently.

Besides supporting a certain artist or hip-hop in general, a major catalyst for attending shows was to see an artist with a lot of buzz that was new. Odd Future and Lil B the BasedGod drew from people that were interested in seeing what their live performance would be like. An attendee to the OFWGKTA show stated "I love going to shows…. I just like keeping up with new music…. I thought that Tyler was really interesting, something different I had never seen before."

The live hip-hop performance can be about interacting with the artist, as seen in the story about my interaction with Freddie Gibbs. It is also about interacting with the culture. Carson states, "The early 2000s underground of hip-hop tapped into the Afrocentric period of hip-hop from the late 80s and early 90s. So these college cats were into celebrating the culture as a whole. It was fucking great. It really sparked my interest in the culture."

As I noted during my data collection, the role of the internet diminished direct consumption at hip-hop shows. The number of merchandise tables and physical copies of music, in the form of compact discs or vinyl records, present at events was observably diminished from my own experience and the experience of my participants. However, consumption of goods was still seen

at the live events. Some merchandise tables were supported by local retailers, as seen at the Das Racist show, while others were direct sales from the artists, as seen with Freddie Gibbs, OFWGKTA, One.Be.Lo, and Blue Scholars.

Mark, a young white man working Freddie Gibbs's merchandise table, stated, "Its best to just send people to your website and charge them shipping. You take a bunch of shit on the road with you, it drives up your costs and is a pain in the ass to set up and take down…. We just have selected merchandise to catch people's eye then send them to the website."

**National headliner, career started pre-2000.** There are two shows that were part of my data collection that fall into the category of national headliner with a career starting prior to 2000. These shows, Twista and Devin the Dude, distinguished themselves in a few ways. These shows had some of the highest percentage of non-white attendees. Also, the style of clothing was distinct from other show categories.

The show headlined by Devin the Dude stands out from the other shows because it was the only show that white attendees did not seem to be the statistical majority. The crowd was about 40% white and less than one-quarter female. Of the approximately 150 people at the show I only saw 7 white female show-goers. There were some interracial social groups but the majority of social groups were all a single race. One of the four acts was white, AJAX, a local emcee.

At the Twista show, while white attendees were in the majority, I estimate that barely half of the attendees appeared to be white. There was also only one white emcee opening for Twista, ProbCause. ProbCause did have a black hypeman. The racial make-up of the crowds at "old school" shows supports the idea that different types of artists have demographically different fan bases. It also hints at, but does not directly prove, the fact that the racial makeup of hip-hop show-goers has changed over time.

Both shows had deejays play music between sets. The deejays played exclusively hip-hop music. Music from the 1990s and early 2000s dominated the deejays' selections, such as Scarface, UGK, Dr. Dre., Snoop, and Nas, but they also played more contemporary rap music, such as Shorty Lo, Wiz Khalifa, Drake, and Lil Wayne. The deejays at these shows also engaged with the crowd more than at prior shows. For example, DJ Razorblade, a black, local deejay, used a great deal of call and response and made his deejay set very interactive. The crowd responded very loudly to the deejay mentioning that it was the anniversary of Notorious BIG's death[56].

In terms of clothing style by the attendees of the show, I observed obvious distinctions from prior shows. There was a great deal of diversity in clothing style like the prior shows, however I didn't see any skinny jeans and I saw very few snap back hats. The male participants wore fitted hats. Also I saw an occasional mesh back hat and a Kangol bucket hat. There were also a number of print tee-shirts, button up shirts and basketball jerseys. The participants at this show wore baggy jeans and Dickie work shorts. There were also a number of male participants in designer/vintage tennis or basketball shoes. The female audience members were largely in "club attire," short dresses, skirts or tight stretch pants. There were also female members of the crowd in jeans and tennis shoes.

**Exposure by social group.** Exposure to hip-hop music for the participants of my research can be grouped into four categories, a combination of the internet and friends, informal friend groups, groups of friends made in formal activities, and siblings. The mixture of discovering stuff on the internet and through friends was common. An example of this would be friends posting music on social media. However, informal hanging out and listening to music is also central to

[56] Notorious BIG, along with Tupac Shakur, remain extremely important figures in the hip-hop community and in popular culture, generally, since their deaths in the mid-1990s.

exposure to hip-hop music. An attendee at the Lil B show said he first heard of Lil B when he on the song *Vans* by Lil B's group The Pack. "I used to skate[board] to The Pack."

Participants gained exposure to music through their casual friendships and also through friendships established during formal activities, such as sports teams and school clubs. For example, Donny, during our interview, credited playing basketball with African Americans from his hometown for his exposure to hip-hop music. Another example would be Dave, a member of an Irish folk dance group that used Macklemore's song *Irish Celebration*, for leading him to hip-hop music.

The final category of exposure to hip-hop was through family. Multiple participants identified the role of their or friend's older siblings as a first exposure to hip-hop. One participant even mentioned his younger brother as a source for finding out about new hip-hop.

**White national headliner, working-class suburb.** As I drive to the show headlining Lil Wyte, a white emcee and affiliate of Three 6 Mafia[57], I am uncertain of what to expect. I am traveling to a suburb about 45 minutes north of the city. The suburb is a working class, white suburb. It has suffered from the post-industrial loss of jobs that the entire area has over the past 25 years, just to a slightly lesser extent. It is known for a distinctly different hip-hop community than the college town and city where the bulk of my data collection has occurred.

I arrive early to the venue. I walk up to the door and the person takes my ticket and checks my ID. I walk into a lobby with people standing around but the lobby is practically empty. There was no merchandise table. I walk through the main doors of the theatre portion of the venue directly in front of me is a wraparound bar centered in the back of the venue. Just beyond the bar was a small seating area. Just beyond that was the next tier down of the theatre. It was made up of tables

[57] The group Three 6 Mafia writes their name stylistically by writing the word "three" and using the numeral "6."

and booths for seating. The floor of the venue was on the bottom tier. This was standing room only and went right up to the stage.

In my time going to shows and consuming hip-hop, I have little experience in this hip-hop sea. I am familiar with the headliner Lil Wyte, a white emcee from Memphis, but I have not heard much of his music. According to the ticket, he is actually co-headlining with the winner of VH1's *White Rapper Show*[58].

To get a better handle on a hip-hop environment that was new to me, I approach a young man. Cody, was a white hip-hop fan, in his early 30s. He wore a fitted baseball hat and a Nike hoodie, baggie jeans, and basketball shoes. Cody has been listening to hip-hop his whole life. As bass driven southern rap music, described to me as trunk music or trap music, echoes throughout the still largely empty concert hall, I ask him about the hip-hop scene in the area.

Cody replies, "Usually you only get ICP[59] wannabes through this area, so it's good to see some real rap up here. I usually have to drive down to the city to watch some real shit."

"What do you mean by real?" I ask him.

For a few seconds after asking that question, Cody just stares at me. I take the look on his face to mean, "What a stupid question?" However, I just continue to follow the line of questioning.

After re-explaining my research, he eventually describes "real" hip-hop as, "None of that gimmick shit... just raw rapping"

After a minute or two, I feel less awkward, a feeling I had started to grow used to during the early visits to the field. We joked around and I told a story about how my friend would buy used minivans that would barely run and put hundreds of dollars of sound equipment in the back.

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[58] The White Rapper Show was a reality show contest in which unsigned white emcees from across the United States competed for a record deal.

[59] The Insane Clown Posse, or ICP, is a rap duo that has a large fan base called the Juggalos. While many Juggalos are hip-hop fans generally, many of them limit their hip-hop fandom to ICP and artists affiliated with ICP.

This sparked Cody's memory. "He said I remember back when I got my car. Me and my boys would roll around bumping Three 6 Mafia, Master P, Dayton Family, or whatever. That shit pissed people off."

Seeing that disclosing my hip-hop experience garnered better answers from Cody, I talked about what I listened to in high school. Following his lead with his story about riding around with his friends, I talked about my road trip from my high school spring break, listening to MJG, 2Pac, and Juvenile."

Before I could complete the story, Cody jumped in, "I used to love Juvenile and the Hot Boys but now that Lil Wayne is in charge. That Drake f****t is fucking a star, fuck that pussy shit." Cody preferred "hardcore" content, "bangin' beats," and hates what is played on the radio. These comment reinforced a hyper-masculinity often associated with hip-hop. Shortly after we spoke his taste in music, the first act started and we parted ways.

I felt more comfortable now that I had a better bearing on this hip-hop community. Cody's position on hip-hop seemed to closely resemble many of the hip-hoppers at this event. As I talked to others and listened to the content of the performers, which were a majority white, I understood the attitude of toughness and being a "real man" was not limited to Cody.

While I only observed one white headliner show that occurred in a working class suburb, the data I gathered was very valuable. The style of clothing closely resembled the choices seen at Twista and Devin the Dude shows. The racial make-up of the crowd was similar to the other white national headliner shows, discussed earlier. Also, the content of the music and the conversations of the show-goers was an amplified version of masculinity in hip-hop.

Most of the crowd was white, approximately 90%. The non-white members of the audience seemed to be either performers or associates of performers. The overwhelmingly male crowd wore

a lot of oversized clothing. There were frequent hoodies, fitted baseball hats. People wore jeans but there were also many members of the crowd wearing Dickie or Carhart work pants.

The content of the music being performed reflected the attitudes expressed by the attendees of the show. Both the fans and artists addressed drugs and violence.The four emergent themes in the lyrics of the white performers at the Lil Wyte show were sex, drugs, violence, and masculinity. A white rapper, Hannibal Casper, professed his desire to "rob rap b**ches." The group Medical Records, made up of three white male emcees and one black male emcee, rhymed about "sluts," not giving "a fuck about the law," and being "sick of these b**ch emcees." Finally, headliner Lil Wyte had an entire song about using and selling oxycodone. His performance of this track was notable because he only rapped during the chorus. The rest of the song he held the microphone out to the audience and they performed the lyrics from the verses in unison.

I understand the themes in the music as basic tropes of hip-hop music and culture. They did occur in the lyrics of both white and non-white emcees throughout my data collection. However, the Lil Wyte show was the only occasion in which they were the dominant themes of the evening by both the performers and attendees of the show.

**Corporate Consumption and "Commercial" Artist**

I went to great lengths to avoid navigating only a small section of hip-hop. I attended shows in different locations, urban, suburban, and college towns. I also went to different venues, in terms of size, ranging from less than 100 person capacity to nearly 10,000 person capacities. I tracked down shows headlined by artists at various points in their career, from artists that were just emerging to artists that were past the financially successful portion of their career. I wanted to get at the different sub-communities that fall under the hip-hop umbrella. While it would be impossible to do quality fieldwork for each of the sub-communities and sub-sub-communities, I found it

particularly important to visit shows of artists that were currently part of or near pop music. For that I attended a show headlined by Wiz Khalifa, a black emcee signed to Warner Brothers Records, and a show co-headlined by Yelawolf, a white emcee of Native American ancestry, and Slaughterhouse, a group of three black emcees and an emcee of Puerto Rican descent. Slaughterhouse and Yelawolf are both signed to Interscope under Eminem's imprint Shady Records.

Now, I will present my finding regarding corporate consumption of hip-hop. This will be coupled with a description of my fieldwork at Wiz Khalifa and Slaughterhouse shows. After which, I will present the data related to the fading role of corporate hip-hop due to the changing landscape of hip-hop and the music business.

**Examples of corporate exposure and corporate products.** Throughout my research and my time as a "hip-hop head," corporate music consumption has been framed largely in terms of radio and video. These two forms of media were frequently mentioned during my research, even for artists that were viewed as independent. For example at the second OFWGKTA show, a woman indicated that she saw independent artist[60], Tyler, the Creator, on the MTV Video Music Awards [VMAs]. Tyler's exposure on the VMAs compelled her to attend the show that evening. However, radio and video are only part of the picture for corporate exposure. For example, a participant referenced being exposed to "underground" hip-hop by Cartoon Network's AdultSwim[61]. Also, Carson says, "When I was younger I didn't live where there was live music. So really I just bought CDs and read the liner notes and hip-hop magazines to find out what's new."

The tide of opinion was largely against corporate and commercial music. However, it is important to note that even among fans of artists signed to large corporate record labels, the music

[60] OFWGKTA is on their own record label but have a distribution deal through Sony Red.
[61] AdultSwim is programing on Cartoon Network that targets watchers in their early teens and 20s.

that is released independent of the record label, such as free mixtapes for download, is viewed as superior. Fans of Lil Wayne and Wiz Khalifa both indicated that their mixtapes were better hip-hop than their official album releases through corporate outlets.

**National headliner, large venue.** The Pittsburgh rapper, Wiz Khalifa has garnered a lot of attention over the past few months to a year since his inclusion in XXL's Freshman[62] issue. He also has a hit song on the radio called *Black and Yellow*. Through this exposure he has built a large following of fans. His popularity makes this the largest show I am attending for my research. I am worried about finding convenient parking with so many people heading to the concert, so I arrive extremely early to the venue. My plan prevents me from facing parking problems but I am far from the first one to arrive. A mob of people are already gathering by the doors of the arena waiting to get in to the show.

To the left of the door I see a large trailer, the kind that would be seen at a county fair selling cotton candy and elephant ears. The trailer has the Wiz Khalifa and Taylor Gang logos adorning the front. As the show nears, two large flaps open along the outside of the trailer. Inside stands four men, one has a microphone and is playing music and the other three are organizing merchandise. Before the doors to the venue even open, merchandise is being pushed to the attendees of the show.

I listen to the man with the microphone pumping up the crowd. He does call-and-response with the now growing mob of people.

"When I say Taylor," he orders, "y'all say gang."

"Taylor!"

"Gang!"

[62] The hip-hop based magazine XXL issues an up and coming artist issue call XXL's Freshman every March.

"Taylor!"

"Gang!"

They go back and forth for a minute or so before he starts pushing merchandise and reinforcing the Taylor Gang brand. "How many of you are OG Taylors?," the man on the mic asks. To the question he received wild applause.

The success of the Taylor Gang brand is seen in sports gear and team logos on clothes at the events I have attended. In fact, there were many teams from many markets represented at nearly every hip-hop event. However the local teams dominated the fashion landscape at all the shows but this one. The dominate team fashion and colors were those from Pittsburgh. All of the professional Pittsburgh teams use the colors black and yellow and so does the Taylor Gang. Despite being hundreds of miles from Pittsburgh, I found myself in an ocean of black and yellow.

While standing at the banks of the Taylor Gang ocean, I engage a young man named Trent. Trent is wearing a Wiz Khalifa shirt, shorts, and a Pittsburgh Pirates fitted hat. I ask him, "What is it about Wiz that created this large fan base?"

"Wiz has that swag and style but also he's the best lyricist out right now," he replied.

Later in our conversation, I inquire, "So, are you from Pittsburgh?"

He answered me with a tentative, "No, but I've been a Steelers fan my whole life." It appeared to me that he was using his affinity for the Steelers, the professional football team from Pittsburgh, to justify the fact he was adorning black and yellow[63].

I was unsure if he took my question as judgment, so I quickly follow-up with, "It's crazy I haven't seen so much Pittsburgh gear in my life."

[63] The professional sports teams from Pittsburgh are the Pirates, in Major League Baseball, the Steelers, in the National Football League, and the Penguins, in the National Hockey League.

This mechanism to prevent him from closing down on me took our conversation to an exploration of "real" fans and authenticity. He described the types of fans that were at the show by dividing them into two groups, fans of the song Black and Yellow and original fans of Wiz Khalifa. For Trent, "A lot of people here only know Black and Yellow and claim to be Taylors but if you talk to them you know that they are just following trends not real fans." He furthered his description by talking about mixtapes of Wiz's that came out prior to his commercial fame, "I've been listening to Wiz since that Kush and Orange Juice mixtape."

As we part ways, Trent wishes me luck on my schooling and my dissertation. He also replicates the branding that is being done by the man in the merchandise truck by yelling, "Taylor Gang or Die."

Through the shows headlined by national acts in large venues, I gather important data. The role of commercialization/commodification of hip-hop is an important discussion in hip-hop circles, as well as the academic literature on hip-hop presented in chapter 2. The idea of commercialization is so central to hip-hop authenticity that two of McLeod's (1999) dimensions of authenticity are influenced by the idea of commercialization, the political-economic dimension and the cultural dimension. While there are distinctions between the Wiz Khalifa show and the Slaughterhouse/Yelawolf show, I will describe the key observations of these shows together because of the artist's relationship to the music industry.

In terms of clothing, the show attendees were dressed similarly, with the exception of the prevalence of "Pittsburgh black and yellow" and Taylor Gang gear at the Wiz Khalifa show. A majority of the male members of the crowd have hats on, such as fitted baseball hats or snapback hats with custom embroidering on them. There are also a number of members of the crowd wearing knit hats. There are a lot of jerseys; many of them are throwback jerseys. Besides jerseys there are

a lot of hoodies, tee-shirts and flannel button up shirts. The female members of the audience fell into two distinct style categories of almost equal proportion. The first was similar to the style choices of the male participants – tee-shirt or hoodie, jeans, tennis shoes and occasionally wearing snapback hats. The second category would be club gear – short skirts/dresses, blouses, and heals.

The racial diversity at each of the large venue, national headliner shows is basically the same. It is also similar to the other shows attended for my research. I estimate the crowd to be 65 to 75 percent white attendees[64]. Both shows also featured white emcees. At the Slaughterhouse show, Yelawolf was the co-headliner. He is identified by many of the show's attendees as white, in coverage of him in the media but is of Native American decent. That show also had a visit from white emcee, Eminem. At the Wiz Khalifa show, fellow Pittsburgh emcee Mac Miller opened up to provide the white rapper presence at the show. The Khalifa show also had an electo-pop group made up of three white males. They not only open for Khalifa but mention recording music with hip-hop producers, The Neptunes, and hip-hop group, Chiddy Bang.

The major difference between the two shows is how they shaped being "real." The performers at the Slaugherhouse/Yelawolf show claimed "real hip-hop." Yelawolf indicated in his lyrics that "I wish a motherfucker would tell me that I ain't hip-hop, bitch you ain't hip-hop." This differed from the authenticity claims made by the performers at the Khalifa show. During his set Wiz asked the audience, "How many y'all been down with Taylor Gang for a couple of years?" This is an authenticity claim but only toward his own fan base. This was echoed by interactions with the fans. While the theme of authentic hip-hop emerged for the Slaughterhouse show, the theme of authenticity at Wiz Khalifa swirled around being a "real" fan of the artist.

[64] I do need to point out that due to the size of the venue that held the Wiz Khalifa show, it was difficult for me to observe the entire crowd.

**Fading need for corporate consumption and non-corporate outlets.** Above, in the section on the role of the internet, I look at how hip-hop fans, specifically, and music fans, generally, could acquire music via illegal download and that non-corporate releases were viewed as a lesser product. In fact, MC BrakeFast says, "I don't buy a lot of rap CDs any more cuz you don't really have to." Internet is joined by local retailers, such as the ones at Das Racist merchandise table, as an increasingly important part of the hip-hop economy. Dante LaSalle, a white, local emcee and deejay, advocated for the crowd to use their "economic force" to support local hip-hop art and merchandise.

**Multiple Hip-Hops**

I observed through my research multiple subgenres and sub-communities that all fall under the hip-hop label. I will address in chapter 5 the implications for authenticity, more precisely white hip-hop authenticity, of having multiple hip-hops. Through the participants and my own experience, the existence of different subgenres and sub-hip-hops is fairly conclusive. However, it is also difficult to draw definitive lines between regions, subgenres, and scenes that all float under the hip-hop banner.

**Existence of/distinction between subgenres and sub-communities.** The existence of subgenres/sub-hip-hop communities is very blurry and difficult to clearly define. My participants largely acknowledged the existence of subgenres/communities, however struggled with placing clear parameters around these groups of music and people. As MC BrakeFast put it there are "very subtle and overlapping distinctions" when it comes to classifying hip-hop. I faced these same difficulties when I tried to pour my data into distinct glasses. In fact, JD states, "I guess I don't differentiate that much. […] What I don't want my son to repeat and what I don't want my mom to take offense to. I can't say that I don't do that but it is kinda what's whack and what's good.

Either its crap or its good." JD, a person I identified as having a deep connection with hip-hop culture, only made the distinction between what he liked and did not liked, as well as who he would play the music around.

This differs from MC BrakeFast and G.M. who think there has been such a change in the volume and types of hip-hop that one *must* make distinctions. While both of these participants were equally embedded in hip-hop culture as JD, as performers and fans, they disagreed with the importance of labeling and focusing on a particular subgenre or sub-community of hip-hop. BrakeFast says, "There is so much rap in the world today, you almost have to narrow your focus if you wanna get any level of connoisseurship."

Even among hip-hop fans that are not deeply embedded in a hip-hop community it can become difficult to distinguish the vast amount of hip-hop subgenres and sub-communities. Fred, who is a white hip-hop fan, questions the usefulness of the subgenre labels. Using the example of gangsta rap music, he points out that artists frequently get labeled as gangsta rap just because they mention "urban problems." While Fred does not deny the existence of subgenres, it is wrong to use them to draw any reliable conclusions about the artists. I faced a similar problem while in the field. There were differences based on the fans at different types of shows. However, the attendees did not have any distinct characteristic that allowed them to be placed neatly into a certain category.

It is the wide influence of hip-hop along with these pools of sub-hip-hop communities that makes determining the boundaries of the culture difficult. This dichotomy is noted by MC BrakeFast. "Hip-hop is massive. Arguably the influential genre in the world right now, so everybody listens to rap." He continues with an example of subcultures that not everyone is

familiar with, “Battling is a very particular subculture, even though it is associated with hip-hop. I mean if you’re into rap you are probably not into battle rap.”

This provides a dilemma for the study of hip-hop. It is influential but with numerous subgenres/communities it is difficult to determine **A** hip-hop, much less **A** hip-hop authenticity. As the waters of hip-hop run-off down different paths, my view of hip-hop as an organizing structure or culture is influenced. As Carson points out, “It is important to not view hip-hop as a singular thing or culture. Hip-hop is different from city to city, from subgenre to subgenre.” A participant in the field that accepts Carson’s premise, hints at the relationship between hip-hop as a singular organizing structure and hip-hop authenticity. He states, “There are so many kinds of rap…. I guess each type of rap is going to have its fans that think it real.”

**Hip-hop subgenres: Examples, ways of categorizing, and their influence on the make-up of a sub-hip-hop community.** I am attending my last show. I personally place the artists and fans at this show on the opposite end of the spectrum from the attendees of the Lil B and OFWGKTA shows, which I’ve identified as the most influential to my theorizing. On one end of the spectrum is Blue Scholars and Bambu that are deeply political hip-hop. Bambu is a political emcee and community organizer. The Blue Scholars wrote a song about the riots in Seattle in 1999 because of the World Trade Organization meeting. That is why I am not expecting to see the tide of Bambu’s community organizing brand of hip-hop crash into the wave of Lil B’s sometimes satirical, sometimes pseudo-philosophical brand of hip-hop at the other end of the spectrum.

I am enjoying the show, when to my surprise Bambu says, “How many of you have been to a Lil B show?”

As the rest of the crowd starts laughing, I yell, “I have!”

The crowd continues to laugh and Bambu inquires, “Did you hear dude?” He continues in a mocking tone, “I have!”

I am slightly embarrassed but more proud that I wasn’t limited to a single sub-hip-hop. During the nearly 12 months of data collection, I have developed a sense of pride in the completeness of my hip-hop knowledge. I knew in the mind of many that Lil B was considered “garbage” hip-hop. The connection between the seemingly disparate artists continued during the set. Bambu appeared to me to be doing a performance art contrast between Lil B and himself. Bambu sprinkled his set—which focused on police misconduct, community organizing, respecting women, and reasons behind social inequity—with Lil B’s superficial signatures “swag” and “whoop.”

Until I got home that evening, I took this to be a clear distinction between sub-communities of hip-hop. However based on a past interview, Bambu seemed to see potential overlap between himself and Lil B’s fans. I located an interview with Bambu in which he stated, “I wanted to see Lil B. I wanted to see what it's all about. I embrace the youth movement. Some people my age may be like, ‘aww that's garbage!’ but as an organizer, I look at it and think, ‘something is going on with this kid and how can I harness what he does?’ I work with kids and I come in doing the cooking dance and they see I know what's up” (Quaynor, 2011, ¶ 31).

Reading this article, and reviewing the comments made by my participants, I changed my perspective on a hip-hop versus multiple hip-hops, once again. I came into my study looking at hip-hop as a singular culture that could be looked at as a fairly unified community of people, that despite divisions in the culture it was relatively similar across all sections. By observing such a large section of hip-hop, I was forced to dispense with that idea. However, after seeing Bambu’s

comments I see a point of convergence as well. Now I sit in between the idea of a hip-hop that has drained into individual lakes and the unified ocean of hip-hop that is made up of many waters.

Subgenres of hip-hop play a number of important roles in the music world. They allow participant shorthand to know the musical and lyrical style of the artist, as well as provide insight into the content and audience of a particular artist. In this section, I will address examples of subgenres and different ways to categorize the hip-hop genre into subgenres. Throughout this section, I will relate subgenres to sub-communities[65] of hip-hop. In short, do certain subgenres of hip-hop have certain types of fans and/or artists? In chapter 5, I consider how this organization of people based on subgenre alters the idea of A hip-hop sub/culture and effects white hip-hoppers' conception of authenticity.

The exploration of subgenres and sub-hip-hop communities is significant to both the understanding of the structure and influence of hip-hop. It also creates the dynamics in which white hip-hop authenticity is performed. As noted above subgenres/communities are difficult, yet important, to breakdown. Though there are many blurred lines and overlapping interests, through my research I have identified the types of categorizations of subgenres/communities in hip-hop. The first way to categorize hip-hop subgenres and communities is by content or style. My participants felt, and my observations supported, that this first type of categorizing had a loose relationship with race. By that I mean, style and content *tend* to influence the racial make-up of the sub-communities that are attached to subgenre. In addition to style and content, hip-hop can be categorized by regional subgenres. Finally, hip-hop can be categorized by relation to media.

[65] I use the term sub-community to talk about the people that follow, create, and enjoy a particular subgenre of hip-hop. Throughout this section, it will appear as if subgenre and sub-community/sub-hip-hop community are synonyms. THEY ARE NOT SYNONYMS; subgenres refer to music and sub-communities refer to the people. However they are so inextricably linked that I will consider them in unison.

Based on style and content, participants in my study identified subgenres that attract a white community. These were nerd rap, folkhop, hipster rap, and emo rap. There is some overlap with nerd, hipster, and emo rap. The overlap centers on the fact that they are all perceived as "intellectual" and/or "emotional." Derogatorily, Fred identifies all these subgenres by the music simply being "upper middle class white kids that are whining about their stupid problems." There are characteristics of hipster rap that are present in other subgenres because the hipster rap community is primarily concerned with the style or artist "of the moment."

Another style group identified by my research is avant-garde or progressive. MC BrakeFast feels that this subgenre is "what makes hip-hop such a fun genre to be a part of is I can still do so much more avant-garde things" for him to perform. Artists, such as Sage Francis, were understood as avant-garde/progressive hip-hop but also part of a subgenre to which white hip-hoppers are particularly attracted. Also the artists that are listed as avant-garde/progressive were predominantly white performers, such as Aesop Rock, B. Dolan, El-P, and Dante LaSalle. However, non-white artists such as Anti-pop Consortium and Mr. Lif were also labeled as progressive hip-hop.

A subgenre of hip-hop was gangsta rap and the closely related coke rap. To G.M., "gangsta rap to me is on some street knowledge stuff. Talking about the violence in the street, the drugs, you know like real life culture." Coke rap is similar to gangsta rap, except it focuses on the drug dealing aspect of street life. From old school gangsta/coke rappers, such as NWA and Ice T, to contemporary gangsta/coke rappers, such as The Clipse and Re-up Gang, all of the artists listed in this category were black emcees.

Another content/style based subgenre that was associated with white performers was Horrorcore. Horrorcore "deals with suicide and homicide but in a more self-destructive way" than gangsta rap according to my participants. White emcees Necro and Ill Bill were listed as

horrorcore, along with Jedi Mind Tricks, a group led by a white emcee Vinnie Paz. Horrorcore is a progression from hardcore hip-hop. According to Carson, "hardcore is pretty much exemplified by MOP or Onyx, really heavy aggressive beats and content. The content could sometimes be considered gangsta rap but to me it's more I'm gonna knock you out shit." OFWGKTA was also considered to be horrorcore group by some of my participants, while others did not feel that they fit well under the horrorcore label.

The final major content category that recurred was conscious or political hip-hop. Exemplified by Public Enemy, X-Clan, Common, Talib Kweli, dead prez and The Roots, conscious artists are "rappers that refer to literature, history, politics, and such in their lyrics," "view[ed] as uplifting," and "funky stuff but they were still like political." It was common for participants that identified having formal education about race and/or diversity to list consciousness and political rap as part of their taste in hip-hop. It is important to note that "intellectual artists" that were white were commonly called nerd rap while "intellectual artists" that were black were listed as examples of conscious rap.

The second type of categorization system for hip-hop is by region. Regions, such as East Coast, West Coast, and Southern Rap, are a common way to divide up hip-hop. Regions have their own distinct sounds and style. Donny says, "You can usually tell where a rapper is from by their style or the beats they use in their music." However, my findings suggest that the important role of regional hip-hop is not specifics about each region but rather how regions viewed and the role regionalism plays.

It tends to be the case that regions have distinct sounds and styles; this is not always as clear cut as it would seem. Carson breaks down the messiness of regional hip-hop nicely when he points out,

> I mean regionally you got West Coast, Dirty South, East Coast, Midwest but even those can be parsed out even further. Houston shit is different than Atlanta shit or New Orleans or Memphis or Florida or Virginia. The West and Midwest aren't really sensible divisions either. I mean Detroit doesn't sound like Cleveland or Chicago or Minneapolis or Kansas City. Just like LA is nothing like San Francisco or Seattle. I guess when I was younger regional subgenres made sense but not really anymore. A$AP Rocky is the perfect example, he has said in interviews he is more influenced by UGK than fellow New Yorkers or even as Jay Electronica reps the fuck outta New Orleans but pretty much everyone would say his sounds fits with Detroit or New York better.

From a wide view regions seem to explain the waters of hip-hop well but when I sit in the boat on those seas I discover it is the local waterways that must be charted.

An aspect of the concept of regionalism is the importance of a "local" scene and the local artists. Through local affiliation, a community emerges with its own norms and practices. The hip-hop I observed was very concerned with localness. Fans and artists alike wore gear from local sports team. Participants deeply embedded in the local scene I observed referenced the local artists with pride. Locals provide a physical scene in which to participate.

The final categorization of hip-hop subgenres/communities is the relationship to media. In terms of authenticity this a way that participants categorized hip-hop subgenres/communities for two reasons. First, this is directly related to key aspects of hip-hop authenticity, such as underground and mainstream music. Second, this type of categorization feeds back to the predominate theme of addressing subculture/post-subculture debate because it alludes to the relationship with consumption and participation.

The relation to media and exposure creates distinct subgenres. For example, MC BrakeFast indicated that he likes "independent" hip-hop. The terms "underground," "independent," "commercial," and "mainstream" functioned not only as a description of an artist's relationship to corporate media but also as a distinct subgenre/community of hip-hop. In fact certain media have appeared to establish their own subgenre. While in the field, OFWGKTA was describe as part of the "Pitchfork Rappers." The online music website has in the mind of this participant developed

its own distinct subgenre/community of hip-hop. Another example of this phenomenon is the reference to "radio" rappers[66]. This implies that the simple act of being on commercial radio provides some distinction.

**Other Music Permeating Hip-Hop**

As hip-hop thaws the runs off creates different ponds of sub-hip-hop communities that are facilitated by subgenres of the music, it is simultaneously having the popular music rain down upon it. The use of sampling has created a long history of influence of other genres of music on hip-hop. The frequently occurring presence of non-hip-hop, along with the eclectic taste of hip-hoppers in my study, requires a look at finding related to non-hip-hop. This relationship between eclectic taste, sampling, and the hip-hop community has implications for how to better understand what it means to be a "hip-hopper" or "hip-hop head" and their conceptions of authenticity.

**Non-hip-hop found in the field.** During my data collection, I saw non-hip-hop acts. With two exceptions, the artists performing were all rapping over music that was distinctly hip-hop. That is why I was taken a little aback when the first act at the Wiz Khalifa show as an Electropop band. They were all white with a keyboard. The front person for the band wasn't delivering his lyrics using a rapping style. Nothing about their sound, content, or style sent a hip-hop vibe. As I watched I remembered only one other act that I would not have classified as hip-hop, The Hop. The Hop had opened for Hoodie Allen. The difference between this band opening for Wiz and The Hop was a deejay. At least The Hop used a traditional hip-hop percussionist, a deejay. As I watch this electropop group kick off this rap concert, I attempted to wrap my mind around their appearance.

[66] There was no mention of streaming and satellite radio services. Future researchers could examine how hip-hoppers differentiate between exposure to artists through streaming, satellite, and air transmission radio services.

I could never track down the name of the band that opened for Wiz Khalifa. None of the participants I spoke with that night knew, or cared, about this band. As mentioned earlier, they did claim to work with Chiddy Bang, a hip-hop duo, and hip-hop producers, The Neptunes, but that seemed to be the only hip-hop connection. However, their inclusion in the show made more sense when Wiz stated during his set, "The way u show love, it like some rock-n-roll shit…. We a different type of fan base, we got different influences." I took this to mean Wiz Khalifa had a desire to not be limited to the hip-hop community.

The phenomenon of incorporating other genres of music into the hip-hop shows by the performers was not limited to Wiz Khalifa. During my data collection, I saw a local deejay and producer Charles Trees on two occasions. To open the Das Racist show, Charles Trees preformed a live P.A. set. During that set, he incorporated multiple types of music but it was predominantly a hybridization of electronic based music with hip-hop. This tactic was also used by white Chicago emcee, ProbCause. ProbCause, opened for Twista. During his set he rapped over a range of beats from classic hip-hop boom bap to the electronic bass-driven genre of dubstep. As seen during the descriptions of the shows, the deejays that played music between sets play a range of music from jazz, rock, new wave, indie rock, and of course a lot of hip-hop.

**Participants' eclectic taste.** The cross-section of music played at the shows began to make more sense to me as I talked with participants at the shows. There was an acceptance that even among "hip-hop heads" that taste in music could, or even should, be eclectic. Even passionate hip-hop fan referenced other genres of music as influential in their taste and style. Multiple participants at shows indicated that prior to their involvement in the hip-hop community that they were, and some still are, passionate about other genres and artists. Rock was referenced for other music or music scenes that participants were/are involved. Specifically punk rock and indie rock were

repeatedly mentioned. There were also references to electronic music by participants, specifically dubstep was part of the music taste spectrum.

This wide-ranging taste in music, even members of the hip-hop community, was not limited to my observations. Participant after participant referenced the intersection of hip-hop with other music genres. This intersection of music came in two forms, alluded to above. One intersection is when artists have appeal or market across music communities. Danny Brown, a black, local emcee that opened for Das Racist and Lil B, was cited by participants as having a fan base that crosses many groups. One white, male show-goer points out that, "Danny is so dope he's respected by all audiences." Artists and music labels also actively court fans of all types of music. On participant stated that he "listen[s] to all kinds of music…. It seems that it is marketed that way." This idea was supported by a hip-hopper that observed that pop radio plays a cross-section of music. Another participant pointed out cross-genre collaboration among artists, such as Ludacris recording a song with country singer, Jason Aldean.

The second intersection, which is logically influenced by the first, is fans whose taste is more expansive than just hip-hop. This was seen in people that considered themselves hip-hoppers and people that were fans of all music including some hip-hop. At the local scene level, multiple participants stated that they go to live performances of artists in many genres. This comes in the form of just attending shows to "support whoever is playing." It also appears in the avid desire to go to live shows, as seen in a comment from a participant at the Lil B show, "I listen to hip-hop mostly but I listen to all kinds of music and go to different shows."

It was a common theory by my participants—and one which I support—that there are generational factors that assist this eclectic taste in music. One participant hypothesized that the label of hip-hopper, punk rocker, raver, or hippies, doesn't exist anymore. He stated, "At least with

my friends, we just listen to everything and enjoy good music…. I like to see how different kinds of music come together to make something cool." One theory for this was the role of the internet to select what a person wanted to listen to and the technology available to listen to music. One female participant at the second OFWGKTA show explained, "When I set my iPod to shuffle when I work out I could listen to the Beatles or David Guetta or Jay-Z."

It is the eclectic taste in music of hip-hoppers and non-hip-hoppers that add to the complex landscape of hip-hop. I started this chapter by addressing the landscape of hip-hop and the pools of sub-hip-hop communities because these have an influence on how a white hip-hopper interacts with hip-hop. The lakes, rivers, ponds, and oceans of hip-hop that fall on the topographical map of music provide the reflection for white hip-hoppers to see their own hip-hop authenticity. Reflected from these waters are the conceptions of hip-hop authenticity that hip-hoppers try to represent. A white hip-hopper's conception of hip-hop authenticity is contingent on which pool of hip-hop they are reflecting and what vantage point they are looking at these waters. The slightest change in positioning can distort conceptions of authentic hip-hop.

**Conception of Hip-Hop Authenticity**

*The Binary Star show/rap battle was just a few weeks ago and my time spent on Twitter and other hip-hop websites has already shifted. The Binary Star album I bought off of One Man Army is booming in the background as I dive into the waters of local underground hip-hop. With the ripples still creating a distorted reflection, I used my old tools of tracking down new music.*

*The cue on Napster read "Boomerrang Slang – eLZhi[67]". He was featured on the posse cut[68]* KGB *by Binary Star. There are not many people sharing the track so the download is*

[67] eLZhi is an emcee from Detroit, Michigan that writes his name stylistically with the first letter lower case and the next two letters with capital letters.
[68] A posse cut is when the artist invites a large number of people to contribute short verses to the song.

*excessively slow. To learn more about eLZhi, I move to the discussion boards. I find him hardly mentioned but when I do, I see words like "lyricist" and "ill flow." The abundance of posts about eLZhi and other artists that revolved around being underground or the best emcee, reinforced my conceptions of hip-hop authenticity that I had developed from listening to Redman[69]. The community of hip-hop fans online were reflecting the content of the lyrics and my opinion of "real" hip-hop was beginning to reflect both of these pools.*

For me, the conception of what is authentic hip-hop is a difficult one to place or explain. This was similarly difficult for many of the participants in the field, particularly in terms of hip-hop fans. While hip-hop artists had added dimensions to the evaluations of their authenticity, such as talent and skills, those expectations could not be placed on a non-performer. The conception of hip-hop authenticity is, thus, a complex layer of changing dynamics that is altered by relation to the community and to which hip-hop sub-community, discussed above, one is a member. The reflective surface of hip-hop waters is in multiple locations and the participants staring into these waters get to see images of hip-hop authenticity distorted in very individual ways.

While I used McLeod's (1999) six dimensions of authenticity as a starting point for my analysis of hip-hop authenticity, however I had findings that did not fit neatly into McLeod's dimensions. It is the conception of hip-hop authenticity that creates the image for hip-hoppers to re/present. Throughout the section on conceptions of hip-hop authenticity, I organize my findings into three sections. First, I present my findings confirm, critique, or manipulate McLeod's six dimensions. Next, I address other facets of hip-hop authenticity that are not directly addressed by McLeod. These additional notions of authenticity overlap McLeod's dimensions but do not fully fall into any of his binaries. I became aware through my data collection that the view of

[69] Redman is an emcee from New Jersey.

authenticity, as it pertains to hip-hop, is shifting. This is seen when I apply my data to McLeod's work but was also explicitly addressed by participants. The third part of this section, addresses these perceived changes related to hip-hop authenticity.

**McLeod's Dimensions of Hip-Hop Authenticity**

*My adventure down the hip-hop river, post-Binary Star show, takes me to calmer waters than my hip-hop experience had prior. I had avoided, so-called, gangsta rap because I could not see myself in the water. I was not from an urban setting riddled with gang violence. I had flocked toward The Roots' album* Things Fall Apart *because it provided me a conception of hip-hop that was comfortable and resembled something I could re/present. Now I had forded the river of gangsta rap to explore the frontier of a fresh lake, conscious hip-hop.*

*What was considered "real" at these shows by the artists and the fans seemed like something I could achieve. To re/present a street persona was outside of my lived experience, however knowing about social issues, finding artists that did not get radio play, and learning about the history of hip-hop was more attainable. In my mind I could stay true-to-self and be an authentic hip-hopper, so I dove deeply into these waters. It was comfortable for me—a comfort not all people could enjoy*[70]*—in the conscious, underground hip-hop circles because when I looked at the surface I could see a version myself.*

The six dimensions of hip-hop authenticity developed by McLeod (1999) persist in the conceptions and re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity. It is how I and other white hip-hoppers engage and understand these dimensions that provide insight.

**Psycho-social dimension.** The psycho-social dimension of hip-hop authenticity accentuates the importance of being "true-to-self," as opposed to following trends. According to

[70] My position as a white male allows me a privilege to find and occupy places that I find comfortable. This is not true for all people. My whiteness allows me to selectively participate and avoid marginalization even in hip-hop.

my participants, this was vital to hip-hop authenticity for artists and fans. As seen in the above autoethnographic vignette my own hip-hop authenticity began to take shape when I saw a place where I could simultaneously be myself and an "authentic" hip-hopper.

It is easier to negotiate "being true-to-self" for fans of hip-hop, as opposed to artists who are faced with being biographical with their content while remaining creative and unique. It is the love of hip-hop and the being true-to-self that participants pointed to as an aspect of hip-hop authenticity for fans. That love of hip-hop manifests itself in knowing the music. For Johnson, a white hip-hop fan I met at a show, "Authentic hip-hoppers really know the music. They just can't be told what to listen to." Johnson's position epitomizes the poles set at McLeod's psycho-social dimension.

Johnson's quote also demonstrates what it means to avoid hip-hop fakeness for my participants. This can refer to liking hip-hop in general, when fans are "just copying what they see on TV" or refer to fans that "jump on a bandwagon" of an artist whose career has taken off. However, the act of following trends, like hipsterism, is the appropriation of "cool," just at different points of its popularity arc.

As previously stated, the issue of being true-to-self is of equal importance to artists. Artists were cited as being "fake" for authenticity purposes throughout my research. For white emcees, in particular, acting "hard" or "gangsta" would be evidence of the misappropriation of hip-hop authenticity. It was prized among my participants when white artists, such as Hoodie Allen, Mac Miller, and Chris Webby, embraced their white suburban personas, as opposed to acting "black." Darius describes an inauthentic hip-hopper as "someone who lies about who they are in order to fit in, like Vanilla Ice."

An artist adopting a persona to be perceived as authentic is not limited to white emcees. An example provided by my participants of an inauthentic rapper was Rick Ross, a black emcee from Miami. Brad's issue with Rick Ross was that "dude talks about selling coke, but he was a prison guard making $24,000 a years. So if what you are saying cannot be backed up by some evidence of some sort, then I think that is not authentic. So authentic would be the opposite of that."

The artist equivalent of fan's chasing the popular thing of the moment is chasing commercial success. G.M. indicates emcees, "bite[71] anything that is hot right now, that trying to rhyme the same thing as the last person that's hot. They might get fame of something for a minute but it won't last." While being like others for success is viewed as inauthentic, artists breaking from what other artists are doing is prized in hip-hop. The example provided by MC BrakeFast of being different was New York emcee, Thirsten Howl. While hip-hop many hip-hop artists were flaunting their wealth, Thirsten Howl performed a song about living with his mom. Thirsten Howl represents uniqueness within hip-hop and counteracts the idea artists are just striving for commercial success.

I have now seen OFWGKTA twice for my research. It is the creativity and uniqueness of Odd Future, specifically Tyler, the Creator, the group's de facto leader, that participant after participant pointed to as the source of OFWGKTA's hip-hop authenticity. As I walk away from the venue on this early autumn night, I see two white men standing smoking cigarettes wearing customized Odd Future shirts. They took markers to make plain white tee-shirts into Odd Future tee-shirts.

[71] To "bite" is to take from someone else's style.

As the conversation starts, one of the attendees, William, excitedly proclaims "What a show! Usually hip-hop shows are boring but Odd Future has real energy."

"Tyler is a genius. Rap was getting really fucking boring and he's reviving it," stated Phil, the other attended.

"How is Tyler reviving rap?" I follow up to Phil's statement.

Phil replies "Real artists create something new. Hip-hop is stale now."

As I hear chants of "Wolf Gang… Wolf Gang…" in the back ground, we continue our conversation about Odd Future reviving hip-hop. Despite being light on specifics the two participants reinforce the importance of being new and creative. Words like "innovator," "different," and "new" are the key descriptors for the work of Odd Future. "You know their style is different," states William. He explains he is talking about how they rap and what they wear.

"Tyler isn't trying to be like other rappers," Phil points out.

It is the purposeful separation from hip-hop tropes that make OFWGKTA "real" hip-hop for William and Phil. It is their desire to be different in their presentation and style that make for hip-hop authenticity in the minds of these Wolf Gang Fans. The importance of creativity and originality were privileged throughout my fieldwork and my interviews, creativity was mentioned in reference to or at the shows of Das Racist, Danny Brown, Lil B, and Odd Future most frequently. Das Racist, Danny Brown, Lil B, and Odd Future accounted for over half the references to creativity and originality. In fact MC BrakeFast states that he "view[s] the true standard of authenticity [as] wanting to create superlative artworks. Unique, distinct, submersive[72], deeply personal artworks." It was also a point of pride for G.M. to be told he was original.

[72] MC BrakeFast used the word submersive in his interview. Which contextual I take to mean, a piece of art that completely surrounds a person in an universe like an when submarine is enveloped by water when it is submerged.

**Political-economic dimension.** The uniqueness and originality of an artist provides a hip-hop authenticity whites can occupy. Also, white fans through the rejection of commercial hip-hop can take on an authentic persona in their participation in hip-hop. It is this overlap that requires a look at McLeod's (1999) political-economic dimension of hip-hop authenticity. This dimension places "underground" and "commercial" on opposing poles. Much like the concept of being "true-to-self," white artists can re/present "underground" hip-hop and thus be "authentic." By extension, white hip-hop fans can gain bona fides from being knowledgeable of underground artists and/or participating in underground hip-hop sub-communities.

*My anniversary with my girlfriend is coming up and I need to get her a gift. Also, Kanye West's new album is coming out and I need to pick it up. So I walk down the street on the cold February morning to the bus stop to take care of both of these tasks. My hoodie, snow hat, and Ecko[73] snowboarding jacket are keeping me warm, as I listen to music from my Sony Discman that blasts from my oversized headphones.*

*My first stop was at Border's Bookstore to pick-up Kanye's album. My familiarity with Kanye West was from his work with Mos Def and Talib Kweli, two New York emcees that are frequently classified as part of the conscious hip-hop subgenre. After paying for the album, I walk back outside rip off the plastic and label, place the CD into my Discman and the case into by backpack. The album was my shopping soundtrack. His content and sound fit nicely into my conception of "real" hip-hop. It belonged in my already deep reservoir of music I have collected.*

*Over the months and years that followed, Kanye's career flowed forward to gain great commercial success. He won awards, his videos were played on MTV and BET, and his songs were in consistent rotation on the radio. Kayne West was a mainstream artist. During his rise from the*

[73] Ecko is a clothing brand that was popular in the rave and hip-hop communities during the early 2000s.

*ranks of hip-hop's underground to pop star, my desire to consume his music ebbed. He's a pop star now and not worth my time because I am an "underground" hip-hop head.*

I witnessed an aversion to commercial music ingrained in hip-hop authenticity. Not surprisingly this permeated the conversation about authenticity during my data collection. While commercial music was deemed as inauthentic by participants in my study, it was also cast as problematic for hip-hop. However, there was some defense of commercial outlets during my discussion with white hip-hoppers, as well.

One key aspect that makes "underground" hip-hop more appealing is a DIY[74] mentality. Underground artists are outside the influence of company executives. The perception that grounded my otherwise, unfounded dismissal of Kanye West was that commercial success changes an artist. Donny explains his distrust of commercial influence, "I feel like companies want to portray certain ones, certain ways and if you don't fit that mold then… You know rapper always talk about it. Being fake and not representing who they are and getting your style from someone else. You got to be who you are… well I guess you can and sell records but you will get called out sooner or later." This is seen in the psycho-social dimension but Donny places the blame for commercial fakeness on the companies that produce the music. Since companies' primary purpose is to make money, hip-hoppers believe the music is being sacrificed.

Being the face of companies the radio and video stations take the blame for playing "fake" hip-hop or "killing the music." There is also a perception that some non-hip-hoppers get a mistaken view of hip-hop through radio and video channels. A participant at the Slaughterhouse and Yelawolf show explained, "The shit they play on the radio isn't hip-hop, that shit is rap…. It is distorted by record labels." He felt that "real hip-hop is underground." The example he provided

[74] Do it yourself

to prove his claim was MTV2's *Sucka Free Sunday* and how people think that is "real hip-hop" but they only play Rick Ross and Lil Wayne or R&B.

A more minority position that was held but still prominent in my research was a blurring or rejection of the distinction that underground hip-hop is superior. Many participants point out that commercial music can be quality music and/or still qualify as authentic. Fred provides the example of Nas to illustrate this point. "You have somebody who is socially conscious like a Nas but is extremely materially successful, gets mainstream radio play." For Fred, Nas is otherwise an authentic hip-hopper but maintains a commercial career. Fred continues, "Then you have groups on the underground that… are in it to make money, they just haven't been able to do it yet." Fred's position was unusual, but not unique, in terms of the traditional perceptions of hip-hop authenticity but he was not the only participant to hold these beliefs. One participant at a local hip-hop show felt that there were plenty of talented "commercial" rappers and "even more terrible underground" rappers.

**Cultural dimension.** Closely related to the political-economic dimension is McLeod's (1999) cultural dimension because of the overlap of mainstream and commercial interests. With that said the "old-school" is still a marker of authenticity for the participants of my study. It is important to note that what constitutes "old-school" has dramatically in the decade-plus that occurred between McLeod's work and my own. In fact, hip-hop music as a commodity has been ingrained in the culture for so long music that would have been identified as "mainstream" for McLeod's study are now part of the culture and represent the "old-school." In the field, participants referred to artists like Master P, Twista, Three 6 Mafia, and Crucial Conflict as "old-school" or described in "back in the day" vignettes. These artists would have undoubtedly been viewed as mainstream in 1999.

This shift in the definition of "old-school" did not diminish its value among hip-hoppers. Comparing periods was used to appropriate hip-hop authenticity was used to legitimize newer artists, such as comparing Mac Miller to Eminem and Odd Future to Wu-Tang Clan. Also, a participant at the second Odd Future show pointed out that "We can't just dismiss artists because they aren't what we think hip-hop is. It's kinda like people saying hip-hop isn't real music back in the day."

Old-school hip-hop maintains its position as superior and authentic despite the comparisons and shifting definition. It was important for my participants to view old-school artists with respect and to understand the origins of the culture. A participant at the Big KRIT show, indicated that he was frustrated that many hip-hoppers did not know where the backpack style originated. Graffiti artists "started the backpack thing to carry around all their paints and shit." Whether it was due to nostalgia, the quality, or distaste for current hip-hop, old-school hip-hop is viewed as superior to contemporary hip-hop. G.M. indicated that there is even a watering down of hip-hop lately. He observed, "when I was getting into the hip-hop scene, you had to get accepted, pay your dues, you know. Or be around to even be looked at as a rapper, as someone involved in. It was more segregated then, but now almost anyone can rap if they wanted to."

The first three dimensions of hip-hop authenticity outlined by McLeod are more abstract, which allows for fluid interpretations to remain relevant and still allow for white hip-hoppers inclusion. However, his dimensions dealing with location, gender, and race, have a *more* socially defined anchor[75]. This creates a different interaction with these final three dimensions than the previous three.

[75] I want to preface that I personally see the fluidity of gender, race, and location. Particularly, I am of the mind that race and gender are socially constructed. However, I also believe that society as a whole has a rigid view of these concepts than the ideas of "underground" or "being true to self."

**Gender dimension.** *The Roots, a Philadelphia based hip-hop band, is backing up dead prez as they play* I'm an African*, one of my favorite tracks of their* Let's Get Free *album. I am yelling the lyrics at the top of my lungs as if I were performing myself. I strategically skip over the N-word and rap about N.W.A.*[76] *and Steve Biko*[77]*. The words from Stic.man and M1 referenced Pan African unity.*

*Wiping the sweat from my eyes the non-traditional show list continued. In the prior shows I had attended one artist would perform at a time with a short break between sets. However at this show, headlined by The Roots, the performers came out for multiple brief periods. The Roots backed up each artist with live instruments. As I wiped the sweat from my forehead after* I'm an African*, the next artist emerged on stage. The Philadelphia based female emcee, Bahamadia came on stage and astounded me with multisyllabic rhymes and a rapid fire delivery. This was my first time hearing Bahamadia and I was not disappointed.*

*After the grand finale of dead prez performing with all the other artists their single* Hip-Hop*, my friends, both white males, and I left the show talking about what we witnessed.*

*"Dude, I think Bahamadia is the best female emcee alive," I said to my buddy Carter.*

*Carter, always touting the old-school hip-hop, replied, "No way, man. MC Lyte*[78] *is doper than she is but she pretty nice*[79]*."*

*"Man she's a beast. I've never heard a girl rock the mic like that," I said in defense.*

My behavior and conversation at The Roots and dead prez show, illustrated my blindness to my visitor status, being white, and accentuated my privileged status as a man in hip-hop. Despite

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[76] A west coast "gangsta" rap group that included Dr. Dre, Easy E, and Ice Cube
[77] An anti-apartheid activist in South Africa that died in police custody.
[78] MC Lyte is female emcee from Brooklyn, NY that released her first album in 1988, 12 years prior to the show in narrative.
[79] Nice is common hip-hop slang for being skilled at a craft. I am not using nice as a reference to kindness but as a reference to Bahamadia's ability.

race being the primary emphasis of my research, the fact that my participants and I are almost exclusively male[80] highlights the importance of McLeod's (1999) gender dimension. The gender dimension is not directly referring to the biological gender of the hip-hopper. I will explore my limitation about addressing fully marginalization of gender and sexuality in hip-hop in chapter 5[81]. However, the valuing of "hardness" in hip-hop, coupled with notions of normative gender roles/behaviors, places heterosexual males in an advantageous place in terms of hip-hop authenticity.

The conceptions of hip-hop authenticity by my participants, very closely aligned with the argument set forth by McLeod. While other dimensions saw a great deal of selective use or reinterpretation, the gender dimension was by and large confirmed by the thoughts of my participants. The adherence to being hard was seen clearly in the adjectives used to describe inauthentic hip-hop. When describing rap they did not like they called it "pussy," "soft," and "whiny" as opposed to the authentic adjectives of "hardcore" and "bangin'." A participant at the Lil Wyte show, when explicitly asked about authenticity, stated "You got to be real…. All of these soft as rappers on the radio are killing the music."

While the idea of being "hard" is not exclusive territory of male hip-hoppers, there was also explicit links between female emcees and female fans with the idea of "soft" and inauthentic. At the Hoodie Allen show, a participant explained his dislike for one of the opening acts Zak![82] by claiming, "The only people that like Zak! are girls." For this participant, Zak! by having "soft" content catered to a female fan base and was not authentic hip-hop. This theme extended was observed by two of my interviewees as hurdles for female emcees. According to key informant,

[80] Over 90% of the people I spoke with in the field and all of my in depth interviews were male.
[81] The limitations are a reflection on my data collection, not on the importance of gender and sexuality to understanding hip-hop authenticity.
[82] Zak!, at the time of the data collection, included an explanation point at the end of his stage name.

Carson, "[I]t seems women in hip-hop have to either be sex objects or be masculine. The one exception that I can think of is Queen Latifah…. The rest of the women have slutty lyrics or talk about being tough like male rappers." Admitting that he does not listen to many female emcees, Darius said, "With the exception of Missy Elliott I rarely get into female rappers. I feel it is harder for them to break in and so they rhyme about how hard it is to break in being a woman."

The value of hardness in hip-hop is even seen by those that question the criteria. Carson and Brad both lamented the perceived value of "physical toughness." Carson explicitly acknowledged that "gay males are the least likely to be accepted in hip-hop. Also, women face a difficult path to being viewed as authentic as well. In my opinion these groups face acceptance issues because of that old school notion of toughness. Being physically tough is important to a lot of males in our society and that extends to hip-hop."

**Social location dimension.** The bridge between McLeod's gender dimension and racial dimension is the social location dimension. Due to white flight, the suburbs are largely associated with whiteness and a lack of toughness or struggle, while the streets are linked to an urban situation marked by hustling. This is a zone for the exploration of white hip-hop authenticity because of the myriad things associated with the suburbs and the streets.

When talking about affluence, JD points out the association with struggle, "I would say the say the same thing about anyone from a more affluent situations. As far as just being a whack person because you haven't had as much to deal with." This was confirmed by G.M. when talking about suburban/college hip-hop scenes and the relationship with affluence, "there are a lot of rich college students, you know. Their mom will buy them equipment, or they know someone, or this person to get a show. And then it gets saturated by their boring music." Despite the role of suburbs/affluence being perceived as inauthentic or "whack," it is pointed out that suburbanites

are the typical hip-hop consumer. Fred directly observes that "upper middle class suburbanites… seem to make up a large portion of hip-hop consumers."

Carson correctly points out that there is a new complicated relationship with urban authenticity in hip-hop. He felt that the "splintering of hip-hop" allowed for non-urban authenticities to be established. His comments were supported by my observations that "being country" or from the suburbs could be deemed as authentic based on the hip-hopper being "true-to-self." I see in the lyrics of Yelawolf and Big KRIT that "country" is a legitimate hip-hop socio-locational domain in their lyrics. Also, Chris Webby rapped about being from the suburbs.

While the limitations of upbringing seem to have some fluidity, the concepts associated with the streets, hustling and struggle, are still highlighted as important. "One of the great narratives of hip-hop is hustling. Like coming out from low circumstances and specifically buying and selling drugs as a means to do so," was pointed out by MC BrakeFast. This was mirrored in the music of Lil Wyte, Yelawolf, and Chris Webby. A fan of Lil Wyte even cited his "hustling" as a reason for fandom. The fan stated, "he is a hustler. He did this all on his own. He had to make his own career."

As a complete re-assigning of the struggle narrative associated with street authenticity, some white hip-hoppers used their struggle being accepted in hip-hop because of being white as part of their personal hip-hop narrative. G.M. talked about struggling to get accepted in hip-hop because of his race. He claimed, "I was trying to get into ciphers and I would literally get pushed out. People would not take me seriously, they'd be like 'who the hell is this white guy' or 'who the hell is this nerd,' you know. And I would get pushed out, and I'd get pushed out, and pushed out. I would still go there steadily, I was like 'I'm going to keep going there till I get accepted.'"

This is also seen in the lyrics of Chris Webby, who complained about being constantly being compared to Eminem just because he is white.

**Racial dimension.** Throughout the previous five dimensions of hip-hop authenticity, race was escapable due to being either not a factor in the dimension or just implicit in the implications of the dimension. When faced with the racial dimension of hip-hop authenticity, the assumptions of inclusion and exclusion because of one's race must be addressed directly. My findings address the racial dimension of hip-hop authenticity in three ways: (1) white hip-hopper's conceptions of hip-hop being an African American or black culture, (2) the acceptance of whites in hip-hop, and (3) whites "acting" black.

For McLeod (1999), white is perceived as inauthentic and black as authentic in hip-hop. MC BrakeFast clearly notes that when it comes to hip-hop authenticity that "being black is a good place to start." My findings on white hip-hoppers awareness connection of hip-hop to the black community will be explored more extensively in the final section of this chapter. However, it should be pointed out that an attendee at the Twista show stated, "I don't think that these kids even think about the fact that they are white people listening to black music."

Participants in my study acknowledged that the roots of hip-hop were not just part of the African American community because black people created hip-hop but also hip-hop has connections to the African diaspora. JD describes what he learned about hip-hop in an African American Studies class, "A wonderful part about the class was the teacher before he got into hip-hop showed the various continuum of music by African American community in the United States and even going back to Africa prior to arrival and how there is a connection between them. Then also showing at the same time how white America has co-opted some of these without giving credit in order to make money and make it seem as if it is a real or authentic deal." The co-opting

of hip-hop by white America, referenced by JD, is the source of the debate on white hip-hop authenticity.

Not only did white participants acknowledge that hip-hop was created largely, but not exclusively, by African Americans and draws from African traditions but also that because of this link, hip-hop functions to inform white hip-hoppers about African American culture. The lessons learned by whites from hip-hop include subversive activities and struggles in contemporary black communities but also historical facts about African American liberation and music. G.M explains through hip-hop, "I know more about African American history or Rastafarianism or Marcus Garvey, certain political figures. If it wasn't for that I probably wouldn't have read some of these books that I have read." Hip-hop served as an inspiration to learn more about black history, including but not limited to the Nation of Islam, police brutality, the fight in Arizona over Martin Luther King Day, and George Washington Carver. In fact, JD indicated his desire to take African American Studies classes stemmed from his love for hip-hop. The draw to African American and diversity studies because of hip-hop was an experience I shared with JD.

Participants at shows and in in-depth interviews noted a shift in the hip-hop community that black is considered authentic while white is not. JD, a key informant and longtime hip-hopper, explicitly indicates a shift in his thinking about race and hip-hop. He said, "I would have said that it would be easier to accept someone who is black as an authentic hip-hop as opposed to someone that is white, but I don't feel that much that way anymore." This was corroborated by participants at shows. Another attendee of the Twista show stated, "When I was a kid going down to the city for shows. It was like one white dude for every five black dudes, now it's like the opposite." This shift in perception about whites and hip-hop is linked to the large presence at hip-hop events of whites. Also, more whites creating and performing hip-hop music and art has contributed to this

shift in perspective about hip-hop being a black art form. Carson notes that the likely reason white people are the "typical" hip-hopper may be "because they are the vast majority of people in the United States." Yet, whites have been the statistical majority in the U.S. because for the entirety of hip-hop history. This is critical to the rest of the findings related to this dimension because of the emergent theme of a post-Eminem shift in the understanding of race and hip-hop authenticity.

Other white hip-hoppers in my study point to Eminem as playing a role in the shift of race perceptions. With the success and acceptance of Eminem, along with other White emcees, whites are now more likely to be emcees and thus be viewed as authentically hip-hop. Carson postulates that white emcees created "massive exposure to white kids. This made more white kids want to rap and as more white people rapped they became more authentically hip-hop." Now white hip-hop artists and fans do not have to deflect from or defend their whiteness. Despite the shift toward whites being accepted as authentically hip-hop, there remained a conversation of race and authenticity throughout my research.

*A large group of seniors stood by my locker, as we did every morning. There were a number of us that had last names that started with A, B, or C, so our lockers were a point where we gathered before school. Over the past two or three years, I began to dive into being a hardcore hip-hop head. I had reflected hip-hop style off and on since fifth grade but it was not until high school that I became obsessed with the music. On this day, we actually talked about hip-hop, as opposed to our usual sports, girls, and gross teenage humor centric conversations.*

*Mitch brought the new Eminem CD,* The Slim Shady LP*, with him to school. I had only heard the single* My Name is… *but had no desire to listen any further.*

*Mitch professed, "This is the best rap album ever."*

*"Have you ever listened to Wu Tang's* Forever *double disc?" I asked smugly. The arrogance in my question was built up during the massive amounts of time I spent watching Rap City[83], reading hip-hop magazines, listening to cassettes/CDs, and skimming liner notes. The time I spent in this pool was far more than most of my friends standing there.*

*"Of course, but this is better man. He's funny as hell and Dr. Dre did the beats," Mitch retorted.*

*"You don't know shit about rap man, RZA is way better than Dr. Dre." I was confident beyond belief and my prior experiences with white emcees were largely bad. They did not seem to mirror the waters of hip-hop the same way DMX, Wu-Tang Clan, and Redman from my perspective. To me hip-hop was black. Now that I thought I knew everything about rap music, I knew no white rapper was better than what I listened to.*

*Accidently and unbeknownst me, I was mimicking what I felt had been directed toward me many times, "Eminem is just trying to be black, dude. He's not real rap."*

My re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity was reflecting conceptions about rap and race I drew from hip-hop and from society at large. I would later realize the talent of Eminem, but at that moment nothing could be said about Eminem that would make me consider him real hip-hop because he was white. My findings and future experience supported that white acceptance in hip-hop was an uphill battle. My view of Eminem and the experience of G.M., white do—or at least used to—face difficulty being accepted as authentic. Fred explicitly stated, "It's going to be somewhat of an uphill battle for any white person to be considered authentic." Even fans of white rappers reflect skepticism toward whites. An attendee of Lil Wyte's show said, "I don't usually like white rappers. They try too hard to be something they ain't [but] Lil Wyte just real."

[83] Rap City was a video show dedicated to hip-hop music that aired on Black Entertainment Television from 1989 it to the 2000s.

While there was recognition that whites may face a struggle to be viewed as authentically hip-hop, some participants did indicate that whiteness could also be a benefit to an artist. Throughout my research, I noted that white artists can collect a following based on their race. MC BrakeFast stated that ICP gained success by pandering to a very specific and largely white audience. This was supported by G.M. who pointed to New York based, white, hardcore emcee, Ill Bill and Minneapolis, progressive, white emcee, Slug, as examples of white artists that owe their career to their predominantly white fan bases. While MC BrakeFast and G.M. were projecting reasons for fan following, I encountered fans at shows admitting to race factors in their fandom for an artist. A Hoodie Allen fan acknowledged, "I'm a Jewish kid from New York and it's good to see another Jewish kid from New York being successful." Also, a fan of white, female emcee, Kreayshawn, stated it was good that a "white girl rapper was getting fame."

For those that rejected the idea that white was inauthentic, two themes emerge as to why. First, was the importance of skill. For Donny, Eminem being a good emcee made him authentic. "[L]yrically he could blow anyone out the booth and no one would step up and challenge him because he would just destroy them in the booth." In fact, being skillful for hip-hop artists was such a point of emphasis throughout my data collection that I assigned it its own place as a marker of hip-hop authenticity. The other was fan connection; fans of Eminem and Yelawolf cited being "similar" to the artists as a reason for their fandom. One participant even cited Eminem as the reason he started listening to rap and engaging the culture.

Just like I felt I was being looked at by the FYE employee and I, in turn looked at Eminem, whites face accusation of being race traitors by associating with hip-hop. The act of mirroring hip-hop culture was trying to be another race. My findings showed that white hip-hoppers faced accusations of "being black." White hip-hoppers themselves expressed displeasure with whites

"acting black." When asked about characteristics of inauthentic hip-hoppers, G.M. provided the example of "people acting like they are down, like a white dude trying to act like they are hard, or something, or act quote-unquote black."

The intersection of race and hip-hop is changing. It is highlighted in different ways by different white hip-hop fans and artists. However, it remains part of the conversation about hip-hop authenticity. Throughout my research, McLeod's multi-dimensional hip-hop authenticity changes in hip-hop were met with resistance from engrained norms to create an internal negotiation of what it means to be an authentic hip-hopper.

**Other Conceptions of Hip-Hop Authenticity**

My findings also reflect a number of concepts related to hip-hop authenticity for which McLeod's work do not explicitly account. These other conceptions of authenticity were equally as salient to my participants as the ones correctly identified in McLeod's work, such as skills, content, and respect for hip-hop. These other conceptions of hip-hop authenticity supported and provided alternatives to the dimensions outlined by McLeod.

**Skills/talent as hip-hop authenticity.** My love of hip-hop has been a blessing and a curse during my first seven shows of my data collection. It has given me insight that allowed me to connect with participants. We had things in common that allowed them to open up to me and ask questions in natural conversation, as opposed to interviewing. On the other hand, I frequently went into the field with little desire to document and just wanted to enjoy the show. It was Slaughterhouse, a super group of emcees whose talent I respected immensely. It was the ability to rap that made someone a "real" hip-hop emcee to me. How clever they were with their rhymes and their command of language that made me want to reflect their style.

I stood in a line that wrapped around the side of the building trying to focus on the "goings-on" to see if something stuck out to my researcher self, I heard the two participants in front of me echo my thoughts about Slaughtershouse. One white, male attendee said, "I've been listening to Royce da 5'9"[84] since before Slaugterhouse. He is so ill."

I insert myself into the conversation, "Yeah, man. I am geeked for Joell[85]. Dude is nasty."

The first attendee's friend, Eric, agreed, "I'm excited that they are signed to Shady 2.0. I just hope Em[inem] shows up. That would be super sick. He's the best rapper alive and he is white. When I was growing up Eminem made it easy to be a white rap fan. He made me want to rap too."

The first attendee, who I now knew was named John, replied "I don't care if Em shows or not. You got Yelawolf with Crooked I, Royce, Joell, and Joe Budden man. People sleep on Joe but he's got the flow and the word play. This is the dopest show I've been to."

During this exchange, I wasn't a researcher, per se. I was just a hip-hop fan having a typical hip-hop conversation. However, I quickly realized I must put my "researcher hat" back on and get informed consent. As usual it was easy to get the attendees at the show to agree to be part of my research, and, as usual, they were fascinated by the fact I was studying hip-hop in school. After entering the venue and before parting ways, John asked, "So for real, you go to concerts for your school?"

"Yep," I sheepishly replied.

"Man dude, I wouldn't have quit college if I knew you could do that."

Having skills or being talented was a key indicator of hip-hop authenticity for a performer. As mentioned above, skills can trump the lack of other "markers" of authenticity—as seen in

[84] Royce da 5'9" is a black, Detroit emcee that was Eminem's hypeman early in his career and is not a member of the group Slaughterhouse, which is signed to Eminem's record label.
[85] Joell Ortiz, a Puerto Rican emcee, from Brooklyn, NY and part of Slaughterhouse.

Donny's position on Eminem's whiteness. In fact, with the possible exception of being "true-to-self," skills/talent was an important aspect of hip-hop authenticity I identified through my research. Skills as authentic was associated with emceeing, however skills and talent were also referenced in terms of production and deejaying. Two common skills a "real" hip-hop emcee needed were flow and lyrics. Flow is a reference to their ability to deliver rhymes, while lyrics refers to the content and construction of rhymes.

For many, hip-hop requires skills to even be considered hip-hop. Donny, in his interview, states, "[I]f you have a nice flow to you and you put on a nice beat then I think you are authentic. I try not to hate on anybody, even if I'm not feeling it. But if you got flow and a really nice beat then I'm intrigued, I'm listening." Donny's opinion was echoed during my field work and in many interviews, including Brad. "So, it has to be real but there also has to be talent there. They have to be clever, they have to be [a] wordsmith, of course. And bangin' beats go a long way."

Just as skills and talent can bestow hip-hop authenticity, the lack of talent is a key indicator of inauthentic hip-hop. Getting exposure in spite of the lack of talent is despised by hip-hoppers. Just as white hip-hoppers are more accepted because of Eminem, there is a agreement that white rappers with no skills get a chance because of Eminem. A participant at the Wiz Khalifa show said about the opening act, Mac Miller, "He is whack. Once Eminem came out, all these white artists with no talent are getting a chance."

**Content as hip-hop authenticity.** To a lesser extent, the content of an artist's music can affect perceptions of hip-hop authenticity. Content that was valued as authentic were lyrics that dealt with social or political issues. This focus on social issues can help "uplift" or bring people together. A white, female attendee of the Macklemore show pointed out that "real hip-hop should uplift, that is what the creators of the culture intended it for." While social commentary and

uplifting content was viewed as authentic, showing a lack of intellect and being offensive were the inauthentic binary. Examples of this provided by participants were Waka Flocka and Odd Future. They were deemed by some as inauthentic hip-hoppers because of lack of positive content in their music.

These two dimensions of hip-hop authenticity, skills and content, emerged as largely evaluative tools of artists. The third dimension of hip-hop authenticity established during my research is a primarily evaluative tool for fans and participants.

**Hipster versus respect for hip-hop as authentic.** This third and final dimension that I added to the original six created by McLeod's (1999) work, is addressed throughout my research but is focused on here. The uniqueness and importance placed on dedicating time and support for hip-hop required me to give it its own category. The respect dimension is the exact opposite of how hip-hoppers that participated in my study viewed hipsters, so I placed hipsters as inauthentic. While I addressed hipsters earlier, I bring them up again here to present a clear understanding of the respect for hip-hop dimension.

To review, hipsterdom is marked by an effort to "be cool." However, it is important to distinguish the hipster from a person that is solely following trends because hipsters want to be aware of something prior to its peak popularity and then move on to something else once it is "mainstream." Following trends is more of "jumping on the bandwagon" once it is already popular. G.M. explains, "Hipsters I wouldn't describe as authentic cuz the same people that make fun of you will end up liking it and only for a short time. Like a fad cuz their friends like it or they read about it in a blog. Then they will just forget about it. They like to hear new things so they seem cooler or at least that's what they think."

It is the first show for my research and I am already off kilter. I was aware of hipsters prior to arriving tonight but I had underestimated their impact. A new reservoir of hip-hop was opened to me for which I did not know how to account. I came to this show with an emphasis on the re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity through behavior and dress. However, as I talked to attendees of the show I began to question the validity of style markers as a re/presentation of "authentic." The lines were very blurry.

I looked around and noticed "vintage" hip-hop style everywhere. Snapback hats with flat bills I owned while a junior high schooler, donned the heads of people at the show. A Charlotte Hornets starter jacket, I wanted badly in elementary school, was there despite the fact the Hornets now played in New Orleans[86]. The artists, Danny Brown and Das Racist, were considered underground hip-hop. I even saw a young white male attendee in a *Yo! MTV Raps*[87] hat.

I approach him with a compliment, "Nice hat."

"Thanks," he quickly replied nonchalantly.

"Who are you here to see?" I ask as a novice qualitative field researcher.

"Das Racist."

"Oh, cool. Well I am doing my dissertation data collection on white hip-hop fans. Can I talk to you about your experience with hip-hop?" I ask, looking for a segue, awkwardly.

He agrees and I transition into getting informed consent for his participation. My script comes off even more awkwardly than my request for participation but he continues.

When I follow up on why he came to see Das Racist, he replies "I found out about Das Racist from my roommate."

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[86] Since my data collection, the New Orleans franchise to the Pelicans. Also, the Charlotte Bobcats reclaim the Hornets mascot starting in the 2014-2015 season.

[87] Yo! MTV Raps was as hip-hop centric video show that aired on Music Television during the 1980s and 1990s.

"Are you a big hip-hop fan?"

"I listened to hip-hop when I was young but I got away from it because it is boring. I listen to indie rock bands because they are more original," he explained. He did not go much deeper into his musical taste even as I prodded. He just stressed "being yourself" as the most important aspect of hip-hop fan authenticity and creativity as the central marker for artist authenticity.

Once I entered the venue, I noticed a merchandise table. The man at the table was the owner of a local clothing boutique. I struck up a dialogue about my research.

"You're here for you doctorate? That's rad, man."

"Yeah, I am lucky. I guess." I responded.

He inquired, "Why did you come to this show for hip-hop?"

"I just want to go to as many different types of hip-hop shows as possible. I don't want my research to turn into me just interviewing my friends."

"I mean I like Das Racist and Danny Brown but, dude, all the people here are hipsters, they don't know shit about hip-hop." His warning was evidence that I had to alter my focus on re/presenting authenticity. The re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity focuses too much on behaviors and aesthetics. What I needed to know was how the white hip-hoppers assessed and described authenticity.

Additionally, the role of the hipster at the Das Racist show provided an additional element that needed to be accounted for in my findings. The presence of the concept of hipsters at other shows and in my in-depth interviews re-enforced my initial impulse to note their role in relation to hip-hop authenticity. Besides shifting my focus from the re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity to the conception of authenticity, hipster also became the mirrored reverse of a critical element of understanding hip-hop—love for the culture.

The respect for hip-hop authenticity comes in two forms. First, a great importance was placed on having knowledge of hip-hop. The second was having a passion for hip-hop as a whole, not just a single aspect. These two forms are adjacent; hip-hoppers need to have a love and passion for hip-hop to dedicate what is required to gain the proper level of knowledge, according to my research. However, they were primarily spoken of distinctly from one another.

Knowing about hip-hop takes time and dedication. It is moving beyond a surface understanding that is authentic. For Darius, a real hip-hopper has "to self-identify as one, buying of albums, and attendance of shows. Also, enjoy the music and or other parts of hip-hop culture." Knowing about the culture as a whole repeatedly came up as crucial to being a real participant in hip-hop. Despite the flood of focus that hip-hop music receives, from my research and society as a whole, it is knowledge of the entire culture that is required of authentic hip-hoppers. G.M. tells us, "an authentic hip-hopper [is] somebody that has knowledge of all aspects of the culture, whether its graffiti, breakdancing, emceeing, you know whatever." Knowing all the elements should be coupled with knowledge of hip-hop history. The understanding of hip-hop history serves as evidence of investment into hip-hop and a desire to learn about it. JD explains that "I think the time you put into it, investment and passion. That would equate a level of authenticity."

This brings me to the second form of respecting hip-hop, demonstrating a love and passion. While passion and love served as abstract concepts that were difficult to explain beyond an investment in time and learning, they influenced many decisions about what to consume and promote by participants in my study. This ambiguous idea of passion is summed up by JD. "You can tell at the show if someone is there for the artist and listen to every word they say and be involved with the call and response or just be cool at the show and what not. Passion for the art form."

The concept of authenticity remains pertinent in hip-hop. Artists include it in their lyrics and performances. It becomes a powerful indicator to fans of what hip-hop is worth consuming and what hip-hop is not worth consuming. However, the concept of hip-hop authenticity proved to be very fluid. The core dimensions are highlighted or tweaked to fit a certain argument. I will discuss my conclusions about the conception of hip-hop authenticity for white hip-hoppers in chapter 5, for now I look at the conclusion about hip-hop authenticity from my participants.

**Hip-hop Authenticity is Changing**

I observed through my own experience, and it is supported by the observations of those that participated in my study, that hip-hop authenticity is far more complex than a simple "this is authentic" and "that is inauthentic" dichotomy. There are a number of considerations to the assessment of hip-hop authenticity that made it extremely difficult for me and the participants to describe "authenticity." It quickly became evident during my research that hip-hop authenticity is variable to the point that some participants argued that it does not exist at all. Even JD—who by my estimation, using criteria set forth by the literature and other participants, is one of the most "authentic" hip-hoppers that participated in my study—found hip-hop authenticity difficult to explain. "The more that I talk about it the more I think that there isn't a line between authentic/inauthentic. The lines have become so blurred; I really don't know how to define it."

The reality of hip-hop authenticity flows from the fact of multiple subgenres and sub-communities. These subgenres/communities create, for all intents and purposes, multiple hip-hops and by extension multiple conceptions of what constitutes hip-hop authenticity. Whether it is due to artists who have their own distinct community, such as Wiz Khalifa's Taylor Gang and ICP's juggalos, or the influence of the internet allowing for digital hip-hop communities to emerge; there exist many hip-hop authenticities. Carson explains this eloquently when he says, "To make these

blanket statements about what hip-hop is and isn't or what hip-hoppers do and don't do is becoming more and more pointless. Like I said there is no one hip-hop culture. There are multiple hip-hop cultures, with multiple conceptions of authenticity. This has a lot to do with the mainstreaming of hip-hop. Old notions of the culture are dying and being replaced with others." Despite the flexibility of hip-hop authenticity presented throughout my findings, which was supported by Carson's statement, hip-hoppers still use authenticity to determine membership. A membership that is still not accessible to all, as Carson also confirms in his comments about female emcees.

**A single hip-hop authenticity does not exist.** The chant of "SWAG! SWAG!" continually interrupted my conversation of real hip-hop with some attendees of the Lil B show as we stand in-line. Between the chants, I talk to Joe about his adoration for Lil B and his claim that Lil B is the "realest." Through my conversation with Joe about authenticity, I see the ever changing reflective surface of the hip-hop waters making hip-hop authenticity a difficult concept to pin down.

Early in our conversation we talk about Lil B' controversial mixtape title *I'm Gay*. Joe explains that "A lot of people on twitter and shit are calling him a f****t and shit but they don't get he trying to change how we use the word gay. I mean he's not homophobic, he calls himself a b**ch and a f****t." This is a point of controversy because of homophobia in hip-hop. It is also important because Lil B is a heterosexual male.

Lil B opened up a debate for hip-hop but also opened up an exchange about authenticity for Joe and me. When I asked about hip-hop authenticity, Joe replied, "Authenticity is about people being who they are."

"Who would you call inauthentic in hip-hop?" I asked.

"Rick Ross for sure, man. How can you rap about being a coke dealer when you were a correction officer?"

"Well, Lil B is calling himself gay when he is not. Is Lil B being inauthentic?" I respond eager for clarification. My excitement about this exchange flows from my desire to understand the importance of being true-to-self. If being honest about self is an important aspect of hip-hop authenticity then hip-hop authenticity is no different than actual authenticity. Who then is a hip-hopper? What becomes a secondary qualification to understanding who belongs in and who is left out?

Joe breaks the string of questions running through my head by explaining, "No, that's different. Lil B is trying to get people's attention. Lil B is real. He also talks about serious shit: his life and is always spreading positivity. That is what the title is about being positive and accepting people."

Joe reflects a common dialog about hip-hop authenticity that had been building throughout my data collection. The waters of hip-hop had become so dispersed that reflecting authenticity had dissipated into a mist of self-labeling and other's perception that a person is being truthful about who their identity. This questioning of ***A*** hip-hop authenticity flooded my research and caused me to change course. In fact, some participants of my research claimed that hip-hop authenticity does not even exist any longer. Beyond the position of hip-hop authenticity being non-existent, my research shows two more common views about a pluralized hip-hop authenticity. First, my participants felt that authenticity is just a device to force conformity. Second, my participants asks who has the authority to deem someone or something authentically hip-hop.

The point of conformity is made very clearly by MC BrakeFast by comparing a political candidate to a rapper. BrakeFast states,

> I think that there is so much tied up in being thought of as authentic or traditional or coming from a certain place where people will accept you. Like, if you are running for a political office it's not about pushing your ideas forward or your unique methods, it more what makes you the most electable. I think a lot of rappers do the same thing, where they want to put themselves out a certain way but they are afraid that labeled or demonstrating variant from what is accepted.

This analogy illustrates how the concept of authenticity can drown creativity and self-expression.

The root of this complex notion of authenticity is created from a changing landscape of hip-hop. As the current of music creates new waters to chart on the hip-hop map there is an erosion of a central hip-hop authority. JD clearly noted in his interview that there are some that are undeniably authentic hip-hop but for the rest, who gets to bestow that honor. He observes, "Obviously you could take someone like a KRS-one or an Afrika Bambaataa. You know there is nothing but authenticity in being involved in the origins of rap. But who's to say? There's not something about them… you know I really don't know." He is lost for a certain characteristic beyond being involved in the origins of hip-hop because hip-hop has become so diverse.

The concept of hip-hop authenticity becomes even more complex because it still remains a potent marker. Throughout my visits to the field the identifier of "real hip-hop" was thrown around by artists and fans of all races. As seen in this section, what is authentic hip-hop was described in various ways in, usually, abstract terms. Fred explains the vagueness and potency of authenticity, "Hip-hop top to bottom is about authenticity, the quote-unquote 'keeping it real.' 50 cent, a mainstream artist, pretty much destroyed Ja Rule, another mainstreamer, by telling everyone that he wasn't authentic. I mean so, I think authenticity is part of hip-hop culture through and through. I just don't think it is clear to anybody what authenticity entails."

Investigating the conception of hip-hop authenticity was originally intended to help me understand more clearly what white hip-hoppers were intending to mirror in hip-hop culture. However, my charting of the sea of findings I collected on hip-hop reversed my thinking. It was

not how hip-hoppers re/present authenticity that was important. It was their conception of authenticity. Because of a pluralized hip-hop community, white hip-hoppers did not need to replicate ***a*** hip-hop authenticity. It is more about locating a pond of hip-hop that their identity could be viewed as authentic. The idea of re/presenting hip-hop authenticity is inauthentic because of the primary importance placed on being true-to-self.

## Re/presentation of Hip-Hop Authenticity

Throughout the course of me describing my findings from shows, I provided things that surely functioned as re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity, for example the clothing worn or slang used by my participants. These were undoubtedly markers of belonging to the hip-hop community. These physical markers were what I had intended to make note of when I first conceived of this project. Yet, I was unable to detangle the precise influence to mark fashion and slang. It is undeniable that hip-hop is central to popular culture. Also, popular culture has been such an inspiration to hip-hop that detecting what each community brought to the table was impossible.

The waters mainstream culture and hip-hop coming together forced me to ask the question. How does one re/present a hip-hop authenticity? After thinking about how white hip-hoppers in my study viewed their relationship with hip-hop and how I have legitimized my own place has an authentic hip-hopper, I determined that the re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity was reflected in the participation one has had with hip-hop. Participation with hip-hop, for me, is best represented in two ways. First, what official and unofficial roles did participants play with respect to hip-hop, e.g. fan, consumer, promoter, emcee, and deejay. Second, how participants in my research discussed themselves and their relation to hip-hop authenticity markers, e.g.-location of upbringing and feelings associated with hip-hop. In some rare but insightful conversations, participants even talked about their own hip-hop authenticity.

**Roles Played in Hip-Hop.**

*A slow increase in my association with hip-hop has been matched by others associating me with hip-hop. I have made many friends and acquaintances that rap, deejay, and do many other jobs to make the hip-hop scene work. I hang out at shows and never have to drink to enjoy the festivities. I am drunk on hip-hop. In my first two years of college I've been to shows that were full to capacity and those that had more performers than fans. For the first time tonight, I am working the merchandise table for my friend, Mitch.*

*Mitch has very little merchandise, just some copies of an album he did with another white emcee some years back and his newly released solo album that was burned to CD-Rs and featured hand drawn cover art. At the merchandise table, there is a representative from a local record store and merchandise for one other emcee.*

*When Mitch asked me to work the table for him, I couldn't say no, but I had wanted to. I didn't want to be stuck behind the merchandise table and miss the show. I always loved being right up front, tucked against a wall leaning on the monitors that sat in front of the stage.*

*Now the night had arrived, I was beginning to change my tune. As I walk to the front of the line with a small box of CDs, I tell the ticket taker my name is on the list to get in for free. I sit down at the table with the Mitch's stuff, and observe the event from a different angle than I was accustomed.*

*"Hey, dude. How much for the CD?"*

*I replied by pointing at each album saying "This one is ten and this one is five…." After a short pause, I followed with, "I can give you both for thirteen."*

*"Bet, I'll take both of them and can I get that hoodie," he inquired by pointing at the other artist's merchandise taped to the wall.*

*"I'm not in-charge of that, sorry. That dude over there by the bar can help you with that. The one in the green jacket," I was trying to assist but did not feel comfortable selling other people's merchandise.*

*As I gave him his $2 back, he said "Thanks." Then he went over to the dude selling the clothing merchandise.*

*After the two completed their transaction, Chuck, the man in the green jacket, leaned over and said, "Man, you can just collect folk's money for me. I don't mind."*

*"Sorry, I wasn't about to be responsible for keeping track of your money and merch."*

*Reassuring me it was o.k., Chuck pats me on the back and clarifies his reasoning, "I've seen you around for years. Plus, Mitch is my fuck dude. I trust you." Laughing he continues, "I do know how much I brought so if shit is missing at the end of the night, I'm coming for you."*

Chuck would become a good friend as well but on that cold, fall night he made me feel as if I had reached a different level of authenticity. I often joke that I do not rap because I have too much respect for the art form, so I show my love for hip-hop in other ways. For me and many of my participants, love and respect for hip-hop was an essential element to being an authentic hip-hop. That night working Mitch's merchandise table spot allowed me to reflect that love and respect for hip-hop. It is the participator behaviors that allow a hip-hopper to re/present his authentic membership in the community.

**Fan, consumer, and social aspects.** The basic level of reflecting the respect for hip-hop dimension is as a fan and a consumer. Attending of events to show support for hip-hop was seen throughout my data collection. GM said he when to shows "probably like once a month, I used to attend like three a month but now just one. I attend rap shows. I do my own shows. So I attend those, obviously. A lot of my friends are emcee and deejays. So I go out and see them as well."

Others went to shows to support certain artists or people. Darius stated he'd "go to about a show a week, especially if Binary [Star] or Matt G hosted [the event]. I was an audience member. Often times I was a promoter who would flyer for shows and artists playing shows. I'd let other people know about shows and try to get others to attend with me."

Despite digital consumption becoming more and more a part of hip-hop, the live event is still viewed as the way to reflect or re/present one's respect for hip-hop. Attending shows as a fan/consumer of hip-hop is showing one's respect but it is also done through other means. Carson keeps up with hip-hop through every outlet he can. "My participation is strictly consumer. I buy and download, check shit out on YouTube or artist's Bandcamp[88]. I go to shows and consume it live. I buy books [and] magazines, [like] the Source and Elemental and XXL. I read hip-hop news websites and blogs. I read message boards. I really want to know everything I can." The quote from Carson makes a specific distinction between consumption that is frowned-up-on because of the commercial implications and consumption for the sake of knowledge. Knowledge of hip-hop is an important part to the respect for hip-hop dimension.

Fred shows that hip-hop is an avenue to interact socially. "I buy music, download music, [and] talk about it with friends. I try to get people to listen to the artists I like." He consumes and encourages others to consume. However, other participants mirrored the social feature through other means. GM used creating hip-hop music as a central focus of his social life. He described how people would visit him to make and talk about hip-hop. Even further than my use of hip-hop to establish and maintain a circle of friends, MC BrakeFast states, "I go to a rap show once every two weeks and it is mostly a social function. I used to go to rap shows because I liked to see the guys and see how they performed but at this stage in my life I go there to hang out with my friends."

[88] Bandcamp is an online music store for artist to release digital music.

**Commercial roles.** The other side of a fan and consumption is the commercial duties required to maintain hip-hop at every level and in every sub-community of hip-hop. As seen in with my experience working the merchandise table, the commercial role of hip-hop, no matter how small, provides a mark of authenticity among other hip-hoppers. The other participants in my research regarded the roles they played on the commercial side as a point of pride. From promotion to managing or even working the merchandise table, the commercial roles played in underground hip-hop scenes are viewed as symbols of respect. In fact GM states, "I have been a promoter. I have booked other hip-hop acts. I have set up shows. So I have done it in that sense." The having done it all was a clear indication that he is part of every aspect of hip-hop, not just an emcee. There are even white hip-hoppers reflecting their connection and respect for hip-hop outside of the local events. The people working the merchandise table at the Das Racist show were selling clothes and music they make and distribute at their own boutique.

**Emceeing.** The importance of the consumption and commercial roles in hip-hop is to support the primary products of hip-hop, art and entertainment. The most popular, both in terms of commercial appeal and the number of people doing hip-hop, is emceeing. There were a number of white participants in my study that emceed in various capacities. From battling to headlining performers, white emcees mirrored their love and respect for hip-hop by taking on hip-hop's most prominent role, the emcee.

While most of the participants in my research limited their rapping to small events there were also four national headlining act that were white observed during my data collection. White emcees I talked to at shows and in interviews participated in public battles and cyphers[89]. MC

[89] Battles are competition between emcees. Cyphers are, usually freestyle, a group of people taking turns rapping outside the structure of a song.

BrakeFast even travelled out of state frequently to participant in rap battles. Other participants had non-public cyphers and wrote lyrics as a private exercise.

White emcees were seen at a number of shows. I also interviewed some emcees for shows I did not attend during my data collection. White emcees were frequent opening acts. The opening acts were local solo artists, such as Gameboi, Mobil, and MC BrakeFast, local groups such as The Puppet Masters, and even national acts, such as Mac Miller, Grynch, and ProbCause. To a lesser extent white emcees were also headliners of shows. Local emcees, such as Mitch and MC BrakeFast, were joined on the list of headliners by national acts, such as Hoodie Allen, Chris Webby, and Lil Wyte.

**Other entertainment roles.** Not surprisingly, I observed or noted white participants that emceed at nearly twice the rate of the other three elements combined. However, I interacted with whites that showed their respect for hip-hop by participating in the other three elements—deejaying, graffiti, and breakdancing. On top of the four primary elements of hip-hop, white hip-hoppers were also observed and discussed beatboxing and producing their own music. One woman at the Das Racist show said she even participated as an extra in a local emcee's music video.

Though all the elements were covered, the other entertainment roles were very infrequently observed, besides deejaying. Deejaying was second only to emceeing for the most frequent entertainment role played by a white participant in my findings, representing a quarter of the mentions and observed. The deejay is an important aspect of hip-hop and whites deejayed in various settings. Some deejays used digital equipment, while other's deejayed using hip-hops traditional vinyl records and turntables. White deejays were the opening and between set music at shows. They also backed up emcees live on stage. JD deejayed in various different settings and

situations. He deejayed solo opening up for national acts and has toured nationwide backing-up local emcees. He also had his own late night radio show on a campus radio station.

**Framing Hip-Hop Authenticity**

Knowledge, love, and respect for hip-hop are mirrored in the consumption and production of white hip-hoppers. Supporting hip-hop and being one's honest self is what needs to be cast to re/present hip-hop authentically. To get a better handle on how my participants re/present hip-hop, I asked them to describe themselves and their own authenticity. These questions included their upbringing, relation to hip-hop, and their authenticity.

**Location of upbringing.** Because of McLeod's dimension regarding social location, I frequently probed about the upbringing of the participants in my study. While a couple moved around a lot, the majority had a specific place they associated with their childhood. Some white hip-hoppers referenced being from rural areas or college towns and a pair of white emcees referenced being from an urban area or the streets. Though, the majority of the white participants in my study indicated that they were from suburban homes. As previously mentioned, Chris Webby even rapped about being from the suburbs and connected to suburban fans because of this fact.

Suburban upbringing was not something any of the participants in my study appeared to avoid. In fact, for some the attraction to hip-hop was an investigation of non-suburban life. In an exchange about the materialism of his suburban neighborhood, MC BrakeFast stated that his suburban experience "probably [led him] to hip-hop because it is so far removed from [his] experience, as a suburban white kid. You know, it's fascinating in that regard. There is an authenticity to it to being poor and having to worry about things that pertain to daily survival that is going to resonate with people that don't have that." This was neither a manipulation nor rejection

of an urban as hip-hop authenticity. MC BrakeFast acknowledged and embraced that learning can come from narratives that differed from his experience.

Hip-hip as a tool for learning about people from different upbringings was also echoed by a fan at the Big KRIT and Freddie Gibbs show. This suburban, white participant was a fan of gangsta rapper, Freddie Gibbs. When I asked him what drew him to Gibbs, he said that it "is an escape from my life, it's something I haven't experienced." He continued by claiming that when he listens to Gibbs, it puts his stress into context. "I don't have it so bad." The comments by the Freddie Gibbs fan are an acknowledgement that hip-hop is a vehicle that can inform about the social reality of others.

**Change in self, related to hip-hop.** Beyond learning about hip-hop from consuming the music, participant related a number of changes in their perspectives and lives due to hip-hop. Hip-hop was identified as the catalyst for diversifying groups of friends in terms of race, providing a stream of income, and giving whites an outlet. These changes identified by white hip-hoppers reflect the relationship they have with hip-hop.

As seen with the fan of Freddie Gibbs, hip-hop provides exposure to narrative experiences beyond one's upbringing. It also provides opportunity to interact and build relationships with a diverse set of people. I asked GM in our in-depth interview the influence hip-hop has had on him. He stated, "It has made me a little more open minded. It made me want to check out other cultures, things of that nature. I am familiar with my culture but I would also like to read about other cultures, as well. That is one of the things that drew me too it. Growing up there were not too many African Americans around. It has brought me closer to different people, different things." It appeared to me that GM was very proud that he had a racially diverse set of friends, despite being from a predominantly white area.

Beyond new friendships and exposure to new ideas, participation in hip-hop also gives opportunities for making money and giving voice to the white hip-hoppers in my study. As discussed earlier, hip-hop authenticity is re/presented through participation. That participation gives creative outlets and economic possibilities. For example, JD's radio show, though he made no money, which provided him the opportunity to speak to people and display his taste/perspective on hip-hop.

**Considering own authenticity.** On rare occasions, participants in my study would address their own authenticity. A feature of the discourse around authenticity was that a few hip-hoppers, that did not perform or make art, were reluctant to describe themselves as hip-hoppers despite participating in the hip-hop community in various other ways. This attitude was described by Carson. "I know a lot of people that being a hip-hopper means participating in one of the hip-hop elements. So to them, I am obviously fake for calling myself a hip-hopper. I even know people that are reluctant to call themselves hip-hoppers because of some stupid notion that they would be judged as 'inauthentic." Carson identified as a hip-hopper and considers himself to be authentic. Carson did not worry about being judged as inauthentic because of a characteristic that was outlined in the dimensions of hip-hop authenticity but because he participated in hip-hop in a less visible way than performers and artists.

*"Hey, Dale! Who's a doper emcee? Guru[90] or Black Thought[91]?" my roommate, Josh, yelled at me while standing at a house party. This type of question had become more and more common for me to hear. I continued to reflect my love for hip-hop inside and outside hip-hop circles, so I no longer had to seek out hip-hop conversation. Arguments about hip-hop came to me.*

[90] Guru is the emcee for the hip-hop duo Gangstarr with DJ Primier
[91] Black Thought an emcee for the Philadelphia band The Roots

*Despite not rapping, deejaying, breaking[92], or doing graffiti art, everyone associated me with hip-hop.*

*"It's hard to say, man, they are so different," I prefaced my long winded response to a simple either/or question. I broke down the monotone flow of Guru and the creative rhyme schemes of Black Thought. I mirrored the hundreds of "best emcee debates" I had seen and read. I used terminology that indicated my membership in hip-hop, like "sixteen bars." I was not at a hip-hop show or around people that appreciated hip-hop as much as I did but I felt compelled to continuously reflect the depth of my hip-hop knowledge.*

*After a long monologue, I state with an extremely condescending tone, "Josh, you can't even compare Guru and Thought. They are in different categories."*

*Josh replied, "Yeah dude, I just like Guru better."*

*As usual, I felt cool for owning a conversation on hip-hop. I spent so much time watching documentaries, reading books and magazines, and sifting through internet posts that anytime to share my knowledge seemed to justify my obsession. An obsession so deep that I enrolled in a class called "Rap and African American Liberation." My enrollment in this course was fueled by my deep desire to enhance my hip-hop bona fides, but it also provided a new contextualization for understanding race in hip-hop and beyond.*

**White Hip-Hoppers Discuss Race**

As addressed thoroughly throughout my dissertation, race is an absolutely vital context for understanding white hip-hoppers' conceptualization and re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity. The entirety of my findings chapter has dynamics of race flowing through and washing over it.

[92] Slang for Breakdancing

My dissertation as a whole is a reflection of race in hip-hop, generally, and my whiteness in relation to hip-hop, specifically.

I will do this by describing key moments in my data collection and my life that shaped my understanding of race in hip-hop and in the U.S. However, I will lean heavily on the thoughts and words of the other participants in my study to consider how hip-hop influences understandings of race. I must again explicitly make the point here that this cannot be simply read as a realist tale about my participants' feelings on race. This section, as with all other parts of this dissertation, is heavily influenced by my understanding and preconceptions of race. I find it particularly important to re-emphasize now that what I write is as much, if not more, a reflection of me as it is a reflection of those I interviewed.

I understand the deeply complex issue of critiquing whiteness without essentializing and reinforcing its power. In chapter 5, I address as thoughtfully and self-reflexively as possible the dynamics of power related to race and hip-hop. It is the interviews and my observations at shows that created a desire to look at other dynamics at play that influenced white hip-hoppers' understanding of race beyond hip-hop. From my first trip to the field, the Das Racist show, race was central to my data collection.

Soaking in the environment at the Das Racist show, I try to establish my procedure for how I will collect data. My observations are scattered and I keep playing out in my head how I will approach potential participants. My thoughts are temporarily broken by a commotion on stage.

It is the middle of Das Racist's set and they are leaving the stage. Before they leave, Heems, one of the emcees in the group says, "People! People! I love encores."

"Yeah boy, I love that shit too. We should do an encore right now?" said Kool A.D., the groups other emcee.

Hypeman, Dapwell followed, “I got an idea, we will go off stage and come back and finish when the crowd ask for us.” Turning from his group mates to the almost exclusively white crowd, he continues, “We’re going to run off stage and you start chanting, but I don’t want you to say ‘encore.” I want y’all to yell ‘Racist! Racist!”

As the hip-hop trio left the stage, the crowd followed the instructions given to them by Dapwell and began shouting, “Racist! Racist! Racist!” Then the group ran out to the music for the next song.

Dapwell returning to his conversation with his group laments his decision, “No, that didn’t feel right. I can’t have a crowd of white people yelling ‘racist’ at me.”

Heems responds, “I don’t know man, I kinda like it. It’s cute to me.”

Dapwell—seeming to me to draw even further attention to the fact they were performing in front white people—said, “Fuck it! Everybody that’s white make some noise.” In true hip-hop fashion the audience screamed wildly.

After the set was over, the crowd flowed down the stairs like a water fall. With Dapwell’s mock encore still in my mind, I cautiously approached two white males leaving the show. I explain my purpose and immediately asked, “What did you think about them doing the encore, where everyone chanted ‘Racist?”

“That was fucking funny,” Robert, one of the attendees, quickly replied.

I nervously asked my follow up, “Were you expecting that kind of interaction?”

The other attendee, Mark replied, “Yeah, they talk about race and stuff in their music all the time. They just do it in a funny way. I think people that listen to Das Racist aren’t uncomfortable talking about racism.”

Robert jumped in to support his friend's thoughts, "Yeah, growing up we hung out with people of all races, so we can see how it's funny. Race isn't as important to people our age."

The exchange about Das Racist's mock encore starts to set up characteristics that influence how whites in hip-hop think about race. The generational factors and social groups undoubtedly do have a great influence on how one thinks and talks about race. However for my research, one important factor has an even greater influence on how fluently white hip-hoppers, interviewed as part of my data collecting, talk about race. That is having a degree in the humanities[93] in higher education.

**Hip-hop's Connection to the African American Community**

*The hip-hop course was teaching me about so much more than the history of hip-hop. It provided the pre-history to hip-hop as well. Today we were learning about the African Oral Tradition and how some emcees play the same role as griots did in Africa. I was enthralled as the professor charted the rich history of the spoken word from the griots to call-and-response in contemporary black churches.*

*Dr. Peters compared the power of the language used by civil rights activists and compared them to modern rappers. H. Rap Brown was like Chuck D of Public Enemy. They used strong, visual language to demonstrate their point. This comparison provides me with a moment of clarity. To truly understand hip-hop culture, I need to understand African American history. My knowledge on these subjects is lacking. It is clear hip-hop music is not a black art because it was created by African Americans, though it was. It is a set of black arts because they are rooted in African traditions, from Africa to the West Indies and continuing with black Americans in the U.S.*

[93] Participants in this area majored in philosophy, history, and English. One of the participants even minored in African American studies during their undergraduate degree.

The starkest difference between white hip-hoppers with humanities degrees and other white hip-hoppers appeared during my participants' analysis of hip-hop's connection to African American culture. Those that studied the humanities in college had a richer understanding of hip-hop history and its link to the black community. The two major themes that flowed from the dialogue on hip-hop and the black community were hip-hop's link to the black community and lessons about African American struggles from hip-hop.

Both groups of white hip-hoppers acknowledge the connection between hip-hop and the black community. However, the way that those with degrees in the humanities viewed hip-hop's origins and those that did not varied greatly. Those with degrees in the humanities discussed hip-hop's link to the black community in very specific terms. They charted influences from previous art forms created in the black community and unequivocally placed the origins with African Americans. According to Fred, a philosophy major, "The whole art of emceeing and battling and cipher and the beat driven music are different permutations of the exact same social and religious practices of Africa. They just manifested themselves in different ways. The ring shout and the early African American religious experience and the improvisation in Jazz music are the exact same types of things that go on in a battle cipher or freestyle emceeing that has always gone on in African American culture." JD, an African American Studies minor, takes Fred's assertion one step further, "Going back to Africa prior to arrival and how there is a connection between [hip-hop and African traditions]. Then also showing at the same time how white America has co-opted some of these without giving credit in order to make money and make it seem as if it is a real or authentic deal." Whether it was a mentality learned in humanities programs or a trait that drew those to a humanities degree, white hip-hoppers with humanities degrees show signs of studying hip-hop beyond a surface understanding.

White participants without a humanities degree did not demonstrate the same depth of the connection with the African American community, while there was some indication that hip-hop drew from African tradition but it was not as thorough. GM, for example, talked about Rastafarianism, Marcus Garvey, and hip-hop's roots in Jamacian culture but only referenced in passing. GM states, "The originators [of hip-hop] were African American, of Jamacian decent really." The other non-humanities degree holders acknowledge hip-hop's African American originators but did not extend it past that fact. Darius states, "It is a musical genre born from that community. It is born from the late 70s/early 80s crime neighborhoods, this is what has come out of it." Some non-humanities degree holders also express comfort with the idea it is no longer explicitly black. For Donny, "It started as an African American culture but white people have taken it on themselves and that's fine." This is contrasted by JD, who feels, his education "did instill the importance and responsibility of my own involvement in the music." JD was cautious of the role his whiteness played in hip-hop.

The knowledge base of white hip-hoppers with concerns in the African American community differed between the two segments of white hip-hoppers. Humanities degree holders considered political-oriented issues. Carson, a history major, states that hip-hop has changed his politics. "My political views are influenced by the hip-hop I consume. I often have an anti-government position. This is definitely shaped by hip-hop telling me about police brutality, racism, failing schools." By contrast Donny referenced,

> I think a lot things I learned was through hip-hop, whether it was good or bad. I learned from Master P… I could now sell crack if I wanted to. You learn things and I am glad that I had those experiences and I learned the things that I did from hip-hop." The orientation of Carson and other humanities degree holding hip-hoppers was a political and social issue perspective, while Donny focused on subversive activities associated with hip-hop. When MC BrakeFast, an English major, talked about subversive activities it was more nuanced, "I think it is great because it is transgressive by nature and this is strange because you think

> of selling drugs as a morally decrepit thing but when you consider the cultural circumstances, like it wasn't a choice for a lot of people.

**Deliberating Whiteness**

It was also evident that there was a difference in perspective between humanities degree holders and non-humanities degree holders when examining the role of their own whiteness. While talking about whiteness, Fred states, "At the end of the day, I've benefited greatly from white privilege. In just the same way as an African American person has suffered a great deal from white privilege. And therefore none of us can cut off from our race." Fred's direct critique of the role of whiteness is contrasted by GM's position on white privilege. He is uncertain of his privilege in spite of his experience. "I personally don't feel privileged. In some senses I do. There's been situations where I've been with my black friends and their driving and they get pulled over the cops would harass them […] or I would go to the store and no one would mess with me, but then automatically look at my black friends."

Fred accepted the fact of white privilege while GM was less egger to note that he received preferential treatment despite pointing to occasions where he felt he received preferential treatment. Brad talked about whiteness but distanced himself from the privilege by discussing it in terms of "upper-class white people." He points out "what white people did to China. I think that attitude of we are going to come into your land and completely disregard your sovereignty so we can profit." This reality of whiteness is collectively understood but the difference between our two groups rests on culpability. Humanities degree holders tended to accept their privilege without stipulation or reluctance. While non-humanities degree holders questioned their privilege reluctantly or indirectly.

It occurred to me as I left the Lil B show that I had just completed the an important trip to the field. The nostalgic fashion of snapback hats and skinny jeans was juxtaposed against Lil B

new approach to hip-hop. I wanted to know more about this sub-community of hip-hop, so I approached a white, male standing outside the venue. After describing my purpose, he enthusiastically asked, "You're doing your dissertation on Lil B?"

"No, it will look at Lil B fans," I clarified. Still not fully understanding what I just experienced, I asked "What is it about Lil B that's so dope?"

"Man, BasedGod don't give a shit. He is an open book. He lets everyone see who he is on his Myspace and Twitter. He's just real." The young Lil B fan explained. "Lil B is funny, too. He makes songs about stupid shit and raps bad on purpose."

"Why do you like that he raps bad on purpose?" I was confused by this omission having already started to analyze my data and seeing an emergence of skills as an important aspect of hip-hop authenticity.

"Everyone gets all mad on YouTube about his songs but they don't get they are getting trolled. He's getting famous by making fun of hip-hop." The fan makes clear.

My head is swimming in an ocean of thoughts. As I drive back home after the show, I keep thinking of the role of irony in hip-hop. This mocking of hip-hop, the Lil B fan described, was an indication to me that post-subculture theories may play an important part in my analysis. But I wanted to know more about Lil B.

Over the months following the show, I downloaded as many mixtapes by Lil B as I could find, which stands at 42 mixtapes[94]. I watched interviews and read comments to videos. Lil B is a polarizing figure in hip-hop. He had his army of fans but also had an army of detractors. He was a prolific artist in hip-hop. Almost every month he released an album's lengths worth of music. He

[94] The 42 mixtapes are the count of official, full-length mixtapes as I complete the final draft of this document. It should be noted that I do not have Lil B's complete catalog.

was equally prolific on social media. He floods Twitter with posts. He tweets dozens of times in a single evening.

During my research, I watched hip-hop flow into ponds of small sub-communities. I also watched these sub-communities come back together and influence other forms of music. Early in my research, I saw neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1995) as the best theory to comprehend hip-hop as an organizing structure now. But watching interviews with Lil B, I came began to rethink my position. What was being reflected in Lil B's performance was not a result of post-subculturalism but between subculture and neo-tribes.

After watching a Youtube interview by Nardwuar[95] with Lil B, I began to think that The BasedGod was not being ironic. He talked so genuinely about the artists he appeared to be mocking and was so sincere with his view on being positive that I could no longer bathe in the idea of Lil B as ironic. What Lil B was doing was neither modern earnestness nor postmodern irony. The fans at the show and now on message boards did not seem to be engaged in a way that could be explained by neo-tribes or subcultures. Lil B could be something different but what did this mean for hip-hop. My original theorizing had been washed away by Lil B and the fluidity of hip-hop authenticity I found across my findings. I need something that accurately reflects the current manifestation of the hip-hop community.

[95] Nardwuar is a Vancouver, BC, Canada based music reporter known for doing unusual interviews with contemporary musicians.

## CHAPTER 5 "DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: HIP-HOP IS DEAD?[96]"

My previous conceptions of hip-hop authenticity were washed away as I began to rethink the way race and hip-hop get poured together. The tidal wave of new information gathered during my year of systematically observing various manifestations of hip-hop in different hip-hop sub-communities[97] provided this long time hip-hop head with a vastly different understanding of hip-hop. In the introduction to chapter 5, I preview the vital concept of metamodernism.

I purposely introduce metamodernism now, as opposed to chapter 2, because I intend for this to be read as a reflection of my journey to my current understanding of hip-hop. Metamodernism is an ex post facto result of my data collection. Metamodern theorists, in no way, influenced me heading into my research. It was my desire to understand my observations that I sought out a new theoretical perspective. That is the reason I introduce metamodernism here.

By replacing the modernist with subculturist and the postmodern with the post-subculturists, I was able to better understand the relationship between the two theoretical perspectives in an enlightening way. I revisit metamoderism below to discuss metamodernism in hip-hop and how metamodernism can help to advance my understanding of the tension between subcultural and post-subcultural theories. Metamodernism is described by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) as a condition that follows postmodernism. What comes after postmodernism cannot simply be a rehashing of the modern state. Scholars describe metamodernism as an oscillation between competing poles. "[M]etamodernism should be situated epistemologically with (post) modernism, ontologically between (post) modernism, and historically beyond (post) modernism."

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[96] Hip-Hop is Dead is the title of a studio album released by Nas. The title was a comment on the state of hip-hop at the time, 2008.

[97] During the course of this dissertation I shifted away from the term hip-hop culture to the term community or sub-community to re/present my theorizing about the proper way to view hip-hop. It does not hang together as the culture of resistance put forth by Hebdidge (1987) nor can it be viewed as Bennett's (1999c) neo-tribes. Later in this chapter I propose that hip-hop can be better understood using a metamodern lens.

(¶ 4). The metamodernist is not balancing the modern and postmodern but rather constantly moving between them.

My original purpose for my research was to answer my research questions posed throughout chapter 2. However the additional result of my research is that my conclusions also serve as a prospectus for future research. By systematically addressing my conclusions, I will summarize my findings in a meaningful way that reflects my understanding of the portion of the hip-hop community I interacted with for my dissertation. Also, I will advance my theories that will be become the centerpiece for my future research.

During the course of this chapter, I move away from stylistic narrative devices. However, these conclusions are a reflection of my current perspective and understanding of hip-hop and not the terminus of hip-hop scholarship.

By bringing together my theoretical lens from chapter 2, my findings from chapter 4, and the idea of metamodernism, I address each of my research questions and provide an answer to each from my perspective, grounded in my research and experience. I conclude this dissertation by advancing my future research—to that end, I also see this as a prospectus for my research track—and address shortcomings of my particular research project that would have strengthened my findings.

**Metamodernist Sensibility in Hip-Hop**

As stated by Turner (2011)[98], it is time for a recognition that "oscillation is the natural order of the world" (¶ 1). I agree with Turner's proclamation of the reality of oscillation. I observed oscillation, on a number of fronts, by my participants throughout my data collection. Since

[98] In an update to Luke Turner's Metamodernist Manifesto, he credits actor Shia LeBeouf as the author. Crediting the actor with authorship appears to be a reference to Shia LeBeouf's metamodern performance art installment, title *#IAMSORRY*, and his Twitter apologies about plagiarism designed to analyze the concept of authorship.

oscillation is accounted for by metamodernism, I utilize metamodernism as a theoretical lens to better understand contemporary hip-hop artists and fans. I will address the metamodern sensibility seen in hip-hop from three perspectives. First, I will discuss how viewing my findings through a metamodernist lens can advance an understanding of hip-hop and the hip-hop community. By using metamodernism, I can tackle some limitations of theories addressed in my second chapter. Metamodernism is not simply a theoretical lens used by a researcher to view, interpret and understand hip-hop but also a sensibility used, intentionally or unintentionally, by hip-hoppers. Second, I will address a metamodernist sensibility presented by hip-hop artists, such as Lil B and Childish Gambino[99]. Finally, I will address how a metamodernist approach to music composition is embedded in hip-hop as a genre and how identity in a contemporary world is manifested through metamodern sensibilities.

Metamodernism is an approach and sensibility that allows for an understanding of a complex world through multiple perspectives by moving back and forth between competing perspectives. Hip-hoppers, both artists and fans, have adopted a metamodernist sensibility, which compels me to use the works of metamodernist scholars to inform my analysis. In turn, I intend to provide further insight into examples of metamodernist traits among hip-hoppers. It is not my intention to proclaim that a particular culture, genre, or genre community is metamodern. My contention is that I must note metamodernism seen in hip-hop to account for new characteristics of hip-hop emerging in the digital age.

**A Brief Overview of the Metamodern**

Before I advance my conclusions about my research—or more accurately, advance my newly forming theories about contemporary hip-hop communit(ies)—I must address more closely

[99] Childish Gambino is the rapper persona for actor, writer, comedian, Donald Glover. Besides rapping as Childish Gambino, Glover has toured as a comedian, acted on the show *Community*, and written for the show *30 Rock*.

the concept of metamodernism. A group of theorists, largely in the art community, have noted the demise of the postmodern period. Art movements that resort back to the naivety and sincerity of modernism have led art and cultural critics to proclaim the death of postmodernism (Kirby 2009, p. 19-36). The gap due to the "death of the postmodern" left a new periodic movement, or advancement, on the modern and postmodern. Of these emerging theories, I gravitated to Vermeulen and van den Akker's (2010) metamodernism because of its ability to rectify the tension between subculturism and post-subculturism. "[M]etamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" (¶ 19).

Vermeulen and van den Akker clearly indicate that a metamodernist methodology is by definition an oscillation between opposite poles, such as irony and sincerity (¶ 20). Yet, the rejection of (postmodern) irony cannot be the re-establishment of (modern) earnestness but an establishment of a (metamodern) new sincerity. Moving historically beyond the postmodern, or whatever theoretical pole is in question, is not a denunciation of modern/postmodern theories. Metamodernists look at their predecessors to acknowledge new modalities that exist due to an oscillation between magnetic poles of competing positions that force individuals and art to swing mercurially between their pull. This does not eliminate liminal space between the two poles, Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) place metaxy at the center of the metamodern sensibility. They continue to define metaxis as a state of neither/both. A metamodernist sensibility is not simply switching back and forth between two opposing poles but is "an attempt to simultaneously transcend both [sensibilities]" (Damiani 2014a, ¶ 6). Moreover, I would suggest it is equally an

attempt to not only transcend both, or multiple, sensibilities, but to acknowledge their fluctuating preference.

**Metamodernist Sensibility and My Findings**

I sought out metamodern scholarship to help me explain my uneasiness with the explanatory power of subculture and post-subulture theory. However, I also see potential in viewing authenticity as a reflection of a metamodernist sensibility in hip-hop. With that said, the relationship between whiteness and metamodernism must be accounted for to allow me to move forward seeking out hip-hoppers with a metamodernist approach and to use metamodernism as a potential theoretical lens.

**Oscillating between subculture and post-subculture.** Neo-tribalism was used by Bennett (1999c) to establish a fluid social structure based on consumption and lifestyle for youth in an urban dance scene. Bennett's theory of urban tribalism became the centerpiece of his work including research on European hip-hop scenes (Bennett, 1999b, 1999c). Building from a debate among youth culture theorists, I compare theories of subculture (Chambers, 1976; Clark et al., 1976; Hebdige 1979, 1987) to the theories of post-subculture (Maffesoli, 1996; Weinzierl & Muggletion, 2003; Bennett, 2011), I sought to identify which set of theories were best able to explain the activities and behaviors of white hip-hoppers. I came to the conclusion that white hip-hoppers reflect a metamodern oscillation between the poles described by subcultural and post-subcultural theorists.

However, the line of inquiry regarding post-/subculturalism took on primacy during the course of my research because viewing hip-hoppers as individuals floating between neotribes versus the members of the hip-hop community making up a subculture provides the landscape that must be navigated for authenticity to be achieved. For example, if hip-hoppers are members of

network of neo-tribes then authenticity can be rejected for what Bose (2003) refers to as "style-surfing." Conversely, if hip-hop remains a subculture, as outlined by hip-hop scholars, then authenticity is not only valid but is rooted in communal resistance and struggle. This forces white hip-hoppers to validate their authenticity, which means, to answer questions about authenticity, the classification of hip-hop as subculture or post-subculture must first be resolved.

I observed a constant oscillation between what appeared to be a subculture of resistance and a community that hinged on cultural capital and hybridity, indicating a post-subcultural structure. The oscillation among members of the hip-hop community allowed white hip-hoppers to oscillate between an individual perception and a communally imposed conception of hip-hop authenticity.

I use a metamodern sensibility to ground the idea that participants in a community or post-/subculture are actually mercurially oscillating between Hebdige's (1987) subcultures and what Bennett (1999c) and Mafessoli (1996) describe as neo-tribes. For a subculturist, youth cultures form around class, identity, and resistance. While for post-subculturists, youth cultures are neo-tribes that exist floating from scene to scene in a consumption-centric lifestyle. A metamodern sensibility to youth culture looks at how people operate within and beyond both of these theoretical perspectives.

**Metamodernism and authenticity.** Subculture and post-subculture's neo-tribes have serious ramifications in terms of authenticity, particularly hip-hop authenticity described by McLeod (1999). From a subculturist perspective, authenticity is essential and rigid. For the post-subculturist, it is of no importance. I found neither of these to be the case for my participants with regard to their conceptions and re/presentations of authenticity. From my viewpoint, hip-hop

authenticity is an essential, yet malleable, concept for white hip-hoppers. This view is the basis for my metamodernist perspective on hip-hop.

The foundation for this argument is based on two sets of observations. First is the simultaneous acknowledgement of the existence of hip-hop authenticity and the twisting/interpreting of the dimensions of hip-hop authenticity. My second set of observations that are indicative of a metamodern sensibility in hip-hop is the importance placed on authenticity by many white hip-hoppers involved in this study. Though important, hip-hop authenticity was perceived as variable and abstract. It was difficult for participants to describe authenticity, particularly for non-performing fans of hip-hop. It was a bit more clear who was authentic and inauthentic among hip-hop artists but the definition of authenticity oscillated between visceral subjectivity and an adherence to objective characteristics.

Revisiting the quote made by Fred, encapsulates this duality of authenticity. Fred explains the vagueness and potency of authenticity, "Hip-hop top to bottom is about authenticity, the quote-unquote 'keeping it real.' 50 cent, a mainstream artist, pretty much destroyed Ja Rule, another mainstreamer, by telling everyone that he wasn't authentic. I mean so, I think authenticity is part of hip-hop culture through and through. I just don't think it is clear to anybody what authenticity entails." Fred's comment is furthered by JD asking who gets to determine what is or is not authentically hip-hop.

It is my contention that a metamodern sensibility in hip-hop extends beyond the concept of authenticity, including post-ironic art being created by hip-hoppers, such as Lil B and Das Racist. However, my findings only allow me to address authenticity. Hip-hopper's authenticity oscillates between notions of the genuine individuality and impositions of communal standards. A

metamodern sensibility toward authenticity by hip-hoppers is an oscillation between and beyond stratified notions of contemporary hip-hop and the elevated status of "old school" hip-hop.

**Whiteness and metamodernism.** Metamodern scholars' work can been used to account for change in hip-hop authenticity, however I also see whiteness studies informing white hip-hoppers' adoption of oscillation in terms of hip-hop authenticity. As the hip-hop community becomes more diverse, fragmented, and hybridized, hip-hoppers create and interact with new manifestations of hip-hop, such as drill rap[100]. With multiple subcommunities in hip-hop, those with authority over hip-hop authenticity grow in number and power becomes decentralized allowing for the manipulation of core hip-hop authenticity markers. Simultaneous to the decentralization of hip-hop authority, is an increased emphasis among hip-hop scholars to legitimize hip-hop by paying homage to its rich history. Additionally, whites, because of their race, are allowed the privilege of "style surfing" but also impose change because of their race. As Bose (2003) points out style surfing is a privilege of whiteness but that is an over simplification. I view the white privilege of style surfing not as assimilation but departure from the original. So as white hip-hoppers oscillate between sub-hip-hop communities, or other genre communities, they alter the norms of the community in which they participate.

**Examples of Metamodernists in Hip-Hop**

Artists use the internet to oscillate between public and private identity. Damiani (2014b) provides rapper Childish Gambino as an example of this oscillation on his album, *Because the Internet*. Gambino shifts between different realities which "forces us to read this collage as a composite persona -- a singular identity engaged in continuous code-switching, more cuttlefish

[100] Drill rap is a contemporary subgenre that is similar in theme to gangsta rap from the Southside of Chicago. Notable drill rappers are Lil Durk and Chief Keef. I use drill rap as an example because while doing my data collection the idea of drill rap as a subgenre did not exist but is now prominent in blogs and news coverage of hip-hop and violence in Chicago.

than parrot -- existing as the summation of all the performed identities" (¶ 2). Through different delivery methods, including Twitter, an Instagram note, a short movie, and his album, Gambino oscillates between multiple public and private personas. Damani's analysis of Gambino's persona as metamodern meets the tenets set forth by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010). Gambino's personality is not the only example of oscillation of persona by hip-hop artists.

During my data collection, I witnessed Lil B re/present a persona that can be rightly labeled as post-ironic. Theorists developed the term post-irony to account for the blurred lines between what is irony and what is earnest, "they're inexorably linked" (Collins, 2010, ¶ 7). Lil B epitomizes the link between the ironic and sincere with his musical creations by taking hip-hop tropes and trends to absurd levels while declaring his earnest admiration for the artists that popularized the trends. Lil B's post-ironic approach is an example of the liminal space that, I contend, falls within a metamodern sensibility.

His metamodern approach to music is coupled with a metamodern sensibility in his public persona, Lil B is folding back on irony with a new sincerity, a combination and absence of irony and sincerity (Thorn, 2006, ¶ 5). Lil B retweets fans, preaches his based-philosophy of inclusion and love, makes ephemeral music that takes current hip-hop trends to their most absurd point, but still never breaks his mercurial persona. Lil B operates between a modern sensibility of earnestness and postmodern irony to demonstrate the complexity of identity.

Lil B's and Childish Gambino's strategies are not exclusive to hip-hop, but are more indicative of the manifestation of internet culture in a post-9/11 and post-great recession digital society. Damiani (2014d) explains that the internet is a space that oscillates between "overstimulation and alienation" due to a constant feedback loop of contribution and critique. While the internet is a platform for metamodern modalities, van Poecke (2011), while discussing

the Free Folk festival, notes the role of the expiation of neoliberalism and the so-called "war on terror" as motivating factors in a push back against a postmodern sense of irony and hyper-individual systems. Both Lil B and Childish Gambino re/present metamodernism in hip-hop. They are also examples of a larger metamodern movement. However, my use of the metamodern lens allows for additional ways to understand contemporary hip-hopppers.

Because of sampling, producers of hip-hop music have long had a metamodern approach to making music. Additionally, hip-hoppers' approach to the elements of hip-hop expose metamodernism embedded into hip-hop. By analyzing the composition and the use of musical instruments/players, it becomes evident that metamodern approaches are a cornerstone of hip-hop. While sampling has been described as the switching from consumption to production (Potter, 1994, p.36), it is my contention hip-hoppers move beyond postmodern pastiche by blending and switching samples to oscillate between appropriation of other's style and establishment of their own.

According to van Poecke (2010), free folk musicians are metamodern in their approach because they oscillate between genres and to create something unique and authentic" to push the boundaries of genre (¶ 4). Similarly, hip-hoppers have long pushed the boundaries between genres. Early deejays, such as Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaataa, used sampling to establish hip-hop as a unique genre. Hip-hop producers/deejays have used sampling to oscillate between the appropriation of other genres of music and the distinction of a unique hip-hop sound. The creators of hip-hop music switching genres during composition has long been a defining characteristic of the hip-hop sound. In this way hip-hop is a genreless genre or more accurately a genre-filled genre.

Hip-hoppers take from other genres to create something of their own through the metamodern sensibility of oscillation. As Damiana (2014b) notes, a portion of Childish Gambino's

metamodern aesthetic is his genre defying approach on the album *Because the Internet*. Gambino raps over songs that alternate between genres and subgenres, as well as oscillate between genres throughout the album while maintaining a hip-hop aesthetic. It is important to note this is indicative of hip-hop and not a deviation of the form. The bricolage of genres that make up hip-hip are as numerous as music itself. Another explicit example of the oscillation and liminal space that hip-hop producers use to create a unique musical genre is De La Soul's *3 Feet High and Rising*. De La Soul rapped over samples that included Johnny Cash, Steely Dan, Hall and Oates, and Public Enemy. The producers of the album made "split-second splits" between the sampled tracks to compose a distinctly hip-hop sound (Bogdanov, Woodstra, Erlewine, & Bush, 2003, pp. 99-100). Through this oscillation hip-hoppers create new subgenres by accessing the uniqueness of other genres and create new hip-hop, such as rap-rock[101] and country rap[102].

The metamodern sensibility of hip-hoppers are not limited to their musical compositions but is also demonstrated by their use of various tools of composition. The cross-fader[103] allows a deejay to oscillate between two musical tracks, as if the cross-fader is a physical metaphor for a metamodern sensibility. The hip-hop deejay uses the cross-fader while switching between two separate tracks. Also, the cross-fader is used by the deejay for scratching or blending tracks to compose a new musical composition. In this way, hip-hoppers take a metamodern approach to record/digital music players. Their use of the players oscillates between a means of reproducing sound and constructing new compositions.

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[101] Rap-rock is a hybrid of hip-hop and rock music. Some notable rap-rock groups/artists are Kid Rock, Limp Bizkit, Rage Against the Machine, and Lincoln Park. Prior to the commercial peak of rap-rock in the late 1990s and early 2000s, rap-rock crossovers were spearheaded by collaborations between hip-hop groups and metal bands, such as Onyx with Biohazard and Public Enemy with Anthrax.

[102] Country Rap is a subgenre of hip-hop marked by its blending sounds from country music and hip-hop. The artists generally deliver their lyrics using a rap cadence over music that joins hip-hop beats/basslines with county music instruments. Some notable artists in the country rap genre include Cowboy Troy, Colt Ford, and Big Smo.

[103] A cross-fader is a device used to switch between two music tracks

Metamodern approaches and sensibilities are seen throughout hip-hop as a natural order of things and as a response to technological and sociopolitical events. I approach hip-hop through a metamodern lens to account for cultural changes and to expand my personal understanding of how hip-hop relates to other music and art movements. Additionally, I see core elements of hip-hop that distinguish hip-hop from other music genres as noticeably metamodern. I make the distinction between metamodernism in hip-hop and central features of hip-hop I view as metamodern in order to demonstrate ways in which a metamodernist standpoint can inform hip-hop scholarship from multiple angles.

**Hip-hop Authenticity in a New Form**

Through my description of the different types of shows, consumption activities, and existence of sub-hip-hop communities, I illustrate that hip-hop has divided into subgenres/communities while simultaneously being absorbed into mainstream culture. This division and absorption of hip-hop did not eliminate hip-hop's traditions, such as its roots in resistance or emphasis on authenticity. Though, this did alter how hip-hoppers view these traditions. There are three clear implications from the fragmenting and mainstreaming of hip-hop: (1) establishment of an underground adversary, (2) the incorporation of authentic commercial hip-hop, and (3) the manipulation of authenticity. I see each of these influence how whites conceptualize authenticity by allowing space for whiteness to navigate hip-hop authenticity.

The underground adversary is a distinct feature that is not accounted for by McLeod (1999) in his six-dimensions. The fan, and occasional artist, get labeled as hipster, as a marker of inauthentic hip-hop. The primary examples of this are the fans of Das Racist and Odd Future. Hipsterism, provided for the white hip-hoppers in my study, is an over emphasis on the political-economic dimension that undercuts the psycho-social dimension. True-to-self ascends to primary

status—underpinned by the cultural dimension—to create my new dimension of respect for hip-hop versus hipster dimension.

The hipster as an inauthentic member of the underground music circles is not a new one. Famously Norman Mailer (1957/2007) lambasted hipsters as "psychopaths" that gentrify neighborhoods. What distinguishes hipsters in this study is that they were gentrifying already gentrified zones. Subgenres of hip-hop that were already designed to cater to whites, according to my participants, were also scenes in which hipsters were prevalent and intrusive. By using the hipster as a foil, white hip-hoppers can reinforce their own authenticity through comparison.

I observed that McLeod's commercial/underground line was also blurred by shifting dynamic in hip-hop. Largely due to how hip-hop is now consumed, the distinction between an underground artist and a mainstream artist is all but dissolved. The primary example of this, from my findings, is multiple participants distinguishing an artist's commercial work from their underground work. Fans of Wiz Khalifa and Lil Wayne appropriate underground fan authenticity by talking about how "real" fans of Wiz and Wayne are intimately familiar with their mixtapes, not just what was released on the radio. They viewed this as underground and not tainted by commercial release because it was free. Artists that have "sold out," to use McLeod's terminology, can now have their proverbial cake and eat it too.

Through the use of internet, artists can linger in-between underground and commercial. Successful independent artists such as Odd Future and Macklemore maintain the mantel underground authentic while still marketing to broad audiences through many outlets, including TV programs and commercial awards shows. The internet is perceived as a domain of the underground, while radio and video are clearly classified as commercial. The line is now so fuzzy between underground/commercial that my participants questioned its usefulness to classify artists.

The labels of underground and commercial still remain a salient concept related to hip-hop authenticity. However, from my research, underground is an abstract distinction given to an artist to legitimize fandom. Also, what is defined as "underground" shifts from one sub-hip-hop community to another. For example, Slaughterhouse was viewed as "underground" despite being signed to Interscope Records, a major record label.

This brings me to the last implication of the shift in hip-hop, the ability to manipulate authenticity. Due to hip-hop becoming a fragmented community, hip-hoppers are allowed to float to hip-hop sub-communities that are more welcoming to traits they have, or at least re/present. Take for example Chris Webby; his fans touted Webby's authenticity by embracing his suburban upbringing. This cuts against McLeod's social locational dimension of authenticity.

Chris Webby is clearly doing hip-hop music and is embraced by hip-hop artists that hold the characteristics of hip-hop authenticity outlined by McLeod, such as Flint rapper Jon Connor[104]. However, Webby occupies a space where his and his fans suburban upbringing is not rejected. The splintering of hip-hop allows for fans and artists to manipulate hip-hop authenticity through selective engagement. I use the term manipulation because Webby does embrace the spirit of the social locational dimension by presenting his "struggle," which incidentally is struggling to be accepted as a white rapper.

**Convenient Conceptions of Hip-Hop Authenticity**

While the constant changes in hip-hop and the need for a more nuanced theoretical lens to analyze hip-hop communities is a development from my research, my realization that hip-hop authenticity must be looked at more as a cognitive process than a behavioral process is, from my

[104] Jon Connor's identity would mark him as authentic on all six of McLeod's dimensions. Additionally, he is viewed as a skilled and thoughtful rapper, which would make him authentically hip-hop by the skills and content dimension I outlined in my findings chapter.

observations, the most important. As I have stated numerous times, I launched this project with the idea that authenticity was about presenting oneself, through visual cues and behaviors, as a hip-hopper. However, throughout the course of my data collection I realized that hip-hop authenticity is about oscillating between a self-created conception of authenticity that the hip-hopper can fit into and re/presenting preconceived notion of hip-hop authenticity with an emphasis placed on the former pole.

I attribute the role of manipulating conceptions of authenticity, as opposed to manipulating presentation to fit into hip-hop, to the primacy of true-to-self as the ultimate marker of hip-hop authenticity. McLeod's (1999) social-psychological dimension of hip-hop authenticity places true-to-self as "real" and following trends as "fake." This dimension was continuously cited by my participants and never refuted or adjusted in my research. It was also cited frequently as an important of trait of an authentic hip-hopper. For this reason, I place this as my most important characteristic of an authentic hip-hopper. It incidentally is also an easily accessible marker of hip-hop authenticity. Just being true-to-self does not take any recalculation; white hip-hoppers only need to be perceived as honest and sincere.

I review my argument for why the conceptualization of authenticity is more important than the re/presentation of authenticity, and how white hip-hoppers in this study, myself included, established levels of importance for different markers of authenticity. I look at how white hip-hoppers tweaked dimensions of authenticity, established by McLeod, to make it an easier fit for them to conceive of themselves as authentic.

**Conceptualization over Re/presentation**

As previously stated, hip-hop authenticity appeared to be more about manipulating the concept of authenticity as opposed to actually manipulating one's own presentation of authenticity.

This can be attributed to how white functions. As the literature suggests, society places whites in positions of power (McIntosh, 1995; Kendell, 2006). This is reinforced by the media (Giroux, 1997; Roediger, 1997; Dyer, 1997). "[T]he media, politics, education are still in the hands of white people, still speak for whites while claiming – and sometimes sincerely aiming – to speak for humanity" (Dyer, 1997, p. 3). This fact of society empowers whites to speak to and for hip-hop authenticity.

Whites have a more fluid identity because whiteness goes largely uninvestigated or as hooks (1993) puts it, an "invest[ment] in the sense of whiteness as mystery" (p. 168). This mysterious quality allows for characteristic traits to roll-off whites. However, whites cannot easily escape the pigmentation of their skin. For this reason, I believe that when dealing with the cognitive dissonance created by being white in hip-hop, it is simply easier to alter beliefs than characteristics. That is the reason I focus more on the conception of hip-hop authenticity by whites, rather than re/presentation as I originally intended.

**Accentuation and De-emphasis of Authenticity Dimensions**

One strategy employed by my participants was the accentuation and de-emphasis of authenticity dimensions to assemble a re/conceptions of hip-hop authenticity that was more viable for white hip-hoppers. My observations of the selection and ranking of hip-hop authenticity dimensions was also seen in the work of Jeffries (2011). He observed that hip-hoppers of all race viewed being talented or "having skills" could make a hip-hopper authentic in the face of striving for commercial success, something deemed very inauthentic. I will discuss what dimensions were accentuated and what were placed as secondary using by McLeod's six dimensions and the ones revealed by my findings.

I reiterate, the social-psychological dimension, was important for all the participants in this study. My impression is that true-to-self is most important and following trends is loathed by hip-hoppers. Not being true-to-self is so reviled by hip-hoppers that the hipster, who wants to be ahead of trends, is an adversary in underground hip-hop circles because of the disingenuous act of style surfing. This is a noted failure by white hip-hop artists in the past. Darius pointed to Vanilla Ice as the epitome of inauthenticity for taking on a persona that was dishonest. It is this kind of failure that may be the root of white hip-hoppers placing "true-to-self" as an important characteristic of authentic hip-hoppers.

As with Jeffries (2011), skill is also an integral factor for being considered authentically hip-hop. Only being true-to-self can create space for an unskilled artist to be viewed as authentic. Much like Vanilla Ice being banished from the circle of "real" hip-hop due to his assumed persona, Eminem, an example of an authentic white hip-hopper in my research, received that distinction due in large part to his talent as an emcee. Many in my study considered Eminem to be the most skilled emcee in hip-hop history. With the most talented hip-hopper being white coupled with skills being of such high importance to hip-hop authenticity allows for whites to be authentic.

After social-psychological and skills, the next important feature of hip-hop authenticity is respect for hip-hop. This is seen in McLeod's old school dimension. However, as seen in the examination of altering dimensions, the old school dimension was manipulated to take on meaning unintended by the discourse category McLeod created. Respect for hip-hop was so important I gave it its own dimension. Respect for hip-hop was determined to be very authentic, while the opposite of respect for hip-hop was the hipster. Respect for hip-hop was formed through knowledge and love for hip-hop. Both of those factors could be unquestionably achieved by a white hip-hopper. Knowledge can be gained through study and love is an unknowable trait.

**Manipulation/Altering Authenticity Dimension**

White hip-hoppers did not just emphasize dimensions of authenticity that were easily occupied by whites, but they also re-interpreted dimensions of authenticity. Three dimensions were widely altered and one was greatly debated. The social locational, cultural and political economic dimensions were all re-assigned meaning but maintained language similar to those used in McLeod's research. The racial dimension was a source of great disagreement, but ultimately a space was made for white hip-hop authenticity in the racial dimension.

Manipulation of the political economic dimension resulted from the changing dynamics in consumption of hip-hop and the various sub-hip-hop communities. However, the manipulation of the social locational dimension is a result of identifying different modes to establish the spirit of the dimension, such as identifying the "struggles" of being suburban. McLeod (1999) uses location to mark authenticity but to also stand-in for the amount of struggle a person had to deal with in life (pp. 142-143). In hip-hop, "the streets" are viewed as authentic and full of struggle, while "the suburbs" are viewed as inauthentic because of a level of affluence and a lack of struggle. A manipulation of this dimension was the stripping away of location and highlighting the struggle. This is a convenient change because a white hip-hopper cannot necessarily change the location of their upbringing but can focus on their individual struggle. Chris Webby and GM even felt they faced struggle being accepted as white emcees. They combat the racial dimension of hip-hop authenticity with the reinterpreted social locational dimension.

The cultural dimension places "old school" as authentic and "mainstream" as inauthentic. The shift in this dimension has less to do with creating occupiable space and more to do with the long term prominence of commercial hip-hop. McLeod uses old school as a referent to hip-hop's origins and the cultural practices that are aligned with hip-hop from its infancy. The mainstream

for McLeod is then aligned with the deviation from those practices and the tainting of hip-hop by commercialization (pp. 143-144). For the social locational dimension, the precise language used by McLeod was removed. For the cultural dimension, the participants used the language literally. Old school was placed against new hip-hop as a dichotomy for the dimension. Old school remained authentic and new hip-hop was largely viewed as poor or inauthentic. This created space for artists that would have in 1999, when McLeod performed his study, to be viewed as authentic strictly on a temporal basis.

The racial dimension was a point of great debate. It is difficult to manipulate because of society's strict racial coding system. While it is true that "[r]ace only becomes 'real' as a social force when individuals or groups behave towards each other in ways which either reflect or perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of subordination and the patterns of inequality in daily life" (Marable, 1993, p. 114), this is so ingrained in the parent culture that people cannot escape the grasp of race classifications. However, there was some movement in the interpretation of the racial dimension in my study.

While some in the study indicated that they felt hip-hop was unequivocally a black art form and a culture derived from African American traditions, my white participants felt it used to be that black was authentic but authenticity was no longer limited to the black community. This perceived change in the fact that white was inauthentic was credited to two factors. One, the growth in numbers of white fans and performers created space for white authenticity. Two, the emergence of Eminem created the embodiment of white hip-hop authenticity. For whatever reason the shift in perception happened, it is clear that there is a view that whites are now eligible to be authentically hip-hop.

Before I move on to directly responding to research question two, I would like to briefly address the final dimension, Gender. While I did include this in my findings, I have elected to not factor my impressions of this dimension in my conclusions because I feel the underrepresentation of female participants in this study skews my observations. Also, this dimension was not altered or placed in any position in relation to others dimensions. It was simply accepted or reinforced by many participants and completely rejected by a few others.

Besides the emphasis placed on conceptualization over re/presentation, I found that white hip-hoppers accept there is an important but abstract hip-hop authenticity. They seem to use the fact that authenticity is fluid and difficult to define to create more convenient standards for hip-hop authenticity. They largely echo the discourse of hip-hop authenticity used by McLeod (1999). However, they make it easier for whites to be viewed as authentic through placing high levels of importance on some dimensions, while reinterpreting others.

## Re/presentation by Reinvention of Hip-Hop Authenticity

Participants in my study placed being true-to-self, skills, and respect for the culture in high importance when discussing their conception of hip-hop authenticity. With the exception of true-to-self, the other highly important features of hip-hop authenticity require participation. A hip-hopper cannot be viewed as talented if they do not perform. Also, love and respect for hip-hop are demonstrated by giving back time and effort. Because of this, my conclusions regarding the re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity are that it is achieved through participation with the culture.

### Re/presentation Occurs as Visual/Behavioral Performance

I observed a fashion sense that I attributed to hip-hop, which was supported by my participants through interviews. This fashion was marked by various styles of baseball hats and sneakers/basketball shoes. However, to paraphrase MC BrakeFast, hip-hop is the most widely

consumed music in the world. Due to the wide and diverse consumption of hip-hop—as noted by MC BrakeFast and substantiated by the literature—it has created a simultaneously integrated and segregated community.

From localized subcommunites (Kitwana, 1995; Baldwin, 1999/2004; Foreman, 2004b) to global hip-hop communities (Swedenburg, 1992/2004; Bennett, 1999b; Nayak, 2003), hip-hop has been able to spread its influence into spaces that are not considered hip-hop. Some notable examples of hip-hop's influence beyond the community is hip-hop production being incorporated into pop music—such as Justin Timberlake's "Cry Me a River"—and the incorporation of hip-hop/"street" fashion into mainstream fashion—such as P. Diddy and Jay-z's fashion lines. Conversely, hip-hop has also equal been influenced by outside subcultures and mainstream culture, such as New York rapper A$AP Rocky's urban goth[105] influenced fashion and the hipster style of Lil B the BasedGod[106]. This makes the waters of what constitutes a hip-hop style very murky.

Along with the cross-pollination seen in hip-hop style, there is an emphasis of show-and-prove[107] built into hip-hop that places more importance on behavior than style or what one says. I observed the show-and-prove mentality to be of great importance to the participants in this study. In their conceptions of authenticity, a great value was placed on love and knowledge of hip-hop, which requires action to demonstrate. They also universally rejected the authenticity of those that appeared to be "dressing the part." Given these observations, I revisit my third research question.

It is my impression that the re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity requires an active participation in hip-hop. This participation can come in solitary behaviors, such as actively

[105] Urban goth is a fashion trend that incorporates leather, studs, and skulls, generally associated with goth or goth-punk fashion and infuses it with a hip-hop style with hoodies, sneakers, and hats.
[106] Prominent in current hip-hop fashion is skinny jeans, scarfs, and black framed glasses, generally associated with the hipster community.
[107] Show-and-prove is a term hip-hop appropriated from the Nation of Gods and Earths that says a person must demonstrate in order to substantiate.

engaging on the internet or studying hip-hop, or it can happen in a communal setting, such as supporting or performing a live event. Attending and participating in live events are held as authentic re/presentation of hip-hop.

### Re/presentation as Connection to Hip-Hop

Hip-hop authenticity is re/presented through the behaviors of the participants, however not all behaviors hold equal weight. The live interaction with hip-hop provides a nearly essential element of authenticity. At the live event, participants took on many roles that had various levels of hip-hop authenticity linked with them. At the top of the hierarchy were the performers and artists. Those that created the hip-hop art, music, and dance are viewed with initially high authenticity. So the primary way to re/present is to create and preform but that needs to be viewed as quality because unskilled hip-hop is inauthentic. The next tier on the re/presentation of hip-hop authenticity, from my observations, is in support roles. That would include working merchandise tables, promoting, and managing. Again this also comes with a caveat; support must be for hip-hop and not strictly for financial gain. The final tier of hip-hop authenticity is consumer and fan. The consumer/fan must be passionate and dedicated to hip-hop, not trying to be cool, such as the hipster. The preferred form of consumption is learning about hip-hop. Knowledge of hip-hop is viewed, by me and many of my participants, as a key indicator of authenticity for hip-hop heads. Passion, knowledge, and respect for hip-hop is expressed by nearly every participant I talked with in my research. It was also cited when talking about others they viewed as authentic.

## The Influence of Whiteness

### Other Factors than Hip-Hop: Space of the Progressive White

White hip-hoppers' are allowed to manipulate hip-hop authenticity, in part, due to whiteness. I do not feel that whiteness is the only factor for changing conceptions of authenticity.

However, whiteness provides the privilege to reinterpret existing notions of hip-hop authenticity, even though there is a well-established link to the black community and the African Diaspora (Hebdige, 1987; Rose, 1994; Keyes, 2002; Chang, 2005). This requires a look at the functioning of whiteness in light of the re-conceptualization of hip-hop authenticity.

Previous researchers are split on the ability of hip-hop to educate white hip-hoppers in terms of race. Thompson and Brown (2002) show that white hip-hoppers tend to be more tolerant and politically liberal than whites that do not listen to hip-hop. On the other hand Rodriquez (2006) shows that white hip-hoppers are still susceptible to the color-blind ideology. These two studies do not contradict each other but a further investigation into the influence of hip-hop is important. In my findings, I saw that formal education in the humanities is an important factor in white hip-hoppers' racial progressiveness.

**Whiteness and Hip-Hop Authenticity**

The re-conceptualization of hip-hop authenticity can be explained by existing literature on whiteness. I see whiteness functioning in three distinct ways that make available the ability for whites to view hip-hop authenticity in a way that is comfortable for them. The first is the media and society reinforcement of white rationality and authority (McIntosh, 1995; Dyer, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Roediger, 1997; Kendall, 2006). The second is the power of invoking majority/minority narratives (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). The third way whiteness influences white hip-hoppers' authenticity is that an investment in color-blindness creates the perception of a meritocracy (Crenshaw, 1988, Lipsitz, 1995, Carbodo & Harris, 2010).

Before I examine these three in more depth, I first must address one major difference for whites in hip-hop in comparison to whites in general. Scholars correctly point to the fact that whites are not conscious of their race (hooks, 1992; Frankenberg, 1993/1997; Dyer, 1997; Wiegman,

1999; Kendall, 2006). This is not the case for the participants of this study. They may not be fully aware of how their race functions but they are frequently made aware of their race. An example of this would be Das Racist asking, “Everybody that’s white make some noise.” This may not always be the case nor may it be evident in all hip-hop sub-communities, but race is still a constant factor in hip-hop. While participating in hip-hop communities, whites must discuss, think about, and interact with race.

In regard to the first way that whiteness invites a reshaping of hip-hop authenticity is that whites are implicitly and explicitly told they are in positions of authority. Whites are seen in positions of power (Kendall, 2006) and speaking for people of all races (Dyer, 1997) in everyday life and through the media. This implicitly sends the message that they have the privilege to speak for hip-hop. Having the authority to speak for a community is the first step in their ability to shift how authenticity markers should be understood.

The rationality and authority of whiteness is substantiated by the narrative of majority/minority membership. Whites evoked the changing racial make-up of the hip-hop community to downplay the importance of race as an authenticity marker in hip-hop. The growth in numbers of white hip-hoppers, perceived by the participants in this study, allows them to claim ownership in the same way whites use majority status when citing nationality. The logic here is how can whites be inauthentic if there are so many white hip-hoppers? This is convenient to evoke because of the inescapability of race in hip-hop. It should be acknowledged that as whites continue to represent a larger and larger portion of hip-hop and there are more and more exclusively white hip-hop sub-communities, as seen at the Hoodie Allen show, race may become invisible to white hip-hoppers in the future.

The final factor flies in the face of the reality of race visibility in hip-hop but like Rodriquez's (2006) research, color-blindness was a factor for whites in my study. Eminem being crowned as the best emcee in history is a function of color-blindness and the perception of a meritocracy. None of the participants in this study addressed the possibility that he was considered the best in part because he is white. The subjectivity of "greatest" emcee took on the discourse of objective fact. The privilege of Eminem's whiteness was ignored and his bona fides attributed to his merit. Using Eminem as an example it is clear that the dimension of skills is an argument for authenticity through merit.

**The Influence of Hip-Hop**

There is a segment of white hip-hoppers that are progressive on social issues, particularly race (Zillman et al., 1995; Thompson & Brown, 2002; Kitwana, 2005). This was substantiated in my research, specifically by Fred and JD. The logic is that hip-hop informs white listeners about issues of race. However, hip-hop does not necessarily provide accurate or positive images of racial minorities (Watkins, 1998/2004; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 2008). This led me to investigate other factors that contribute to white hip-hoppers being social progressives.

It was clear that across all participants that hip-hop has informed them about racial inequality, the experience of other races, and provided interaction with non-white people. For the participants in this study, hip-hop has influenced how whites understand race. However throughout my in-depth interviews, it became apparent that a common characteristic among the white hip-hoppers that were fluent and informed about issues regarding racial inequality and the history of hip-hop were those with a college degree in the humanities. This indicates to me that an important supplement to hip-hop needs to be education. Hip-hop influenced white hip-hoppers, such as MC BrakeFast, JD, and me, to take courses or seek out information regarding race.

## Research Possibilities

As is stated on the title page of this document, this dissertation is "in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy." While that is the directed purpose of this project, it is far from the most important, in my opinion. My research project serves as the launching point for my prospective research track. It has honed my thinking on the subject of hip-hop and youth cultures. It functioned to cultivate my thinking about notions of authenticity. The issues and theories advanced by my research are far from fully hashed out. To that end, I address future research possibilities by acknowledging ways that this project could have been strengthened. Then I will conclude my dissertation by talking about how this project creates the foundation for my future research.

### Acknowledging Additional Possibilities in this Project

My fieldwork and interviews proved valuable to my thinking on hip-hop. However, I have identified two ways that my research could be built on in future research projects. First, there was a lack of diversity of participants in my data collection. Second, I can further document different sub-communities of hip-hop. With these additions, I can continue to address the ever changing landscape of hip-hop and account for different dynamics at play in hip-hop.

The lack of diversity in participants was partially intentional and partially due to underrepresentation of women at the hip-hop events I attended. During the writing of my findings it became clear to me that in order to understand authenticity and race in hip-hop, I must account for the fluid changes in hip-hop. To gain more insight into the fluidity hip-hop, I will gather the perspective of hip-hoppers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in future projects. My initial focus was on white hip-hoppers because I wanted to see how *they* conceived of authenticity and then what measures *they* took to re/present hip-hop authenticity. However by including interviews with

non-white hip-hoppers in the future, I can expand on my theorizing about metamodernism in hip-hop. Anecdotal evidence supports the idea that style-surfing is not an exclusively white male experience but is a shift in youth culture among all races and genders, however further research is required to substantiate this informally collected evidence.

In terms of gender, there was an underrepresentation of white female hip-hoppers. White males represent the majority of attendees at the shows and an even wider majority of those that self-identified as hip-hoppers, either hip-hop heads or active participants in the community. However, female hip-hoppers view the community from a unique standpoint. I will include more female hip-hoppers, as this project continues, to shed light on the intersection of race, gender, authenticity, and hip-hop.

Future ethnographic research on white hip-hop authenticity must account for hip-hoppers of all races and genders. Also, future research on hip-hop authenticity must include LGBT hip-hoppers. This is even more vital with the emergence of prominent LGBT emcees, such as Le1f[108], Mykki Blanco[109], Azealia Banks[110], and Angel Haze[111]. My focus on the perceptions of white hip-hoppers limited my ability to collect data on other hip-hopper's perspective on white hip-hoppers.

**Launching Point for Future Research**

My research focuses on the conceptions and re/presentation of white hip-hoppers, including myself, in a number of hip-hop sub-communities. Though I, as accurately as possible, re/presented the participants thoughts and behaviors in my study, this dissertation is more a re/presentation of my theorizing about hip-hop, generally, and white hip-hoppers, specifically.

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[108] Le1f (pronounced leaf) is an openly gay male emcee and producer from New York.
[109] Mykki Blanco is an openly gay emcee and poet from New York that re/presents both masculine and feminine personas while performing.
[110] Azealia Banks is an openly bisexual emcee from New York.
[111] Angel Haze is an openly gay female emcee from Detroit, MI.

Throughout my research, I was exposed to hip-hop that I would not have engaged in previously. This interaction with different sub-hip-hop communities caused me to rethink how people should rightly understand youth cultures in the new millennium and how authenticity functions.

As with all communities, hip-hop has gone through significant changes in its structure. The modes of communicating inside the hip-hop community and the interaction with other art and music communities have made major shifts due to the expansion of social media. Along with shifts in interaction, hip-hop is now predominantly represented by a generation that only knows hip-hop as a media force. This requires a reconfiguring of how hip-hop is thought about.

Along with changes in hip-hop, authenticity, in general, is at a moment when an extreme rethinking the concept needs to be considered. In an interconnected society, people have more access to information and culture[112]. Because of easier access and exposure, what constitutes authenticity needs to be rethought.

Due to my research, I have to re-conceptualize core concepts of my project. The need for a new explanatory theory behind hip-hop and youth culture is needed. Moving forward I will look at the idea of metamodern hip-hop. Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) claim that art, music, and architecture, among other creative forms, are moving past the postmodern period and into the metamodern period. The metamodern operates between and with the modern and postmodern to create a sensibility that is beyond both poles. Through my research, I see the possibility of viewing genre communities (Lena, 2012), specifically hip-hop, as entities that operate using many of the characteristics outlined by both subculture theorists and post-subculturists. Style surfing is influenced by consumption activities but also in resistance to a parent culture. For example, the scene that surrounds OFWGKTA appears as counter-culture. It has its own cultural markers, such

[112] Culture meaning art, music, fashion, entertainment, etc. that is produced by a group of people.

as homemade fan clothing and speaks to a segment of middle class disaffected, predominantly-white youth. However, the OFWGKTA scene is also a fleeting lifestyle that functions like a neo-tribe coming together temporarily and not bound by rigid class distinction. After a year's worth of data collection, I am convinced that to understand hip-hop, a theoretical perspective that incorporates both subculture and post-subculture must be implemented. I witnessed an oscillation between these poles during my data collection, leading me to search for metamodernism in hip-hop.

Within the theorizing about metamodernism in hip-hop, my findings also point to advancing a new understanding of authenticity. Authenticity remains a potent concept, however it also is a very fluid concept. Grand narratives surrounding hip-hop authenticity remains largely in place, though authenticity is malleable in its exact parameters and definition. It is my position that participants in my research faced difficulty describing hip-hop authenticity because it is not an effect of having some characteristic but rather an affect a person presents to others. Hip-hop authenticity is an oscillation between self and the community. It moves between criteria and an aura a "real" hip-hopper can just sense. Take for example Tupac Shakur[113]. His hip-hop authenticity goes unquestioned in hip-hop circles despite the fact that he appeared to take on the persona of the character Bishop, a role he played in the movie *Juice*. This violates a dimension of hip-hop authenticity, true-to-self. However, his acting skills were so convincing that he gave the appearance of being his authentic self. Tupac's persona was a verisimilar authenticity reinforced by perception rather than being.

By further investigation of hip-hop and youth culture I can test the theories I formed during my research. It is the continued shifts in society and media that necessitates constant revisiting of

[113] Tupac is a rapper based out of California that died in 1996.

a cultural site. I use this dissertation as a call for an updated look at authenticity and hip-hop. The ever changing youth culture that started in the South Bronx and greatly influenced everything from art to politics is now influencing another generation. The children of rappers are now rapping[114], soon to be followed by the grandchildren of the golden era of hip-hop. How hip-hop manifests for future generations proves to be fertile soil for new scholarship to grow.

[114] An example of the generational torch being passed is the BET Hip-Hop Award show cypher featuring emcees Rev Run, from Run DMC, Ice Cube, and their children.

# APPENDIX A

## Research Information Sheet (v. 1)

Title of Study: Whiteness in Hip Hop (working title)

Principal Investigator (PI): Dale Anderson
Department of Communication
313 909-7435

**Purpose:**

You are being asked to be in a research study of the perceptions of white hip hop fans, practitioners, and consumers because you interact with rap music and/or hip hop culture. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University.

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in a brief interview that will explore your participation in and perceptions of the event you are attending and your perceptions of hip hop culture. The interviews will last approximately one hour. You have the option to terminate the interview at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions asked of you for any reason you see fit. You may be contacted in the future for brief follow up interviews. These rights pertain to any necessary follow-up interviews, as well.

**Benefits:**

- As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

**Risks:**

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

**Costs**

- There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

**Compensation**

- You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

- All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept without any identifiers.

**Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Dale Anderson at 313 909-7435 or via email at dv3501@wayne.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Human Investigation Committee can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

**Participation:**

By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

## APPENDIX B

### Research Information Sheet (v. 2)

Title of Study: Whiteness in Hip Hop (working title)

Principal Investigator (PI): Dale Anderson
Department of Communication
313 909-7435

**Purpose:**

You are being asked to be in a research study of the perceptions of white hip hop fans, practitioners, and consumers because you interact with rap music and/or hip hop culture. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University and local hip-hop events.

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will explore your participation in and perceptions of hip hop culture and rap music. The interviews will last approximately one hour. You have the option to terminate the interview at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions asked of you for any reason you see fit. You may be contacted in the future for brief follow up interviews. These rights pertain to any necessary follow-up interviews, as well.

**Benefits:**

- As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

**Risks:**

By taking part in this study, you may experience the loss of confidentiality. Contact information will be collected from you for the purpose of conducting follow-up interviews. Also audio recording of your interview will contribute to this risk.

However steps will be taken to preserve the confidentiality of your identity. Your name and contact information will not be linked, in any way, to the information collected from you. Also the audio recordings will be immediately transcribed and the digital audio recording will be deleted. All identifying information will be removed during the transcription process.

**Costs**

- There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

**Compensation**

- For taking part in this research study, you will be paid for your time and inconvenience. On completion of your interview you will receive the amount of $10.

**Confidentiality:**

- You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

**Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Dale Anderson at 313 909-7435 or via email at dv3501@wayne.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Human Investigation Committee can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

**Participation:**

By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

# APPENDIX C

## Interview Protocol for Indepth Interview

Title of Study: Whiteness in Hip Hop (working title)

Principal Investigator (PI): Dale Anderson
Department of Communication
313 909-7435

**Introduction:**

Thank you for participating in my research project. You have received your received your information sheet about informed consent, correct?

As stated in the informed consent document you have the right of to refuse to answer any question. Also you will have the opportunity to review the transcript of this interview to amend or clarify any answer you gave. This interview will take about one hour and will be a semi-structured interview.

Do you have any questions before we began this interview?

**Section 1 – Perspective and Interaction with hip-hop**

1) When do you first recall interacting with rap music and/or hip-hop culture?
2) How has your interaction and involvement with the music and culture changed over time?
3) Could you describe the level of participation you have with the culture currently?
4) Could you describe your particular tastes in rap music?
5) Do you have favorite artist or performers?
6) What is it about those artist/performers that you are drawn to?
7) Are their different sub-genres within rap music?
8) What are those sub-genres & what are some artist/performers associated with those sub-genres?

**Section 2 – Identity**

1) How would you describe yourself?
2) Has hip-hop influenced your identity?
3) How has hip-hop influenced your identity?
4) What are some factors that have influenced your identity?
5) How would your describe yourself in terms of race/ethnicity?

**Section 3 – Description of Cultural Site**

1) How frequently do you attend events that showcase hip-hop artist/performers?
2) What types of events do you attend?
3) Could you describe the activities that happen at this event?
4) What are the activities that you partake in at these events?
5) Could you describe the typical person that attends this type of event?
6) Would you identify yourself as a typical person that attends this type of event?
7) How are you similar to a typical person at this type of event?
8) How do you differ from the typical person at this type of event?
9) What other ways do you interact with the culture?
10) How frequently do you interact with hip-hop or rap music in those ways?
11) Could you describe the typical activities you engage in when interacting in these ways?

**Section 5 – Authenticity**

1) Could you describe an "authentic" hip-hopper?
2) What characteristics or actions make someone an "authentic" hip-hopper?
3) Would you describe yourself as "authentic?" why (or why not)?
4) Could you describe someone who is "inauthentic" in hip-hop?

**Section 6 – Hip-hop and Race**

We are almost finished here; I would just like to revisit an earlier discussion about race and identity.

1) Is hip-hop linked more closely to one racial/ethnic group then another? (Which group?)
2) Has hip-hop influenced you perceptions about another racial/ethnic group(s), positively or negatively?
3) From your perspective has hip-hop been a positive or negative effect on the perceptions of any racial/ethnic groups? (Which ones? How?)

Thank you again for your time. I would like conclude this interview by giving you an opportunity to add anything that may pertain to your experience as a hip-hopper or you perspective on hip-hop culture.

## APPENDIX D

### Key for audit trail

Format for Domain citation (Source:Page#) Example (CA1:p.1)

Format for Taxonomy citation (Source:Page#, Domain#)Example (CA1:p.1,D1)

Format for Componential citation (Source:Page#) Example (CA1:p.1)

KEY

CA = Cultural Artifact

I = Interview

FN = Fieldnotes

D = Domain

All Data will have a corresponding number

(Example the first trip to the field will be labeled Fieldnotes 1 or FN1)

NOTES:

Native Terms or verbatim quotes will appear in quotation marks

Observer Terms or paraphrased quotes will appear w/o quotation marks

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## ABSTRACT

**RE/PRESENATION OF HIP-HOP: AN EXPLORATION OF WHITE HIP-HOP FANS, CONSUMERS AND PRACTITIONERS**

by

**DALE ANDERSON**

**May 2015**

**Advisor**: Dr. Donyale Padgett

**Major**: Communication

**Degree**: Doctor of Philosophy

Whites make up the majority of hip-hop consumers and participants. However, scholars have created a clear link between hip-hop, the African American community, and African Diaspora. Through ethnographic fieldwork and autoethnography, I explore the intersection of race and hip-hop. With the data from my trips to hip-hop events and in-depth interviews: I answered 5 research question.

**(RQ1) How does tension between subculturalists and post-subculturalists influence the understanding of how the hip-hop community is shaped by hip-hop music and art?**

**(RQ2) In what ways do white hip-hoppers conceptualize authenticity in hip-hop?**

**(RQ3) In what ways do whites re/present an authentic hip-hop identity?**

**(RQ4) How does whiteness influence white hip-hoppers' authenticity?**

**(RQ5) How does hip-hop influence how whites understand race?**

Due to changes in the culture, I found that both subcultural and post-subcultural theorist account for different elements of the structure of hip-hop communit(ies). The participants in this study noted an oscillation between class/resistance community identity, as described by

subculturist, and a neo-tribal, accounted for by post-subculture theorist. Hip-hoppers' oscillation between these poles facilitated the ability of white hip-hoppers to manipulate/alter markers of authenticity to benefit their re/presentation of an authentic hip-hop persona. Along with the changing structure of hip-hop, whites also utilized their white privilege to enable their selective adherence to previously documented authenticity markers. While white hip-hoppers are acutely aware of race, their ability to discuss race in hip-hop and beyond was influenced more by factors unrelated to their participation in the hip-hop community, such as type/level of education.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Dale Anderson received his Bachelors of Arts degree from Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in Ypsilanti, MI. He continued his academic career at Eastern Michigan, receiving his Masters of Arts in Communication Studies. This dissertation is submitted as a degree requirement for his Doctorate of Philosophy in Communication from Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. He has published two book chapters, one of those was co-authored, and presented at numerous conferences. His scholastic focus is hip-hop and youth culture, with a special emphasis on how members of those communities are influenced by participating.

You can contact Dale by email at daleanderson55@gmail.com