



Volume 4 Issue 1 ISSN 2331-5563

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Table of Contents

Essays

After Blackness, Then Blackness: Afro-Pessimism, Black Life, and Classical Hip Hop as Counter-Performance Kevin Eubanks.....	5
The Vulgar Voice on the New Black Realist Soundtrack: Sounds of Resistance, Policing and Crime in Spike Lee's Clockers James Millea.....	23
Eminem's Character, Stan: A Bio-Psycho-Social Autopsy Akeem Sule and Becky Inkster	43
White Chicks with a Gangsta' Pitch: Gendered Whiteness in United States Rap Culture (1990-2017) Melvin L. Williams.....	50
Addict Rap?: The Shift from Drug Distributor to Drug Consumer in Hip Hop CalvinJohn Smiley	94
Making Movie Money: A 25-Year Analysis of Rappers' Acting Roles in Hollywood Movies Tia Tyree.....	118
Book Reviews	148
<i>Hip Hop DJs and the Evolution of Technology: Cultural Exchange, Innovation, and Democratization</i> by André Sirois Reviewed by Roy Christopher	148

After Blackness, Then Blackness: Afro-Pessimism, Black Life, and Classical Hip Hop as Counter-Performance

Kevin Eubanks

Just as Frank Wilderson cites the propensity of the black performance to obscure and evade black life and reality and calls for a more “direct reflection” on the “ghosts and grammar” that haunt the enactment of black subjectivity, Jared Sexton’s critique of Fred Moten’s optimism lies in the latter’s emphasis on the “fugitive ontology” of blackness, an ontology that has the black always *on the run* from the structures that govern a priori the anti-black world into which it would pretend to escape. Consequently, the challenge of afro-pessimism is to imagine, amidst the afro-pessimist negation, a black movement that is *not* or *other than* performative, something more than a “narrative strategy hoping to slip the noose of a life shaped by slavery,” but instead a more visceral apprehension of and engagement with the structural violence against blackness as “a grammar of emergence and being.” The question I would like to answer here is whether in Hip Hop one can discern just such a movement and apprehension.

Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in [...]. That’s the whole point of the enterprise at some level. It is all about the implications of this agreed-upon point where arguments (should) begin, but they cannot (yet) proceed.

– Jared Sexton, “*The Social Life of Social Death*” (2011)

I know the price of life. I’m knowin’ how much it’s worth.

– Kendrick Lamar, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015)

“Can I live?” -- when Jay-Z asks this question repeatedly on his 1996 album *Reasonable Doubt*, he not only asks the question that lies at the heart of the afro-pessimist critical tradition, but he also calls to mind the ongoing history of Hip Hop’s inquiry into the status and nature of black life and the everyday mantra, the “lived experience,” of so many black voices in America: “We hustle out of a sense of hopelessness, sort of a desperation [...]. We feel we have nothing to lose, so we offer you, well, we offer our lives. What do you bring to the table?” Here Jay-Z asks *the* question that echoes throughout slavery’s afterlife and stages his own encounter with the problem of whether Hip Hop might somehow craft a vital black existence out of social death; in the process, Jay-Z reinforces the dominant leitmotif both of afro-pessimism and of classical Hip Hop from the 1980s and 1990s.

On the one hand, Hip Hop’s *hustle* reflects the “outlaw ontology” and “criminal life” upon which Fred Moten bases his “pre(optical) optimism” in “The Case of Blackness” and through which he locates blackness’s escape route to independence.¹ On the other hand, afro-pessimism’s cautious apprehension surrounding the possibility of black social life, especially insofar as it is called a “fugitive” life (Moten), is also clearly

¹ Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 182.

in play across the Hip Hop aesthetic and an embedded feature of its ontology. Poised against the positive value assigned to such performativity is the insistence that these signs of life are still only shadows of life, a unique predicament that situates Hip Hop's particular expression of blackness alongside the contemporary debate between black optimists and afro-pessimists, and especially where that debate pivots on the limits of black performativity.

This predicament thrusts us, for instance, into the orbit of Saidiya Hartman's seminal commentary in *Scenes of Subjection* on the simultaneous effects of the slave performance, where "[o]ne performance [is] aimed to reproduce and secure the relations of domination and the other to manipulate appearances in order to challenge these relations and create a space for action not generally available."² For Hartman, any modicum of free movement granted in the performance is simultaneously challenged, ontologically-structurally, by the circumstances of its expression: "Since acts of resistance exist within the context of relations of domination and are not external to them, they acquire their character from these relations, and vice-versa."³ Conventional scholarship in Hip Hop studies generally comes down on one or the other side of Hartman's simultaneity. Hip Hop is said either to effectively challenge the political status quo through various means or it is said to reproduce the terms of its captivity.

Where Hartman's scene carves out "a space for action not generally available," Frank Wilderson's short but incisive critique in "Grammar and Ghosts" goes much further than Hartman's by denying "any causal link between the performance and the emancipation of the black people who produced and consumed it - as though art was the very essence of, rather than an accompaniment to, structural change."⁴ For Wilderson, any aesthetic-political gains made by the black performance nevertheless leave the substructures of anti-blackness intact; in short, Hartman's "space for action" is always already compromised - there simply is no free space for blackness in a world governed by whiteness. Jay-Z's refrain "Can I live?" remains a question, after all, and as such Hip Hop emerges not only as a performance of black (social) life but also, like afro-pessimism itself, as a valuable critical commentary on its relative possibility or impossibility.

Wilderson puts it bluntly at the end of "Grammar and Ghosts": "This is the problem that performance studies has yet to work through: How, or more to the point, why does one perform in and for a world that has forced upon one cartographic and temporal injunctions that are always already operative at every scale, from the body to the village to the nation to the continent to the diaspora? Who is served by [...] this easy grammatical join of art and liberation?"⁵ Every black performance, Wilderson says, is "haunted by the grammar and ghosts of Africa's structural violence," and this haunting

² Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 8.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Frank Wilderson, "Grammar and Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," *Theatre Survey* 50, no. 1 (2009): 121.

⁵ Ibid, 124.

prevents the black performance from achieving the one thing structural change of the kind imagined by Wilderson requires, namely, as he calls it, “direct reflection.”⁶

Where Wilderson describes the problem as it animates or, rather, fails to animate the field of performance studies, Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods describe the same problem as it manifests in Hip Hop studies: “Hip hop studies will remain utterly wretched unless it comes to terms with the structure of gratuitous violence in which it exists. In order to chart an ethical future, hip hop studies must *become* black studies, and in so doing, confront the ways in which black existence in an anti-black world – in other words, a universe where black life is structurally impermissible – is bound up with [...] a fugitive life ‘lived in loss.’”⁷ According to Saucier and Woods, Hip Hop studies too routinely embraces the performance of black pathology at the expense of taking head on the structural conditions that lead to the pathology in the first place; consequently, they challenge Hip Hop studies, in becoming *black* studies, to come to terms with the *structure* instead of the *performance* of black life.⁸

From its very beginnings, Hip Hop exposes these structures, effectively mapping the edge of a claustrophobic boundary that separates black social life from white civil society:

The Coup, “Not yet Free,” <i>Kill My Landlord</i> (1993)	Notorious BIG, “Suicidal Thoughts,” <i>Ready to Die</i> (1994)	Mobb Deep, “Shook Ones,” <i>Infamous</i> (1995)
In this land I can’t stand or sit and I get shit thrown up in my face A brother never gets his props I’m doing belly flops at the Department of Waste.	When I die, fuck it I wanna go to hell cuz I’m a piece of shit it ain’t hard to fucking tell It don’t make sense going to heaven with the goody-goodies, dressed in white I like black Timbs and black hoodies	When the slugs penetrate you feel a burning sensation getting closer to God in a tight situation Now take these words home and think it through or the next rhyme I write might be about you

There is, after all, no “easy grammatical join of art and liberation” at work in The Coup’s “belly flops,” Biggie’s self-loathing, or Mobb Deep’s “tight situation.” In these examples, Hip Hop clearly recognizes and seeks to come to terms with the gratuitous structural violence of black life, and, as I would like to argue here, realizes precisely

⁶ Ibid, 122-123.

⁷ P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, “Hip Hop Studies in Black,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 26, no. 2-3 (2014): 285.

⁸ Ibid, 274.

what Wilderson says is really wanted of black art and what Saucier and Woods say is wanted in Hip Hop studies, that is, a more “direct reflection” on the structural basis of black captivity.

Just as Wilderson cites the propensity of the black performance to obscure rather than make any kind of authentic contact with black social life, Jared Sexton takes to task Fred Moten’s positive emphasis on the “fugitive ontology” of blackness, an ontology that has blackness always *on the run* and as such always in flight *away* from the structures that govern a priori the anti-black world. Thus the broader challenge of afro-pessimism is to imagine amidst the afro-pessimist negation a more vital black movement that is *not* or *other* than performative, something more than a “narrative strategy hoping to slip the noose of a life shaped by slavery.”⁹ Only in the wake of a more visceral confrontation with anti-blackness can blackness convert the ghosts of slavery into what Wilderson calls “a grammar of emergence and being.”¹⁰ The question this essay would like to answer is whether in Hip Hop one can discern just such a movement.

Jared Sexton’s forceful reminder that black life, as impermissible as it may be, is nevertheless *lived*,¹¹ and Wilderson’s belief that performance and ontology do, in fact, meet, amount to a shared, albeit very cautious, optimism that implies a transformative black aesthetic and the possibility, not the impossibility (as one might expect), of blackness. According to afro-pessimism, what is wanted is a more direct critical engagement with the implications *for* black life of the antagonism itself – what Frank Wilderson refers to (over and against the liberation model) as a model of “understanding” and what Sexton refers to as the necessity of “getting inside [blackness].” It is, then, within the context of Moten’s “fugitive” performance and Wilderson’s biting critique of performativity that Sexton asks whether a black art that “affirms (social) life can avoid the thanatological dead end if it does not will its own (social) death.”¹² Sexton suggests that such a will is forced, in its “tight situation,” to take an unprecedented *turn* towards itself: “In a world structured by the twin axioms of white superiority and black inferiority, of white existence and black nonexistence [...] the zero degree of transformation is the turn toward blackness.”¹³

And this turn, I’d like to argue, would be tantamount to a *counter*-performance, a turning toward itself and, as such, toward an unprecedented confrontation with the oppressive productions of anti-blackness. From this opening, even if the limits of black performance cannot be denied, then at least we can imagine in Hip Hop the performance of a specifically black reality and life, one not scripted by whiteness – an entirely different kind of speech act, if you will, because it is an entirely different

⁹ Wilderson, “Grammar,” 122.

¹⁰ Ibid, 119.

¹¹ Jared Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism,” *InTensions* 5, (2011): 28-29.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 27.

entrance into language. Then again, it could just as easily be that in this rescripting or reterritorialization of blackness there is something (in the turning toward blackness) that undoes the performance itself in a much more absolute sense.

Simply put, what is wanted by afro-pessimism is the achievement of the understanding that the way *out* for blackness is *in*. And this curious resolution invites an answer to Sexton's challenge to his readers to conceive of black life as taking place in "a world in which the world does not live" and to accept afro-pessimism as "'not but nothing other than' black optimism."¹⁴ In turn, it also invites an answer to Wilderson's question of how an authentic black performance is possible, much less wanted, "*in and for* a world that has forced upon one cartographic and temporal injunction that are always already operative at every scale."¹⁵ The answer, it seems, is that it isn't, but this doesn't also render black life/art impossible since Sexton conceives for us a black life and black art that takes place neither *in* nor *for* an anti-black world but rather *in and for* a world in which *that* world does not live, a black world, and it is, consequently and following Sexton's clearing, only *in and out of this* world that an authentic black freedom and optimism can position itself to emerge.

In its turn toward blackness, Hip Hop performativity can be said to "come to terms with the structures of gratuitous violence," to become black studies, and to give voice to the "emergence and being" of an ontology that, while not yet free, is also no longer slave. Insofar as acts of resistance are always performative and, following Hartman, "acquire their character from [...] relations [of domination], and vice-versa,"¹⁶ these acts are not prevented from shaping an independent subjective and social relation to the dominant reality and, in effect, acquiring a freedom and movement, even a *world*, perhaps, that in another world is denied to them. Hip Hop would appear to operate and gather its force from its being jammed up at this confluence where Wilderson suggests performance and ontology merge into one.

In the center of The Coup's track "Not yet Free" (1993), after having spelled out the day to day struggle of black life – "I can't stand or sit and not get shit thrown up in my face" – lead MC, Boots Riley, raps:

*Niggas, thugs, dope dealers, and pimps, basketball players, rap stars and simps:
That's what little black boys are made of.
Sluts, hos, and press the naps around your neck, broads pop that coochie bitches stay in check:
That's what little black girls are made of.*

*But if we're made of that
Who made us?
And what can we do to change us?*

¹⁴ Ibid, 37.

¹⁵ See note 4 above.

¹⁶ See note 2 above.

Boots certainly recognizes a “blackness” in the performance, the way in which blackness is articulated, or, better, scripted within the black community, within Hip Hop, and under the authority and direction of a violent and oppressive system of anti-blackness – “I got a mirror in my pocket and I practice looking hard.” At the same time, his very recognition of the script handed down to blackness by whiteness and of another self struggling to navigate the imposition reveals a counter stance and a sort of anti- or counter-performance. Boots seeks to expose the imposition as script, to enlist his listeners and, by extension, the black community to rewrite the script anew, and thus to confront the structural antagonism itself in such a way, I think, called for by afro-pessimism insofar as in this verse what it means to *do* blackness and what it means to *be* black do, in fact, and rather self-consciously, meet.

Moreover, it is in this promise of the meeting, at the historical-aesthetic-critical crossing paths of blackness with itself, that both Wilderson and artists like The Coup evince optimism similar to Sexton’s faith in the turn toward blackness. In fact, one could say that Sexton’s turning takes place precisely at Wilderson’s intersection. Consequently, the question of how one might imagine the possibility of black social life is the right question to ask – against the backdrop of afro-pessimism’s claim that “there is no black (social) life,” Moten asks his readers in “The Case of Blackness” to “fathom a [black] social life that tends toward death, that enacts a kind of being-toward-death, and which, because of such tendency and enactment, maintains a terribly beautiful vitality?”¹⁷ As afro-pessimism insists, however, this question cannot be asked at the expense of the afro-pessimist denial but must always be envisioned against it. In other words, only once the end (or social death) of blackness has been announced (This is an “agreed upon point,” after all) can the social life of blackness be articulated for the first time. Therefore, we find ourselves with the afro-pessimists, and, not coincidentally, with Hip Hop, as much at the beginning of blackness as at the end of it.

The Turn toward Blackness

Deleuze and Guattari’s observation in *A Thousand Plateaus* that “European racism has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other”¹⁸ helps us to better understand what Sexton means when he says that the most radical negation of the anti-black world is also the most radical affirmation of a blackened one, which is to say, how such a turning toward blackness can be more precisely grasped as a turning away not from the antagonism as such but away from the pathology generated in it, becoming something other than “black” for the first time insofar as *this* is the name of the “impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination.”¹⁹ I want to argue here that it is in this otherness that the black freedom denied by afro-pessimism moves on its own and not according to but always against the dictates of white power. Sexton, whose

¹⁷ Moten, “Case,” 188.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1987): 160.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

work is close kin to Wilderson’s, suggests it is precisely here, on the point of what afro-pessimism makes possible (instead of what it doesn’t), that arguments should begin and that an authentic afro-optimism can be felt. Such a hard-fought optimism must necessarily move beyond *ressentiment* toward critique, where the long process of abolition can be completed, an enduring process that is no longer caught up in the affairs of the master, but rather, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, involves a “self-destruction [of blackness]” that has “nothing to do with the death drive”²⁰ and that, in fact, as Sexton argues, calls into being a world of its own. Within the scope of Deleuze and Guattari’s critical race theory, the black world described by Sexton is not the “thanatological dead end”²¹ of social death that he warns about but rather the world opened up in the constant defense against it. And insofar as black studies is a way forward, it is also a way *toward* blackness and thus requires critical proximity as much as it requires critical distance, and Sexton’s transformative aesthetic that has blackness turning toward itself is a useful lens through which to read Hip Hop, in its willing the death of one history through the grammar of another’s emergence, as a way of moving blackness nearer to itself.

As afro-pessimism suggests, achieving this proximity to blackness begins with achieving a radical proximity to the structural negation that makes blackness what it is and then turning upon the negation in such a way that returns body and voice to the sovereign black subject and insists on being *against* the reality of its erasure:

Public Enemy, “Don’t Believe the Hype <i>It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back</i> (1988)	NWA, “Fuck the Police,” <i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (1988)	ODB, “Reunited,” <i>Wu-Tang Forever</i> (1997)
Back – caught you lookin’ for the same thing It’s a new thing Check out this I bring Uh, oh, the roll below the level cuz I’m living low Next to the bass (C’mon!) Turn up the radio Number one, not born to run about the gun I wasn’t licensed to have one The minute they see me,	<i>Ice Cube:</i> Fuck that shit cuz I ain’t the one for a punk motherfucker with a badge and a gun to be beating on <i>MC Ren:</i> I’m a sniper with a hell of a scope taking out a cop or two they can’t cope with me	Bitch ass niggas counterfeit the funk I smoke the bead of the skunk, tree top of the trunk, moonshine drunken monk, your head get shrunk, your treasure sunk. My name’s Black you worms wanna play in my dirt? Bitch stop! My momma serves free lunch from the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

AFTER BLACKNESS

fear me	[...]	church [...]
I'm the epitome of "public enemy"	So I'mma turn it around put in my clip, yo	Unglove the noose Watch a nigga transfuse
Used, abused, without clues	and this is the sound	Dirty add to the fuse
I refuse to blow a fuse	<i>Easy E:</i> They put out my picture with silence cuz my identity by itself causes violence	

Old Dirty Bastard's (ODB's) unique style famously "has no father" (36 Chambers) and thus operates at least in part independently of the father's authority. Hip Hop, in a similar denial, functions independently of the authority of both black and white performance traditions even as it (mis)appropriates them and in doing so bastardizes what Moten calls the "natal occasion" of blackness, black captivity and black artistic traditions. ODB seems to know he is already dead, a social corpse he calls by its name, his name: "Black." And, yet, it is the signature of a life that resonates with the question of whether in Hip Hop we can name something as an affirmation that both recognizes the truth-claims of afro-pessimism and somehow responds to its forceful negations. ODB's verse clearly reflects the "gratuitous violence in which [Hip Hop] exists," and he plays the role of the quintessential antagonist in the plot of white reality well enough, but it is also as much a vigorous counter-stance - "Unglove the noose/Watch a nigga transfuse" - as it is a *mere* performance of black pathology,²² and breaking through the surface of his performance is the voice and figure of a black protagonist that owes nothing to the white script, and thus involves an emphatic self-overcoming of "blackness" that begins not with evasion but with a willing encounter with what it means to *be* towards death. The otherwise very literal dead end signaled in the sharp finality and recognition of the premise, "My name's Black," opens at the same time toward an enigmatic subjectivity, and, even more so, an indecipherability for which ODB is well-known and that in its (only apparently) parodic enactment of blackness manifests as a constant threat to white capacity in and through which, it may be said, both abolition and a particular kind of black social life are realized. In this way, Hip Hop performativity actively resists speaking in and for an anti-black world, "You worms wanna play in my dirt? Bitch stop!," and in doing so confirms the inseparability of black performance and ontology.

These deliberate strategies are at work, too, in NWA's violent positioning over and against the police, where Cube asserts his dignity and independence ("I ain't the one [...] to be beating on"); Easy E actively enters that busy crossing where black performance and black identity, where a black and a white script, converge ("[M]y identity itself causes violence"); and Ren deftly recognizes the incapacity of white

²² Greg Thomas says the same of "gangsta" rap in Hip Hop Revolution in the Flesh.

power to “cope” with the appearance of this new iteration of blackness when he quite literally stops running and turns around (“So I’mma *turn it around*/Put in my clip, yo,/and *this is the sound*”) in a move that aligns his turning both with a brand new positioning of black subjectivity over and against the state and with the sound of the blast, that is to say, with Hip Hop music and culture and the birth of “gangsta” rap.

Public Enemy’s turn toward blackness, while stylistically easily differentiated from NWA’s or the Wu-Tang Clan’s or anyone else’s, nevertheless stakes out a similar claim relative both to the divide between the performance and the ontology of blackness and to the structural obstacles of anti-blackness. On the one hand, the so-called “fear of a black planet” has its source in the historical mechanics of anti-blackness, where white civil society continually stokes its own irrational fear of the black subject – “They see me, fear me/I’m the epitome of ‘public enemy’). It is in this sense that Public Enemy is “back” again, another revolutionary voice in the history of slave rebellions and the ongoing struggle for civil equality and freedom. On the other hand, they quite literally catch us “looking for the same thing,” when, as they point out, “it’s a new thing.”

In all of these examples Hip Hop is *not* “born to run”; it is both a “sequel” and an original (“Number One”). It is not so much late as right on time, a brand new thing, and, as such, it invokes something *other* than performance since to perform “blackness” means to (re)iterate an inherited identity/value that has been maintained and developed over time and, perhaps most importantly, that has been conferred upon the performer from the outside. Here in these examples and across the rhythmic Hip Hop landscape, we find a blackness speaking of itself for itself and “out of the possibilities embedded in a social *life*.”²³ That in each case we are talking about a black ontology *and* Hip Hop performativity certainly presents a difficulty, but this difficulty is both a vital symptom of their inseparability and a function of the genre. In fact, Hip Hop enters the history of discourse surrounding the character and nature of black life and agency in this way, with an optimistic strength and vitality that is in play in each of the examples above; as Chuck D insists, “YES! was the start of my last jam.”

Consequently, it is possible that in the turn toward blackness (Sexton) that is at the same time the new work of understanding and of engaged reflection (Wilderson) blackness moves freely within the antagonism itself, or, perhaps, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, *on* it: “Staying stratified – organized, signified, subjected – is not the worst that can happen [...]. This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements [...], lines of flight.”²⁴ It seems when Wilderson asks us to replace the work of liberation with the work of understanding or when Sexton describes his turn toward blackness, they are challenging their readers to imagine black life as only possible within this predicament, within the context and confines of its subjection. Insofar as this is the case, the afro-pessimist antagonism begins to acquire the look and

²³ Moten, “Case,” 192.

²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 161.

feel of the Deleuzian stratum, the black hole in/on the white face, which must be lived in and dealt with from the inside, or better, “the dividing line is not between the inside and outside but rather is internal to simultaneous signifying chains and successive subjective choices.”²⁵

The Deleuzian stratum and the structural antagonisms of anti-blackness clearly accommodate the simultaneous effects of Hartman’s slave performance, where a “space for action” is carved out and amplified on (and *only* on) *one* side of the simultaneity, a so-called “line of flight.” It is obvious enough that Hip Hop, in this scenario, manages to “experiment with the opportunities [the stratum] offers,” but, remaining “stratified – organized, signified, subjected, etc.,” nevertheless maintains the structural effects of anti-blackness. Accordingly, the black subject, in chasing its liberty, and in keeping with the afro-pessimist paradigm, finds itself again in escape mode and still very much on the run. In order to achieve truly decisive political effects, blackness must at some point stop running and turn around, as NWA, Public Enemy, and Wu-Tang all do in the above examples. Such moves are an affront to the simultaneity of the slave performance and the successive effects of oppression and threaten the integrity of the structures that support them, and it is through these means that black art (and life) begins to acquire its character from something *other* than those “relations of domination” that have historically held it captive.

After all, the black hole can only appear on the white face, and yet the future of the face, we are told, is guaranteed only in its undoing. Remarkably, Deleuze and Guattari also tell us that “there is something absolutely inhuman about the face. [...]. The inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start,”²⁶ and as such the black slash/black hole emerges here as something like the mark of black human agency and practice upon it. Here at least it would seem that Deleuze and Guattari are in agreement with the afro-pessimists, for whom becoming something other than black is the only thing that breaks the antagonism apart – thus the only way to move past the afterlife of slavery is to destabilize the white face and so enter the afterlife of blackness itself, for, as Public Enemy would have it, blackness can always find itself situated at the edge of an entirely new significance and signification.

Praxis as Counter-Performance

The structural antagonism that divides the world of the slave from the world of the human provokes the obvious response – the answer to black freedom lies in the restoration of black humanity, in slavery’s abolition, in its becoming human once again – but it is precisely this, remember, that has been made “impermissible.” For Wilderson, the case against the performative lies in “the prohibition against attaining differentiation or self-knowledge” stemming from the “structural violence that removes

²⁵ Ibid, 178.

²⁶ Ibid, 171.

black 'people' from the world."²⁷ Wilderson's case, of course, follows on the heels of many others, including Hartman, who wonders "whether the rights of man and citizen are realizable or whether the appellation 'human' can be borne equally by all"²⁸ and Sylvia Wynter, for whom "'humanity' refuses to signify any ontological primacy within Afro-diasporic discourses."²⁹ As Hartman points out, the shift "from chattel to man" is merely "a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection" (6). Thus the promise of civil society is one that cannot be kept, or rather, in being kept denies to blackness exactly what it was promised in the first place. Consequently, becoming something other than black also means becoming something other than human, insofar as this, too, is derived from the relations of domination that support the structural antagonism afro-pessimists have worked so hard to expose. And this is precisely where Sylvia Wynter's work is so pertinent, since Wynter, who admits the immovable conception both of the human category and of the white civil society built upon it, in short, the total force of the afro-pessimist structural analysis, nevertheless conceives of a way of being without and outside of it. Wynter describes this becoming other as a process through which blackness and what it means to be human, an authentic black humanity, are "redefined as praxis."

The way in which Wynter's thought has been deployed to locate black life in black music is altogether kindred with Moten's objectives in *In the Break* and "The Case of Blackness" and resonates directly with Sexton's question of whether an aesthetics that "affirms (social) life can avoid the thanatological dead end if it does not will its own (social) death."³⁰ As Katherine McKittrick explains, according to Wynter, "black cultural production writes scientific and disciplinary knowledge anew, as necessarily a human project."³¹ And, as Alexander Weheliye argues, Wynter's brand of "[b]lack humanism disenchants 'Man as Man,' bringing 'into being different modes of the *human*' because it deploys the very formulation of 'man' as catachresis."³² Both Wynter and others, like Kodwo Eshun, view black music as a potential staging ground for a black humanity that is otherwise obscured by anti-blackness. However, where Eshun tends to locate black humanity in the "nonhuman otherworldliness" of Afrofuturist music, Wynter understands that black being is always being-in-the-world and thus requires a special proximity signaled only in the turn *toward* blackness, which, according to Wynter, is at the same time a turn *toward* 'praxis' insofar as blackness is the product of both an individual and collective "self-making" (Thomas). And what else is Hip Hop if not just such a turning toward, a black lodging in/on the white face that gathers its strength

²⁷ Wilderson, "Grammar," 121.

²⁸ Hartman, *Scenes*, 6.

²⁹ Alexander G. Weheliye, "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music," *Social Text*-71 20, no. 2 (2002): 27.

³⁰ Sexton, "Social Life," 16.

³¹ Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015).

³² Weheliye, "Feenin'," 27.

and virtue by “tearing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means of exploration, tearing the unconscious away from significance [*sic*] and interpretation in order to make it a veritable production”³³ and/or ‘praxis’? From Wynter’s perspective, the distinction between what it means to *be* black and what it means to *do* blackness falls away and collapses in the category of ‘praxis,’ through which an authentic black humanity is quite literally *made* intelligible.

Although there are many ways in which Hip Hop accomplishes this making, and a thorough treatment of all of them is well beyond the scope of my objectives here, such an achievement is primarily enabled and made manifest through Hip Hop’s linguistic and sonic in(ter)ventions, all of which are made readily apparent in the figure of *the flow* – that apotheosis of linguistic freedom to which every rap aspires and around which Hip Hop’s ritualistic experimentation with language and meaning revolves. In fact, nothing quite conflates *being* and *doing* blackness like the “veritable production[s]” of black voices that Hip Hop, essentially, *is*. And, yet, because language is wholly determined by structural conditions that prevent its ever being able to name that to which it would hope to refer, or, rather, *only* name it – this, by the way, is the manner by which language facilitates our primal separation from being – and Hip Hop is unimaginable without the language through which it is performed, one would guess that blackness is cursed, so to speak, to be always chasing, fugitive-like, something like the “ghosts” of Wilderson’s haunting.

We may do well here to remember Theodor Adorno’s take on the end of art (as, not coincidentally, Moten does in “The Case of Blackness”) since for Adorno it is precisely this coincidence that ensures art’s continuation: “Art survives because the moment to realize it was missed.” Adorno’s paradox is not at all unlike Wilderson’s not so “easy grammatical join of art and liberation” – performance falls short precisely because it is an accompaniment to structural change and not necessary to it. For art to hit its target is for it to no longer *be* art. This predicament mirrors the one blackness is in, for blackness, too, cannot hope to ever coincide with itself because of the structural intrusions of anti-blackness and the processes that remove black people from the world. And yet all of Hip Hop aspires to a condition under which language as performance *becomes* the realization of its original freedom and in so doing becomes something other than performance – this is what the flow *is*, and it serves to illustrate the way in which Hip Hop cuts across the nature of performance, and, in the process, provides an analogy to black life that truly belongs to it. When Hip Hop hits its target, blackness *per se*, it, too, ceases to be performance and becomes something else in becoming itself.

It is no accident, for instance, that Hip Hop, the historical origins of which can be traced to the street cipher and to party DJs, like DJ Kool Herc, who began to “talk” over the record, emerges out of an economic, technological lack and isolation, or, put differently, just another kind of voicelessness. Every written/recorded rap, after all, invokes a memory of itself as *freestyle*, and nothing links the performance of blackness in Hip Hop more clearly and directly with the structural “noose of slavery” and the

³³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 160.

ontological status of the black subject than Boots' notation at the end of "Not Yet Free": "No, this is not yet freestyle cuz we are not yet free." Nevertheless, in voicing the limits of its own performance, Hip Hop's awareness generates a threatening and viable counter-position over and against those relations of domination in which it knows it is caught up.

Both the turn toward blackness and the counter-performative can be seen operating across Hip Hop, where what is reinforced is the amplification of a distinctly black grammar and agency. On Method Man and Redman's *Blackout!* (1999), guest MC, Streetlife, raps:

*I'm the cynical, lyrical, rap individual
On my death bed I spit sick flows that's critical
I'm not a fan of this, I'm a mic vandalist
Thug therapist, my clan's too original [...]
Who wanna come test, lick the sweat from my genitals
We can get off the mic and get a little physical*

In this verse, as in so many others, the mic amplifies rather than silences the black voice and predicament. As ODB showed us earlier, Street Life's flow exemplifies the way in which a rap aesthetic inaugurates a specific and original way of being in the world; the names of this new black subject proliferate throughout the sequence: mic vandalist, thug therapist, rhyme writer, hip hop provider, live wire. Just as ODB begins at the end ("You worms wanna play in my dirt"), here a "cynical, lyrical, rap individual" is born on his "deathbed spittin' sick flows that's critical." The very emphasis on the critical and criminal nature of the flow and the rap commentary betrays the understanding on the part of many rappers that what they are up to is precisely *not* performance: "I'm not a fan of this." Streetlife not only acknowledges the pastless and hard to capture nature of his flow ("My clan's too original"), but he also insists that the space between the Hip Hop performance and black lived experience is one that is easily crossed: "We can get off the mic and get a little physical." The routine analogy that links the mic with black lived experience and that is revealed through this both literal and figurative amplification stages the drama of an original black experience and pleasure that is first and foremost *voiced*, or as Method Man follows Streetlife on the same track: "It ain't your granddaddy's music/it's Hip Hop/Coming through your woofer like a mulekick/100,000 watts." At any rate, what it means to *be* black is transformed in these and many of the other examples I have shared into an assertive and positive ontology, confirming, I believe, Lewis Gordon's insistence that the only way to be against anti-blackness is to be black, which is, after all, just another kind of turning toward.³⁴ Thus Method Man reminds us elsewhere on *Blackout!*: "I'm still ghetto, rhyme ghetto, my

³⁴ Lewis Gordon, "Black Existence in Philosophy and Culture," *Diogenes* 59, no. 3-4 (2014): 96-105.

AFTER BLACKNESS

peoples ghetto, pants sagging, teeth yellow. Now that's what I call grimy, a million crazy kids behind me."

Everywhere in Hip Hop, rap's singularity and probing inquiry into the status of black (social) life is enlisted to move past the limits of performance toward the Real, and this observation should go some way toward revitalizing the authenticity debates about the implications of Hip Hop's constant reminder to "keep it real":

Jay Z, "Where I'm From," <i>In My Lifetime, Vol. 1</i> (1997)	Jaylib, "Survival Test," <i>Champion Sound</i> (2003)
Your word was everything so everything you said you'd do, you did it couldn't talk about it if you ain't lived it I'm from where niggas pull your card and argue all day about who's the best MC Biggie, Jay-Z, or Nas?	You don't wanna be without here Niggas ain't giving a fuck they'll pull it out here [...] How a lotta blood get spilled out here It's fucked up but it's real out here Is that how it is out there? Shit don't make sense out here

In "Where I'm From" Jay-Z offers a riveting sketch of black life in the neighborhood where he grew up. In addition to painting a picture of a "world in which the world does not live" ("I'm from where the other guys don't walk too much"), "Where I'm From" blurs the line between the Hip Hop performance and black lived experience in at least two ways. Jay-Z is able to "talk about it" precisely because he has "lived it," and he notes the inseparability of the other world in which he lives and the talking about it, which is to say, of course, Hip Hop itself – "I'm from where niggas pull your card/ And argue all day about who's the best MC/Biggie, Jay-Z, or Nas?" Similarly, Mobb Deep's seminal "Shook Ones" begins with the listener "stuck off the realness" and a dedication of their "performance" not to fans but to "real niggas who ain't got no feelings," and famously claims, "For every rhyme I write it's 25 to life." In each case rap wishes to transcend performance and the trap of language toward a taking over of what it means, as Moten suggests, to *be* toward death, a counter-performance and counter-discourse that in the turn toward blackness, in the head on engagement with its own social death, plans to find itself somewhere in the difference between what Madlib calls above "here" and "there."

This active acknowledgement (that is at the same time a production) of the difference between the world of whiteness and the world "where the others guys don't walk too much" exposes blackness as a kind of "catachresis" like that described by Weheliye above. As such, it also goes some way toward revealing how Hip Hop, as counter-performance, tackles the difficult task of acquiring what Wilderson cites as being essential to black ontological and political freedom, namely "differentiation and

self-knowledge"³⁵:

Mobb Deep, "Shook Ones," <i>Infamous</i> (1995)	Inspectah Deck, "Triumph," <i>Wu-Tang Forever</i> (1999)	Kendrick Lamar, "Momma," <i>To Pimp a Butterfly</i> (2015)
You don't know me There's no relation	I bomb atomically Socrates' philosophies and hypotheses can't define how I be droppin' these mockeries	This feeling is unmatched this feeling is brought to you by adrenaline and good rap black Pendleton ball cap We don't share the same synonym, fall back

These verses convey a specifically black pleasure and politically powerful "counter-violence"³⁶ and counter-knowledge that reveal itself when Hip Hop *becomes* black, so to speak. There is in these passages something of Wynter's *other* humanity writing "scientific and disciplinary knowledge anew" as well as the metacognition of the kinship between Hip Hop and blackness as such; as we saw earlier, blackness, like *the flow*, is "hard to capture" (Wu-Tang). There is also something indecipherable, untranslatable in what is given, something invisible and inaudible to the non-black spectator that calls into being a uniquely black subjectivity forcefully positioned against a dominant language and reality. "Shit don't make sense out here," Madlib says, and between "here" and "there," there is no "relation," no "synonym," "fall back," or as the Wu-Tang would have it ("Reunited," 1997): "Uncompleted missions, throw in your best known compositions/You couldn't add it up if you mastered addition (GZA)" or "How can I put it?/Life is like video footage, hard to edit/Directors, they never understood it (RZA)."

The productive tension here between an ontology of black art/life, its right to exist, and the administrative, historical (white) world in which it appears, which prohibits its existence, and thus against which black life/art always measures its powers *to be*, mirrors Moten's critical distinction between Fanon's infamous conception of blackness as "an object in the midst of other objects"³⁷ and a black *Dasein*, or social-ontological agency [*lit.* being there], that exceeds this objectivity, a difference between the made thing (*Sache*) and the thing/world of its making (*Ding*).³⁸ It thus also clarifies, here at the end, the difference between blackness as the made thing in a world from which blackness, according to Wilderson, has been removed, and Sexton's world "in which the world does not live," the world not *from* but *to* which blackness has been

³⁵ Wilderson, "Grammar."

³⁶ Thomas, "Hip Hop Revolution."

³⁷ Quoted in Jared Sexton and Huey Copeland, "Raw Life: An Introduction," *Qui Parle* (2003): 53.

³⁸ Moten, "Case," 182.

removed, a world of its own making. Hip Hop, it can be said, transforms black subjected-ness into an “aesthetic sociality”³⁹ that not only *belongs* to blackness and black social life, but that gave/gives life to this modern black world “in which the world does not live,” ultimately transforming what it means to be black from a mere affirmation of white capacity into a radical affirmation of black life, which is, as Sexton suggests, also “a radical negation of anti-blackness”⁴⁰ – or, as Kendrick Lamar points out so beautifully (and much more recently) on *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015):

*I know everything, I know everything
 Know myself
 I know morality, spirituality, good and bad health
 I know fatality might haunt you
 I know everything, I know Compton
 I know street shit, I know shit that's conscious, I know everything [...]
 I know everything, I know history
 I know the universe works mentally [...]*

*I know how people work, I know the price of life
 I'm knowin' how much it's worth
 I know what I know and I know it well
 Not to ever forget until I realized I didn't know shit
 The day I came home.*

So it is through the counter-performance, a Hip Hop ‘praxis,’ that a black *Dasein* is revealed, and in the turn toward itself blackness comes *to know* itself though the structural violence at the ground of its existence. Kendrick Lamar’s homecoming is a (re)turn toward the long-obscured black (social) self *as* being-towards-death. And this is how afro-pessimism conveys a dynamic optimism in the turn toward blackness that in its “radical affirmation of a blackened world” is both a turning *other* for the first time *and* a turn (again) toward black humanity. Also, this is how Hip Hop emerges as an ongoing historical, subjective, and social hermeneutics – a constant “breaking it down,” so to speak; just as the history of afro-pessimism is an expression of the same *care*.

We cannot ever return to a world in which there was no slave, but we can also never reach a place in time in which what it means to be black, including the possibility of its meaning nothing at all, can be permanently decided. Perhaps blackness, too, is something always still to be settled, and so contains within it the ever-present possibility of its becoming, along the way, something else entirely. This is more likely than not the case if we can bring ourselves to imagine the social-ontological “death” of blackness (and the afro-pessimist critical tradition that responds to it) as the symptom of black free agency and of the diminishment of white power and anti-blackness instead of *only* as the cruel effect of white capacity. Thus even if we accept the allegations

³⁹ See note 37 above.

⁴⁰ Sexton, “Social Life.”

surrounding its end, and rappers like Kendrick Lamar certainly give us reason to doubt it, black life is encouraged (not discouraged) because Hip Hop *was*. And if Hip Hop can be said to have ended, then this is because the moment to realize it was *not* missed.

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The Vulgar Voice on the New Black Realist Soundtrack: Sounds of Resistance, Policing and Crime in Spike Lee's *Clockers*

James Millea

"Bam Bam," "Ch-Ch," "Woop Woop." In mainstream narrative cinema the sounds of gunshots and police sirens usually occupy the peripheral levels of the film soundtrack, where they help simply to qualify the presence of the onscreen cinematic space. However, in African-American independent cinema of the 1990s, New Black Realism, these sounds crept into film's central vocal track. Echoing Hip Hop music of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the vocalising of these otherwise fringe elements of the narrative soundtrack expose an attempt to engage with and resist the issues of crime, surveillance, and policing that these sounds represent. In that, these vocal sound effects become consequential to these cinematic narratives, announcing and verifying the exchange between the bodies of those that utter them and the environment in which those same bodies exist onscreen. With this in mind, this article will center on the role and purpose of these vocal sounds in the narrative cinematic soundtrack, focusing specifically on Spike Lee's 1995 crime drama, *Clockers*, as the supposed final iteration in this collection of cinema. This article will analyse how and why these 'vulgar' sound effects have become fundamental to the vocal expressions of Hip Hop culture onscreen and explore some of the developed non-linear narratives that these sounds have contributed to in Lee's work. In short, this article will explore the space for resistance that the vulgar voice has crafted on the New Black Realist soundtrack.

The medium of film has communicated, shaped, reproduced, and challenged various notions of black subjectivity in twentieth and twenty-first century America since D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* appeared in 1915.

– Guthrie Ramsey, "Muzing New Hoods, Making New Identities" (2002)

KRS-One's 1993 single "Sound of Da Police" is an interesting case study in Hip Hop. In 1988, with the release of Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* and N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton*, Hip Hop became a vehicle for political discourse and change. These albums saw the music establish a direct and fearless attack on the blatant racial inequalities in the world around it, an attack mounted in specific opposition to the American criminal justice system.¹ Across America Hip Hop acts like Ice-T, LL Cool J, Tupac, Main Source, and Brand Nubian dealt with issues of surveillance, police brutality and racial profiling in their music. These acts explored those tropes both in their lyrics and in the musical soundscapes over which they rapped, where sounds of helicopters, police radios, sirens and gunshots accompanied the music's central vocal line. In "Sound of Da Police" those sounds exist as part of the voice in Hip Hop. Here, through his exclamations of "woop woop," KRS-One vocalised the sound effect of police sirens, bringing them to the fore of the music's narrative. In

¹ Erik. Nielson, "'Can't C Me': Surveillance and Rap Music," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 6 (2010): 1257 - 1258.

expressing those sounds vocally, KRS-One was not just experiencing them as a passive subject but attempting to confront and control them through his voice. However, as Hip Hop began to encounter new arts and media this language unsettled the frameworks and structures of previously established forms. Nowhere is this disruption more fascinating than in New Black Realism, a collection of African-American commercial independent films in which the aesthetics of Hip Hop culture stand as guiding principles.² Grounded in the *cinéma vérité* style of their predecessors, the “Hip Hop musicals” of the 1980s,³ New Black Realism offered a unique and developed moment in contemporary cinema. While these films attempted to explore the “reality” of African-American life in the late twentieth-century, through a view of “worlds and milieux where random violence, drugs and general criminal activities pervade[d] every aspect of everyday life,” they also engaged with a “strategic employment of a sophisticated ‘cine-literacy,’” to mimic, reorganise and reshape Hollywood’s characters, situations and visual and musical structures in ways which unsettled preconceived conceptions of cinematic realism.⁴ So, while in mainstream narrative cinema the sounds of police sirens and gunshots usually occupy the peripheral levels of the film soundtrack, where they help simply to qualify the presence of the onscreen cinematic space,⁵ in New Black Realism these sounds leaked into the central vocal track. They became consequential to the cinematic narrative, announcing and verifying the exchange between the bodies of those that utter them and the environment in which those same bodies exist onscreen.⁶ The vocalisation of these sounds highlights the invasive role that they play in the mediated expression of Hip Hop culture. In New Black Realist cinema, the vocalising of these otherwise fringe elements of the cinematic soundtrack became a culturally-specific attempt to engage and resist crime and the contemporary American criminal justice system that these sounds represent. With this in mind, as a critical musicological study, this article will focus on the role and purpose of these vocal sounds in the narrative cinematic soundtrack, centering specifically on Spike Lee’s 1995 crime drama *Clockers*, as the supposed final iteration in this collection of cinema.⁷

² Manthia Diawara, “Black American Cinema: The New Realism,” in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (London: Routledge, 1993), 23; S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 98.

³ Massood quoted in Kimberley Monteyne, *Hip Hop on Film: Performance Culture, Urban Space, and Genre Transformation the 1980s* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2013), 4 - 5.

⁴ Paul Gormley, *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary American Film* (Bristol: Intellect, 2005), 126.

⁵ Gianluca Sergi, “In Defence of Vulgarity: The Place of Sound Effects in the Cinema,” *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies* 5 (June, 2006), accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2006/june-2006/sergi.pdf>; Chion Referenced in Holly Rogers, “Beethoven’s Myth Sympathy: Hollywood’s Re-Construction,” *British Postgraduate Musicology* 8 (2006), accessed December 15, 2015, <http://britishpostgraduatemusicology.org/bpm8/Rogers.html>

⁶ Steven Connor, “What I Say Goes,” in *Dumbstruck: A History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

⁷ Paula J. Massood, *Black City Cinema: African America Urban Experiences in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 189.

This article will analyse how and why these “vulgar” sound effects have become fundamental to the vocal expressions of Hip Hop culture onscreen and explore some of the developed non-linear narratives that these sounds have contributed to in Lee’s work.⁸ In short, this article will explore the space for resistance that the vulgar voice has crafted on the New Black Realist soundtrack. To do so, this article is split into three sections: it will first explore the ability of the voice in Hip Hop to echo the physical body and space in which that body exists, then move on to map the role that sound effects play in mainstream cinema, before finally connecting the two in a detailed analysis of key scenes in *Clockers*.

The Problem with the Problem of the Voice in Hip Hop

The artistic revolution that followed the success of Run-DMC in the early 1980s led to Hip Hop’s current manifestation as a vocally-centric expression.⁹ Although the release of “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979 marked the initial tear in Hip Hop’s form as an “integrated series of live community based practices,” practices which included breakdancing, graffiti, deejaying and emceeing,¹⁰ it was Run-DMC that “consolidated and commodified” Hip Hop as aural form, one specifically centred on the voices of the group’s rappers: Run (Joseph Simmons) and DMC (Daryl McDaniels).¹¹ In this, Hip Hop’s tumble into late twentieth-century culture as a technologically mediated object brought with it an understanding of the music as a cultural expression focused on the voice. For artists such as Eric B. & Rakim, Big Daddy Kane and Boogie Down Productions, the voice symbolised a sonic space for individual utterance and agency, a chance to articulate the realities of their contemporary world and to have those articulations heard.¹² However for Hip Hop scholars this elevation of orality, and the ebbing importance of the elements that it left behind, led to deterioration in the presence of the physical body, a far more crucial aspect in the culture’s integrated artistic expression and its ability to communicate the experiential.

In his article on Hip Hop music as mediated narrative, Greg Dimitriadis explores the music’s principal role in Hip Hop as a culture of performance. In his study he draws on Katrina Hazzard-Gordon’s research on social dance formations in African-American culture.¹³ Hazzard-Gordon’s work looks at how community dance and social interaction have been linked to the availability of “dance arenas” that act as crucial spaces for marginalized groups and specifically allow “aesthetic and technical commonalities” to be retained throughout the histories of African and African-

⁸ Sergi, “In Defence of Vulgarly”; Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation*, 3 - 4.

⁹ Greg Dimitriadis, “Hip Hop: From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative,” *Popular Music* 15:2 (May, 1996): 184.

¹⁰ Dimitriadis, “From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative,” 179.

¹¹ Dimitriadis, “From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative,” 185.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

American dance. What is most telling in Dimitriadis' extending of this reference is the declaration that these commonalities "are, of course, not biologically determined, but rather ... the product of body-to-body socialisation processes made possible through the availability of dance spaces."¹⁴ He pinpoints the significance of this relationship through the work of Susan McClary, who notes that "the musical power of the disenfranchised youth [and] the underclass ethnic minorities ... more often reside in their ability to articulate different ways of constructing the body, ways that bring along in their wake the potential for different experiential worlds."¹⁵ In showing early Hip Hop to be a performance of four interrelated and cross-fertilizing elements, Dimitriadis defines Hip Hop in the body and the interactions that that body shares in a physical arena. He argues, therefore, that in its reification of "the vocal content alone" Hip Hop as recorded musical object has "downplayed the significance of dance, graffiti and other face-to-face community building practices."¹⁶ In other words, Hip Hop as recorded object lacks the presence of the physical body in which it creates and speaks. For Dimitriadis, Hip Hop as cultural expression is tied specifically to the physical body and the space in which that body exists. As his use of McClary suggests, without constructing the body within a communal space with which it can converse with other bodies and media, the voice in Hip Hop must fall short of being able to construct "different experiential worlds." However, to suggest such a binary - that the mediated voice in Hip Hop music has become disembodied and without a cultural space - is to not fully allow for the voice's role in music generally, and Hip Hop more specifically. In fact, I suggest that Hip Hop as mediated narrative not only holds a relationship with the physical body and social space but offers novel and innovative ways to echo that which Dimitriadis argues it has "left behind," a suggestion that exists in two parts.

In the first sense, Roland Barthes has considered such relationships in his famed essay, "The Grain of the Voice." In this work, Barthes defines the vocal "grain" as the "body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs," and argues that this relationship determines the hearing of the alliance between the voice and "the body of the man or woman singing or playing"¹⁷ Barthes proffers that the very production of the voice brings with it that which created it, the physical body. He suggests an inherent connection between the two that means to engage with the voice we must also engage with the materiality of the body. For Barthes, the voice has the audible presence of the physical form in which it was constructed contained within its very utterance, a concept which in itself also offers a further displacement of Dimitriadis' argument. In his concept of the "utterance," Mikhail Bakhtin argues that through orality and vocalised language each word's very "performance is of historical and social significance, as ... the fact of its realisation in the here and now, in given

¹⁴ Dimitriadis, "From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative," 180.

¹⁵ Susan McClary, "Same As it Ever Was: Youth Culture and Music," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Culture and Youth Music*, ed. A. Ross and T. Rose (New York: Routledge, 1994), 34.

¹⁶ Dimitriadis, "From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative," 191.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 188.

circumstances, at a certain historical moment [and] under the conditions of the given social situation."¹⁸ Bakhtin's utterance does not attempt to authorise the voice in the body but instead contends that the voice is unable to elude the shackles of the cultural and social space from which it emanates. The vocal utterance reverberates from within and through the cultural actuality in which it exists. It is in Steven Connor's work that the logic of the intrinsic connection between the voice, the social space and the body becomes most apparent.¹⁹ Here, Connor posits that the "voice comes from the inside of a body and radiates through a space which is exterior to and extends beyond that body. In moving from an interior to an exterior, and therefore marking out the relations of interior and exterior, a voice also announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and the environments in which they have their being."²⁰ While the body may not be visually present at the moment that it speaks, it still undoubtedly qualifies the existence of the being and social space from which it is uttered. In that sense, the voice can never be fully uncoupled from the being that creates it and the environments in which it is both created and heard. With the words of Barthes, Bakhtin and Connor ringing out we can agree that the existence of the body in Hip Hop, and of the physical space in which that body exists, has undoubtedly changed with the voice's centrality in the culture. But, in so doing, we must contend that the change is a complication rather than a deterioration in the connection between the voice, the body and Hip Hop's cultural space. Artists like Run-DMC have certainly readjusted the possibilities of what the voice means in Hip Hop culture, but they have not exhumed it from the fundamental links which make it "Hip Hop."

In the second sense it is also imperative to consider the role that technological mediation has played in rearranging the sonic components in Hip Hop culture. In fact, it is Hip Hop's relationship with technology that has opened the possibilities of sonic exploration in Hip Hop music and specifically it has encouraged the culture to explore the experiential through the voice. Such an argument stems from Tricia Rose's work on Hip Hop music and black culture, *Black Noise*.²¹ Grounded in Walter Ong's discussion of orality and technology,²² Rose suggests that Hip Hop exists as a post-literate orality, a term used to describe the way [that] oral traditions are revised and presented in a technologically sophisticated context." Rose proposes that as post-literate orality Hip Hop music "simultaneously makes technology oral and technologises orality."²³ However, the "technology" in question here exists in a very particular format, through the concept of sampling. Sampling's ability to capture sound artefacts from previous recordings and reorganise them to create new sounds through manipulations of sonic material is fundamental to the specific and culturally charged construction of Hip Hop

¹⁸ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 17.

¹⁹ Connor, "What I Say Goes."

²⁰ Connor, "What I Say Goes," 6.

²¹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

²² Walter Ong, *Orality and Technology: The Technologising of the Word* (London: Meuthen, 1982).

²³ Rose, *Black Noise*, 86.

culture and music.²⁴ Therefore, and in paraphrasing Rose, the voice in Hip Hop structures sampling and sampling structures the voice in Hip Hop. Or, more precisely, the Hip Hop voice *is* sampled and sampling *is* the Hip Hop voice. The two are intertwined and inseparable. Hip Hop music is constructed from and for the (re)organisation and (re)structuring of sonic material. Technology's position in Hip Hop then is not something to mourn but a relationship that allows us to understand the music in its fundamental existence: as creative "process." It is the Hip Hop voice that reverberates through the cultural expressions of the Hip Hop generation and it is a technologically mediated voice, mediated through the technology of sampling. Such a point is echoed by Paul Clarke in his investigation of popular music as recording art where he considers the way in which the recorded "object" has reshaped the composition and creation of rock music.²⁵ He argues that "along with its marked influence on performance traditions recording has also been instrumental in the development of what can best be described as new forms of creative art—forms in which the capturing of performances (on disc or tape or in digital recording) becomes not an end in itself but a gathering of raw material which can then be treated in various ways ... as part of a process of considered composition."²⁶ As a post-literate orality, Hip Hop's innate connection with technology is fundamental to its existence and the concept of sampling is at the center of that. At the same time the elemental role that sampling holds in Hip Hop means that it is more than an immediate, compositional apparatus. It is also an aesthetic ideology, an approach to the (re)creation and (re)orchestration of material that influences and frames expressions of "self" and "the real" in Hip Hop music. The concept of sampling is what structures the Hip Hop voice as it echoes in a dominant, subcultural existence.

By situating ourselves in the work of Barthes, Bakhtin and Connor, and accepting that Hip Hop's music is structured by the (re)shaping and (re)organising of sonic material - that sampling *is* the Hip Hop voice and the Hip Hop voice *is* sampled - then our understanding of the possibilities of the vocal utterance in Hip Hop can be considerably extended. In the voice in hip hop, communication is not limited to the linguistic, or at least, language is not just about the construction of words in a set order. Instead the very sound of the voice becomes the raw material through which the story can be told, in which a culturally understood and contemporarily significant narrative exists. Technologising orality has allowed the Hip Hop generation to sample the voice and voice the sample, and while this understanding has led to a number of Hip Hop poets and rappers, like Busta Rhymes, Shabba Ranks, Monie Love and B-Real, building their vocal-style in a prominent and "percussive voice," more importantly, sampling has reconstituted what is available to the voice in Hip Hop in the expression of its

²⁴ Emery Petchauer, "Sampling Memories: Using Hip Hop Aesthetics to Learn from Urban Schooling Experiences," *Educational Series* 48 (2012): 138.

²⁵ Paul Clarke, "A Magic Science: Rock Music as Recording Art," *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 195 - 213.

²⁶ Clarke, "Rock Music as Recording Art," 199 - 200.

cultural reality.²⁷ In this sense the sampled voice marks a balance between the immediacy of the material that it presents and the hypermediacy of the intertextual relationships that that mediation constructs. This culturally charged, sampled voice manifests itself in the vocalising of the non-musical, non-linguistic and non-organic sounds of the subdominant culture. Screeching tires, gunshots, explosions, sirens, helicopters and airplanes become material that the voice can (re)shape and (re)organise. The culture's understanding of "sound as music" allows those constructing the Hip Hop voice to draw on the immediate and non-musical tropes within their social and cultural environments. These sounds constitute the soundscape of the African-American existence in the last moments of the twentieth-century and in using those sounds the Hip Hop voice calls on both the internally and externally enculturated comprehensions of this sonic material. As a post-literate orality, the vocalising of these sounds, rather than just the sampling of them in a normal musical sense, offers us a developed awareness of their importance to the Hip Hop generation. On the one hand, the encroaching of these sounds into Hip Hop's central expressive element shows their encompassing occupancy in the subcultural reality - their very existence constantly reminding the Hip Hop generation of their social, economic and political hardships in the late twentieth-century. On the other hand, the voice's sampling of these noises points towards both the culture's attempt to control these elements in its surroundings and the ability of that same voice, as a sampled utterance, to explore and echo the culture's reality.

The "Vulgar" Sound Effect and the Hip Hop Soundtrack

"There remains one thorny issue, namely the understanding of sound effects as an expression of the crude, the mechanical [and] repetitive, the unsophisticated, that is, as an expression of vulgarity."²⁸

The non-linguistic and non-musical tropes that exist in Hip Hop culture's musical expression already hold a defined function and purpose in the mainstream film soundtrack. That is, the non-organic sounds that the Hip Hop voice samples in its music exist as a fundamental component in the construction of the contemporary film soundscape. Therefore in Hip Hop culture moves to the filmic medium there is an inherent contrast in the structuring of this sonic material. However, it is in interactions like this, in the space between a subdominant cultural articulation and the structuring of a mainstream medium, where the composition and control of these sounds is of most interest.

In his contribution to 2006's June issue of *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, Gianluca Sergi defines a sound effect as "a sound that is made artificially, not one to be

²⁷ Rose, *Black Noise*, 67. For more on percussive-style voices see Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

²⁸ Sergi, 'In Defence of Vulgarity.'

found in nature,” and suggests that these sounds are “used to create a greater sense of realism in the audio-visual.”²⁹ In other words, a sound effect is a piece of non-organic sonic material that is used in a work of film to construct a sense of reality around the images on screen. Sergi’s definition echoes the work of Michel Chion, a pre-eminent figure in film music scholarship, who argues that in the “contract that exists between the images and sounds of cinema, sounds flesh out the two dimensions of the image providing effects that are experiential and related to sensation.”³⁰ Chion sets film sound as qualification for the presence of the images onscreen and in so doing he establishes what most agree is the film sound effect’s main purpose: to sound the “real” of the onscreen world. Through this determination, the sound effect is a “technical matter,” mapped by sound designers to augment the “emotional and sensual level” of the filmic medium rather than the “intellectual.” As Sergi suggests, film sound and sound effects “are understood as customarily providing ambience, mood, scope and size, but not information, characterisation and plot development ...,” these central elements of the film’s construction left for the soundtrack’s more prominent components of music and dialogue.³¹ Consequently, the structuring of the mainstream film soundscape exists as a three-tier system of dialogue, music and sound effects, placed in order of their contribution to the film’s narrative and their perceived importance to the film audience’s engagement with that narrative. This idea that the sound effect plays a lesser role in the film soundtrack, that it is set as the final component in the construction of the film’s aesthetic existence, is a persisting doctrine in film and film music research and one which is continually reaffirmed through two related channels. The first is the apparent lack of relevant academic scholarship on this subject matter, a point made by scholars like Tony Grajeda and Jay Beck who proffer that the “field of sound studies is very much in the process of formation – a work in progress subject to ongoing transformations as it coalesces into its own distinctive field.”³² The second exists through the assertions and confirmations made by the small collection of key scholars and texts that have chosen to explore these “other” elements of the film soundtrack. This returns us to academics like Chion who, in his concept of the “aural triage,” suggests that film as a vocally-centric medium places sound and music more generally in the background of the mainstream film soundtrack.³³ So, it is clear then that the role of the sound effect in film never changes - it is always meant to echo the reality of the onscreen images - but what about when the reality on screen is altered?

“Against a black screen” John Singleton’s 1991 film *Boyz ‘N’ the Hood* bursts open with “a cacophonous mixture of angry male voices, gunshots, police helicopters, sirens,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Quoted in Helen Hanson, “Sound Affects: Post Productions Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Design in Hollywood’s Studio Era,” *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* 1, no. 1 (2007): 39.

³¹ Sergi, “In Defence of Vulgarly.”

³² Tony Grajeda, and Jay Beck, *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2008), 110.

³³ Holly Rogers, “Beethoven’s Myth Sympathy: Hollywood’s Re-Construction,” *British Postgraduate Musicology* 8 (2006), accessed December 15, 2015, <http://britishpostgraduatemusicology.org/bpm8/Rogers.html>

chaos, and violence.”³⁴ If there is a “contract” between the “images and sounds of cinema,” as Chion suggests, then such an opening scene plays into the very specific agreement that must be written up for New Black Realism. As Paula Massood highlights, African-American culture is not only linked by, but specifically identified through the city, a framework which foregrounds “histories and asks concurrent questions of mobility, progress and stasis.” It was migration that brought the Hip Hop generation to the city and it was the city that placed economic and social limits on its plethora of Black residents.³⁵ So, in a cultural construct where the city stands as a thematic and structural centerpiece, the film soundscape must reflect such an integral component. As “black commercial independent” films, these audio-visual social documents were created through culturally-charged independent aesthetics but benefitted from “access to commercial film industry resources and, most notably, production and marketing budgets, distribution, and theatrical exhibition.”³⁶ The soundscapes of these films were built to explore the existence of young African-American lives at the turn of the twenty-first century and they had the financial stability to be able to bring that existence to fruition in the film soundscape. The soundtrack of New Black Realism therefore needed to be composed with rich, diegetic and prominent (even if heard off-screen) sound effects to highlight and explore the dominant role that the city plays in Hip Hop culture. As Rick Altman explains, sound effects like those used in New Black Realism carried with them a “spatial signature”³⁷ which provided information that was “narrative and spatial in nature.”³⁸ For New Black Realism the function of the film sound effect was to echo and explore the culturally-centered actuality that the film presented onscreen, and sonic constructions like that which opens *Boyz 'N' The Hood* allowed them to do so. So while its role is stationary and unchanged, the possibility of its function permits the sound effect to engage with the realities of the world onscreen. This balance between stasis and movement, or rather role and function, allows the film sound effect to serve its inherent purpose, the why of its existence: to sonically engage with the experientiality of Hip Hop culture on film.

The comprehension of music, dialogue and sound effects on the film soundtrack is built on the “language” that each component uses, and that language’s ability to communicate alongside the filmic image. While vital in the overall composition of the film and its soundtrack, the sound effect is seen as a somewhat indecipherable component. It is part of the film’s sonic wallpaper: necessary for the overall aesthetics, but not something that commands attention, for even if it did we couldn’t understand too much of what it meant. As Sergi notes, “in film sound, [while] dialogue employs

³⁴ Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., “Scoring A Black Nation: Music, Film and Identity in the Age of Hip Hop,” in *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip Hop*. London: University of California Press, 2003), 180.

³⁵ Massood, *Black City Cinema*, 204.

³⁶ Watkins, *Representing*.

³⁷ Randolph Jordan, “The Ecology of Listening While Looking in the Cinema: Reflective Audioviewing in Gus Van Sant’s *Elephant*,” *Organised Sound* 17:3 (December, 2012): 250.

³⁸ Rick Altman, *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992), 24.

verbal communication, [and] music uses both verbal and non-verbal (but crucially has a recognised “grammar” of its own in terms of structure and phrasing), [sound effects] would appear to be a purely non-verbal form of communication.’ He contends that the film sound effect lacks a “recognised structure” and that ipso facto it must “be content with the kind of sensual activities traditionally linked to non-verbal forms of communication.” In other words, the sound effect “can give you a sense of location, scope, and detail but it cannot engage you at an intellectual level.” Here the distinction between the intellectual and sensual, verbal and non-verbal, sophisticated and vulgar appear indefensible. Sergi highlights the muddled position that sound effects hold in the film soundscape further by stating that it is “not commonly thought of as a non-verbal form of communication either, since non-verbal communication has come to mean [the] visual. In other words, [sound effects] would appear to be without a logical home in the realm of communication: it cannot be regarded as verbal nor can it be understood as non-verbal.”³⁹ In this sense the problem of the film sound effect exists within its closed, unclear “language” and our subsequent inability to take anything more from these sounds than the immediacy of their presence on the filmic image. But what if the film sound effect had a language in which the audience could unpack its meaning? What if they were able to take from a structure which allowed them to decipher what this sonic material meant in reference to the onscreen images and narrative? With Hip Hop, as in the work of KRS-One, the audience has been given a culturally-specific platform upon which they can grasp what these sounds mean. This is something that Sergi even hints to in his suggestion that “in cultural terms music is a different kind of sound than [sound effects].”⁴⁰ This proffers the idea that both music and sound effects are culturally-charged sonic constructions, and if this is true, then surely the “language” that the filmic sound effect speaks is centered in the culture that it looks to present. In other words, the sound effect in New Black Realism can be built upon and expresses the existence of the Hip Hop generation.

This raises two fundamental points of interest in our exploration. First, if we suggest that Hip Hop offers a system through which to understand these filmic sound effects, does it itself emphasise and exploit such sonic components in its music? In her analysis of two seminal Hip Hop albums at the turn of the 1990s, Amanda Sewell creates a developed typology through which to discuss sampling as a compositional tool in Hip Hop music. Sewell delineates three specific sections - structural, surface and lyric - and various subsections within each.⁴¹ While both the structural and lyrical sections are of interest to a more general discussion of Hip Hop music, it is the “surface sample types” that hold a particular importance in our current discussion. Sewell suggests that these surface samples “decorate or punctuate a track’s groove without necessarily participating in the track’s primary loop” and that these “surface samples do not contribute to the rhythmic or harmonic propulsion of the track, but they are

³⁹ Sergi, “In Defence of Vulgarity.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Amanda Sewell, “Paul’s Boutique and Fear of Black Planet: Digital Sampling and Musical Style in Hip Hop,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 8, no. 1 (2014): 32.

valuable samples for rhetorical emphasis, historical context, and formal articulation." Then, by splitting these into three subsections, "momentary (appearing a single time during a track), emphatic (beginning or ending a track or a section within a track), or constituent (occurring at regular intervals but without the same sense of continuity as a structural sample)," Sewell enables us to explore how these samples, in their various permutations, interact with and augment the central musical elements of Hip Hop.⁴² Sewell's work determines the innate connection and value of these surface samples to the construction of Hip Hop music. While these sounds do not reside in the music's central vocal track or constitute sonically integral elements in the music's beat, per se, they are intrinsic to the creation of Hip Hop music and its meaning, and the Hip Hop generation not only engage with these components but look to them in aesthetic, narrational and connotational terms. With this culturally specific construction of sound in mind, the sound effect in New Black Realism can be seen not just as a tertiary element of the soundtrack but instead stand as a sonic component which creates a "spatial signature" that conveys the space in which these sounds emanate from and the cultural existence in which that space is situated. Nevertheless, while Hip Hop culture and music may denote that these "surface samples" offer aesthetic and connotational purposes, dominant film still understands the film sound effect as the "sensual," the "vulgar." Therefore, Hip Hop culture's identification through these vulgar sound effects in New Black Realism both express their own cultural meanings and characterisations and also place it in relation to the dominant medium and culture in which it exists.

The second point of interest is the most crucial in our developed understanding of the potential of vocalised sound effects to express the experiential in the soundscapes New Black Realism. While these films have augmented the final element of the filmic soundtrack and reset the function and purpose of the film sound effect, they have also displaced the vulgar on the Hip Hop soundscape, moving it from the peripheral realms of the filmic soundtrack, to the central narrative track in the filmic medium. Here, Hip Hop contradicts the intellectual with the sensual, the verbal with the non-verbal, and the sophisticated with the vulgar. Hip Hop, as a culturally charged music process, reshapes the voice in cinema for the purpose of the Hip Hop generation. Now, we understand the voice not just as identifying the individual and reflecting the social space but tying the two together inextricably and echoing the actuality of that specific, cultural existence. While the voice in Hip Hop is sampled, the Hip Hop voice on film, as it samples the non-organic sound effect, is vulgar.

The 'Vulgar' Voice and Echoes of a Cultural Actuality in the Soundscape of Spike Lee's *Clockers*

As the final moment in New Black Realist cinema, Spike Lee's *Clockers* offers one of the "loudest" examples of the experiential, "vulgar" voice. An adaption of Richard

⁴² Sewell, "Paul's Boutique and Fear of Black Planet," 37.

Price's 1992 novel of the same name, the film follows Ronald "Strike" Dunham (Mekhi Phifer) in his attempts to progress as a low-level drug dealer in charge of a small crew of "clockers," those who sell drugs "around the clock."⁴³ Strike is a street marshal for Rodney Little (Delroy Lindo) and his right-hand, Errol Barnes (Thomas Jefferson Byrd). While the local drug trade is Rodney's, he is never close enough to be pinned to any particular crimes or convictions. After the murder of another of Rodney's more prominent dealers, Strike's brother, Victor Dunham (Isaiah Washington), turns himself into the local authorities claiming to have shot the man in self-defense. While Detective Larry Mazilli (John Turturro) thinks that this is an open-and-shut case, Detective Rocco Klein (Harvey Keitel) thinks otherwise, suggesting that Victor's impeccably clean record means that something else is surely going on. Like both Rodney and the neighbourhood police officer, André the Giant (Keith David), Det. Klein suspects and pursues Victor's drug dealing brother. Strike, everyone agrees, is the reason for the murder of his fellow "clocker" and the fall of Rodney Little. As the film closes out, so too does Strike's time as a "clocker"; he must make a decision, flee his current existence and lifestyle, or fight and die on the streets. Although those who have discussed the film tend to focus on its "film noir" connotations,⁴⁴ *Clockers* presents an expert construction in the genre of New Black Realism. Like most of these ghetto-centric films,⁴⁵ the soundtrack is an eclectic mix of Hip Hop music, African-American-specific popular musics (soul and R&B) and scored cues, composed in this instance by Terence Blanchard. Alongside the music, there is also a developed construction of linguistic variations, again reflecting a trope in the soundscapes of New Black Realism.⁴⁶ Through the diverse, culturally informed structuring of language, the film shows the interactions of social groups both within themselves and with each other. However, what is most progressive and engaging about the soundscape of this film is its expanded construction of the vulgar voice. Throughout *Clockers* the vocal expression of the vulgar sound effect litters almost all voices in the film's soundscape, from the White and Italian-American police investigating the murder and connected drug dealers to the drug dealers themselves, all young African-Americans members of the Hip Hop generation. In this film, the vocalising of these "noises" relates to the violent reality of New York City at the end of the twentieth-century for the community onscreen. These sound effects, which specifically echo gunshots, car noises, explosions and trains, can be heard in the human voice as "pop," "boom," "beep," "bam," "gat," and "choo choo." The concurrent existence of these biological expressions of non-organic sounds in all channels of the

⁴³ Amy Taubin, "Clockers," in *American Independent Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. J. Hiller, (London: BFI, 2001), 52.

⁴⁴ See Dan Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Massood, *Black City Cinema*.

⁴⁵ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 182.

⁴⁶ Margaret Thomas, "Linguistic Variation in Spike Lee's *School Daze*," *College English* 56:8 (December, 1994): 911 - 927.

voice on film alters the position, and therefore function and purpose, of the mainstream filmic sound effect.

In film, the sound effect is largely diegetic, unspecified and offscreen, rarely foregrounded. Unlike the voice or music, we cannot pinpoint these sounds and can never truly determine their origin, only gather an inference from their unattached relationship with the images and narrative that we are following onscreen. Drawing again on the work of Chion, these sounds are “acousmatic,” “heard without [their] cause or source being seen,” and so simply ground the characters, narrative and image in a filmic space.⁴⁷ However, *Clockers* (re)situates these sound effects in the voice and those voices echo them repeatedly throughout their sound world. The move from offscreen to onscreen, in a specified existence, changes the function of the film sound effect both physically and metaphorically. The vulgar voices that utter these sound effects shrink the film world in which the narrative is set. The constant reiteration of these sounds, now onscreen and having bled onto the central vocal track, reduces the range and breadth of the world in which they were constructed. Instead of these sounds echoing outside the film’s image, and reflecting the world in which they exist, they have encroached upon the characters and their narrative. The vocalising of the film sound effect not only constructs the cinematic world of New Black Realism but reminds its characters and the viewing audience of the Hip Hop generation’s restricted opportunities and movement. When Det. Rocco Klein questions Victor Dunham, and both men articulate varying numbers of the word “bam” to highlight the gunshots that Victor supposedly fired at the deceased drug dealer, they do not just allow the characters to talk about the narrative but remind each of the immediacy of those elements within their existence. This is particularly true for Victor who, although he utters the term just once, has Det. Klein repeat “bam” four times in the interrogation room with him. The vocalised sound effect in this sense shrinks Victor’s world to a small, cramped and circumscribed box. It reminds Victor of the proximity and inescapable nature of the world in which he lives, as even when he is inside the police station those sounds and that actuality follow him in. The police do not protect him from that life - they can’t; they simply perpetuate that existence for Victor. In this sense, the vocal sampling of the film sound effect in the vulgar voice still holds its relationship with its original connotations in mainstream Hollywood film but relocates their position in New Black Realism and augments our understanding of the social space in which that voice echoes.

This movement of the sound effect has also reshaped the voice in New Black Realism. As the central sonic track in the film’s “aural triage,” the voice offers us film’s plot, its narrative and the identity of its characters. It is sophisticated and intellectual and it is the most important aural component in any film that engages with mainstream aesthetics and audiences. To be clear, the fundamental nature of the voice in these films has not changed, but the form of material which that voice uses certainly has. The voice

⁴⁷ Schaeffer quoted in Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18.

is still the pivotal force in the expression but its structuring has changed in its relationship with Hip Hop culture and music. Through the technologising of Hip Hop's orality, the Hip Hop voice has sampled the film sound effect and subsequently identified the Hip Hop body through that component of the soundtrack. The tertiary element of film sound design has not just crept into the voice but is now constructed with and around it. The Hip Hop voice is vulgar because it is framed through the filmic sound effect and, unlike conventional sound design, these vocalised sound effects qualify not just the reality of the onscreen action and image but the actuality of that cultural existence. These explicitly tie together the Hip Hop body and the post-industrial city. The vulgar voice is experiential because it is ingrained with the sound world in which it echoes, not just in the way that Steven Connor's work previously suggested, but in the shaping of that voice through that sonic reality. This shaping also creates the idea of a subcultural filmic voice. Unlike the dominant vocal expressions of more mainstream film movies, the non-dominant existence (re)organises the voice around its sonic representations of a culturally specific actuality in which the city, as a trope of modernity, migration, economic difficulty and social limits, is fundamental to these vocal expressions. This innate connection and (re)shaping of the voice on film is prominent throughout *Clockers* and it is the recurring and varied nature of these examples which highlights a change in the creation of the voice in Hip Hop's New Black Realism. Whether it is police talking to Strike about his hobbies ("Choo Choo"), the soon-to-be deceased clocker Daryl Adams (Steve White) trying to intimidate Strike ("Boom"), or the interrogation between Victor and Det. Klein ("Bam"), these (re)structured voices are a concurrent motif in Spike Lee's filmic soundscape. It is one of the film's final scenes, where Det. Rocco Klein tries to save Tyrone "Shorty" Jeeter (Peewee Love) after he murders Errol Barnes, that this motif is most apparent.

Before the interrogation begins André begs Det. Klein to rescue the young boy from the situation in which he finds himself, arguing that this incident is a glitch in the life of an otherwise innocent, intelligent and well-behaved young man. Klein decides to help and explains to Tyrone how to retell the story once the tape recorder is on, suggesting that it was all done in panic and self-defense. This leads to a rather interesting moment of meta-diegesis within the filmic soundtrack and, even more importantly, a prominent instance of the vulgar voice. As Det. Klein talks to Tyrone, we see an illusionary version of the scene in which the young boy kills Errol Barnes, created from both the images of the events that actually occurred and the story that Klein offers to Tyrone to save him from jail. In this scene the vulgar voice occurs on two levels: in the centered vocal and image of Klein as he "(re)tells" the story for Tyrone, and in the imagined peripheral discussions of Strike's crew of clockers. In the latter, we hear the vulgar voice as a moment of meta-diegesis in which the young African-American drug dealers point guns at each other, pretending to shoot and reload as they voice the sound effects as "pwooch," "blup blup" and "ch-ch." This is coupled with Klein's dialogue, which speaks of the threat and menace that this world brings to Tyrone and his mother. Initially, this allows us to hear the way in which Tyrone subconsciously constructs the sonic boundaries of his actuality. When he imagines this world, he places these

vocalised sound effects in the film image's soundscape and in so doing allows them, like Sewell's surface samples, to sonically punctuate and augment the sentiments and ideas of the film's central dialogue at that moment. However, as we have seen, these sound effects offer more than just additional material to the film's dialogue. In understanding that the vulgar voice is a biological manifestation of non-organic sounds and components specific to a cultural existence, the subconscious sounding of Tyrone's world through these surface samples offers developed identification processes for the film's characters. When we hear these sounds, and can specifically tie them to Tyrone through the meta-diegesis, we can elevate our understanding of him as a character through a sound world that is culturally and socially specific. The physical space echoes within these vulgar voices and ties the character of Tyrone specifically to the world in which he lives and hears these sounds. Also, the characters that utter these vocalised sound effects remind Tyrone of the encroaching nature of the violent city and neighbourhood in which he exists. Arguably those sounds suggest that at this moment he cannot escape this social environment and all that it represents. In this case, the immediacy of the vulgar voice offers narrative connotations and a developed understanding of character. In the case of the former, when Det. Klein finishes the filmic sequence by echoing the two gunshots fired, he vocalises them as "boom boom." The difference here is that Tyrone is not creating or imagining these sounds, but rather Det. Klein is actually speaking them. The situating of the vulgar voice in the central expression of dialogue is a move of considerable note. Now, the fundamental identifying track of the film expressly vocalises the culturally specific sound effect of the post-industrial city, and with it, the audience's engagement with that element of the film's soundscape. However, what is most interesting is who actually voices the vulgar: Det. Rocco Klein. If we return to the suggestion that these films talk the "lingo" of Hip Hop, then Det. Klein's vocalising of the filmic sound effect at the end of his speech is an attempt to speak to Tyrone on a level that he may truly understand. Like Margaret Thomas's discussion of linguistic variation in Lee's *School Daze*,⁴⁸ Klein's vulgar voice is an effort to talk to a young member of the African-American Hip Hop community in a way that Klein thinks he fully comprehends, through a form loaded with the cultural connections and socially constructed sonic tropes that speak on both a conscious and subconscious level.

It is important to note that neither Shorty nor Strike (except for a solitary utterance which he is startled into repeating by Det. Klein) use this vulgar voice, but instead listen to and imagine others speaking it. And in that, the lack of or purposefully avoiding the use of this vulgar voice also contributes to character identification in Lee's *Clockers*. While Strike, as the film closes, escapes the reality of New York City by train, forced out by his fear of Rodney and a beating from André, Tyrone escapes the repercussions of murdering a man and his future, it seems, exists outside the world he currently occupies. The vulgar voice dictates the life of these characters throughout *Clockers* and it is omnipresent in the reality of their onscreen existence. But their ability

⁴⁸ Thomas, "Linguistic Variation in Spike Lee's *School Daze*," 1994.

to avoid engaging with it on a personal level, to avoid the vulgar utterance, gives them the hope, freedom and possibility to escape the reality of their existence and the innate connection with the violent hardship of the post-industrial city.

Conclusion: The Experientiality of Hip Hop's 'Vulgar' Voice

"In my class, some students argued that these films use hip hop culture, which is the new Black youth culture and the most important youth culture in America today. Thus, the characters look real because they dress in the style of hip hop, talk the lingo of hip hop, practice its world view toward the police and women and are played by rap stars"⁴⁹

While the above quote from Manthia Diawara's students suggest that these films draw from Hip Hop culture in a number of ways, their assessment arguably boils down to a single component: the "language" of Hip Hop and its artistic expressions. In this sense, the students suggest that these films use Hip Hop's aesthetics, techniques and conventions in their creation of authentic audio-visual social documents. New Black Realism, these students argue, speak the "lingo" of Hip Hop's arts and media. In drawing on the aesthetics of Hip Hop's construction of sonic material in its music, these films tap into a culturally charged understanding of the possibilities of the Hip Hop voice and music in New Black Realism. The soundtrack becomes unhinged from the parameters set out by the mainstream medium that it exists in and instead leans towards the subdominant culture's comprehension of sound and sonic possibilities. The blurred boundaries of the filmic soundtrack, and the embodied narratives that the Hip Hop voice on film offers, exists not as symptoms of an exploited filmic blip, but as a statement of intent and artistic force from a subculture that is (re)shaping and (re)constructing a mainstream medium. While the Hip Hop voice is sampled, the Hip Hop voice on film is vulgar, and that vulgarity brings with it an inherent duality that marks a balance between the immediate nature of the material presented and the hypermediated frames that present it. In these films, the biological uttering of the non-organic and mechanical constructs of the Hip Hop generation's existence in the post-industrial city qualifies the presence of the physical body in that space and the culturally specific place in which that body exists. The sounds that the voice sample become engrained in its utterance and in our understanding of that reality through the film's narrative and character identification. The vulgar Hip Hop voice is "vulgar" only to the mainstream filmic medium, but that vulgarity serves a purpose in Hip Hop's expression on film. The construction of Hip Hop's vulgar voice echoes the cultural actuality of the Hip Hop generation, both through its structuring and sampling of material, and its interactions with the dominant medium of mainstream film. In both form and content, the vulgar Hip Hop voice, the voice of New Black Realism, is inherently experiential in its expression of its facticity.

⁴⁹ Diawara, "Black American Cinema," 24.

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VULGAR VOICE

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Eminem's Character, Stan: A Bio-Psycho-Social Autopsy

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Eminem is a multi-platinum selling Hip Hop artist. For over a decade he has proven his mastery of multi-syllabic rhyming and vivid storytelling. In this article, we dissect lyrics from one of Eminem's most critically acclaimed songs, 'Stan', for mental health themes. We use the bio-psycho-social model to explore contributing factors leading to the decline of Stan's mental health. For the results, we speculate that Stan might be suffering with emotionally unstable personality disorder of the borderline type as evidenced by self-harm, overdose, fear of abandonment, chronic emptiness, self-image and sexual identity issues, and impulsivity. Stan speaks of having an adverse early childhood, which we propose relates to changes in Stan's brain that affect his ability to cope with stress. In conclusion we highlight the feasibility of using Hip Hop lyrics to open up dialogues around mental health and for bridging youth culture with the medical community.

Editor's note: The Journal of Hip Hop Studies is pleased to publish Hip Hop Psych's "Eminem's Character, Stan." For more information, visit www.hiphoppsych.co.uk/index.html. Hip Hop studies brings together scholars from around the world and from different fields of study, as a result, this essay maintains the integrity of scholars from this emerging field of Hip Hop Psychiatry.

Eminem is considered one of the greatest Hip Hop artists of all time. He received the title "best-selling artist of the decade"¹ in 2000 was voted "Best Rapper Alive" by Vibe Magazine's reader's poll,² and titled 'Hottest MC in The Game' in an MTV survey.³ Eminem is renowned for his multi-syllabic rhyming and vivid storytelling. Being born into a poor socioeconomic environment, this theme is often portrayed in his lyrics, giving a different perspective from African American and Hispanic perspectives that, until then, had dominated Hip Hop culture.

One of Eminem's most publicized tracks is "Stan"⁴ from the album *Marshall Mathers LP* that reached number one in the music charts internationally.⁵ In this article, we dissect lyrics from one of Eminem's most critically acclaimed songs, "Stan," explore Stan's mental state, his actions and early adverse life experiences to unravel this complex character's psychopathology. Our methodological approach utilizes the bio-psycho-social model to explore contributing factors leading to the decline of Stan's mental health. We speculate that Stan might be suffering with emotionally unstable personality disorder of the borderline type as evidenced by self-harm, overdose, fear of

¹ James Montgomery, "Eminem Is The Best-Selling Artist Of The Decade," *MTV News*, Accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1627833/eminem-is-the-best-selling-artist-of-the-decade/>

² Shaheem Reid, "Eminem Is The Best Rapper Alive, According To Vibe Poll," *MTV News*, Accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1596451/eminem-is-the-best-rapper-alive-according-to-vibe-poll/>

³ Paul Cantor, "Eminem Is the Hottest MC in the Game!," 2017. *MTV News*, Accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1650705/eminem-is-the-hottest-mc-in-the-game/>

⁴ EminemVevo "Eminem - Stan (Long Version) Ft. Dido," *YouTube*, Accessed December 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOMhN-hfMtY>

⁵ "Stan (Song)," *En.Wikipedia.Org*, February 6, 2017, Accessed December 14, 2016, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stan_%28song%29.

abandonment, chronic emptiness, self-image and sexual identity issues, and impulsivity. Stan speaks of having an adverse early childhood, which we propose relates to changes in Stan's brain that affect his ability to cope with stress.

In this track, the character, Stan, is upset and writing a letter to Eminem, aka Slim Shady, about his previous fan letters that were not replied to. As the chorus opens, we hear a female voice singing (music artist, Dido) representing Stan's pregnant partner. Her lyrics reference her despair about Stan's increasing obsessions with his idol, Eminem.

In verse 1, Stan comes across as a devoted and knowledgeable Slim Shady fan and identifies with Slim Shady by finding commonalities between his friend's suicide and the suicide of Eminem's uncle.⁶ In verse 2, we attain deeper insights into Stan's mental state. Stan initially writes that he isn't mad at Slim Shady for not responding, but based on his prosodic intonation and inflection of his voice the listener can sense Stan's burst of anger and his feelings of betrayal. Stan comments on witnessing his parents' domestic abuse and never knowing his father; again, he attempts to identify with Slim Shady. We speculate that Stan experienced an insecure attachment to his parents as primary care givers (i.e., is a person or persons predominantly responsible for an individual's emotional needs as a child). Bowlby⁷ and Ainsworth⁸ describe attachment as a social connection that a child fosters (i.e., forms) with a primary caregiver for emotional support and regulation of affect (i.e., help to control changes in moods so they don't become overwhelming or extreme). It has been proposed that this attachment relationship occurs at a 'critical period' between the age of 6 months and 2 years old, enabling the child to hold an internal working model (i.e., based on relationships with your caregivers, e.g., parents, you learn how to love, hate and predict how others relate to you in different situations) as a blueprint for future relationships. Early adverse experiences that effect attachment could contribute to the development of psychopathology that is reflected by insecure future relationships.

Early adverse experiences can alter oxytocin levels (i.e., the 'love' and 'trust' hormone) in the child and primary care giver.⁹ Oxytocin's ability to enable an individual to infer other's mental states (i.e., understand and empathize with people's emotions) is important for human interactions as it enables an individual to read social cues.¹⁰ Since oxytocin is a hormone that promotes social interactions, disruptions to this neuropeptide could partly explain why Stan is alienating himself from his partner and feels betrayed by Slim Shady. Early adverse life experiences can also lead to epigenetic

⁶ David LaChapelle "Eminem Blows Up," *Rolling Stone*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/eminem-blows-up-20091105?page=2>

⁷ John Bowlby, *Attachment: Attachment and Loss Volume 1* (New York: Basic Books, 1969). John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss Volume 2: Separation, Anger and Anxiety*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1973).

⁸ Mary Dinsmore Ainsworth, "The Development of Infant-Mother Attachment, in *Review of Child Development Research*, ed. B. Cardwell & H. Ricciuti (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

⁹ Barbara Stanley and Larry J. Siever, "The Interpersonal Dimension of Borderline Personality Disorder: Toward a Neuropeptide Model," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 167, no. 1 (2010): 24-39.

¹⁰ Gregor Domes, Markus Heinrichs, Andre Michel, Christoph Berger, and Sabine C. Herpertz, "Oxytocin Improves 'Mind-Reading' In Humans," *Biological Psychiatry* 61, no. 6 (2007): 731-733.

alterations (i.e., loose chemical tags which attach to certain parts of DNA switching harmful or protective genes on or off; for example, switching the glucocorticoid receptor gene on, which leads to increased activity in the stress pathways in the brain and body). For example, childhood maltreatment can lead to altered epigenetics (called DNA methylation) of the glucocorticoid receptor gene (i.e., which produces the 'stress' hormone), resulting in an exaggerated hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (aka the HPA axis; i.e., the brain's stress pathway) response to stressors.¹¹ Such factors may interfere with Stan's ability to moderate stress. Evidence suggests that oxytocin helps to decrease excessive HPA axis activity (consequently decreasing stress response); if oxytocin levels are relatively low then this can lead to an overactive HPA axis with possible pathological outcomes.¹² Early childhood experiences can alter brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF; i.e., 'brain fertilizer') gene expression via epigenetic mechanisms¹³ leading to a reduction in the size of the hippocampus, making this brain region less effective at controlling HPA axis activity.¹⁴

Stan speaks about his "Slim Shady" tattoo on his chest; this can be regarded by some as being unusual and possibly considered taboo from a machismo-promoting Hip Hop cultural perspective. We speculate that Stan may be experiencing problems with his sexual identity: 'P.S. We should be together too'. This could hint at Stan's possible homosexuality. Stan also talks about cutting himself to get a "sudden rush", which could be a form of self-medication. Stan might be managing his nasty/unpleasant feelings through increasing endogenous opioid peptides (i.e., 'feel good' chemicals which are released during exercise for example), creating a "feel good" sense of euphoria. Research revealed that cluster B Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)¹⁵ patients who self-harm have low levels of opioid peptides in the cerebrospinal fluid. It has been hypothesised that low levels of opioid peptides and compensatory upregulation (i.e., increased number of receptors) of opioid peptide receptors in BPD patients who self-harm produces a heightened response of receptors to opioid peptide release in response to pain. This would provide self-soothing, euphoric calmness and analgesia effects for the pain after cutting. There appears to be an idealization of Slim

¹¹ N Perroud, A Paoloni-Giacobino, P Prada, E Olié, A Salzmann, R Nicastro, and S Guillaume et al. "Increased Methylation Of Glucocorticoid Receptor Gene (NR3C1) In Adults With A History Of Childhood Maltreatment: A Link With The Severity And Type Of Trauma," *Translational Psychiatry* 12, no. 1 (2011): e59.

¹² Markus Heinrichs, Thomas Baumgartner, Clemens Kirschbaum, and Ulrike Ehlert, "Social Support and Oxytocin Interact to Suppress Cortisol and Subjective Responses To Psychosocial Stress," *Biological Psychiatry* 54, (2003)

¹³ Tania L. Roth, Farah D. Lubin, Adam J. Funk, and J. David Sweatt, "Lasting Epigenetic Influence of Early-Life Adversity On The BDNF Gene," *Biological Psychiatry* 65, no. 9 (2009): 760-769.

¹⁴ James P. Herman, Michelle M. Ostrander, Nancy K. Mueller, and Helmer Figueiredo, "Limbic System Mechanisms of Stress Regulation: Hypothalamo-Pituitary-Adrenocortical Axis" *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry* 29, no. 8 (2005): 1201-1213.

¹⁵ Alan R. Prossin, Tiffany M. Love, Robert A. Koeppe, Jon-Kar Zubieta, and Kenneth R. Silk, "Dysregulation of Regional Endogenous Opioid Function In Borderline Personality Disorder," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 167, no. 8 (2010): 925-933.

Shady as evidenced by Stan's words 'everything you say is real'; Stan is spending increasingly more time devoted to Slim Shady, neglecting his pregnant partner.

Stan's anger and perceived betrayal escalates in verse 3. His tone and actions suggest he now devalues Slim Shady (e.g., ripping Slim Shady's pictures off his walls). We speculate this reflects a phenomenon called 'splitting', highlighted by object relation therapist Melanie Klein,¹⁶ who described this phenomenon of a child experiencing the "good breast mother" (i.e., a mother that is able to satisfy the child's needs all the time) as being different from the "bad breast mother" (i.e., a mother that is unable to satisfy the child's needs therefore letting the child down) depending on if the child's needs are met (i.e., paranoid schizoid position). As the child matures he/she is able to integrate the mother as a cohesive whole, leading to the 'depressive position'. The child sees both types of mothers (i.e., good and bad) as two different mothers initially but with maturity the child realizes that they are one/the same and the child feels disappointed (i.e., 'depressive position'). It is postulated that failure of an individual to integrate a cohesive view of themselves or others, could lead to polarized views of others with subsequent disappointment with that person.

Stan is now driving impulsively and recklessly over the speed limit whilst intoxicated. There is evidence Stan has taken an overdose of "downers" (e.g., benzodiazepines, opiates etc.) and feeling "drowsy."¹⁷ Notably, when Eminem was interviewed he discusses his addiction to "downers" (e.g., zopiclone, hydrocodone, diazepam and his methadone overdose). There is evidence of aggressive behaviour as it becomes apparent that Stan's pregnant partner is tied-up in the trunk of the car. Stan blames this situation on Slim Shady's rejection. Throughout verse 3, Stan riles against perceived betrayal, abandonment and rejection from Slim Shady and seeks to punish him for this. It appears that his intention is to end his life by driving over the bridge, killing himself, his partner and their unborn child. The scene ends with Stan's realization that his recorded message to Slim Shady might not reach him, illustrating poor planning and impulsivity.

Through these verses, we speculate that Stan is probably suffering with emotionally unstable personality disorder of the borderline type as evidenced by self-harm, overdose, fear of abandonment, chronic emptiness, self-image and sexual identity issues and impulsivity;¹⁸ these recurrent themes are likely to be long standing issues. We speculate that Stan's early childhood neglect and psychological trauma have led to chemical changes in his brain making him less able to cope with stress and difficulty in developing trusting relationships. Such factors may have led Stan to self-medicate by cutting himself to deal with his unpleasant, distressing feelings, which, taken together,

¹⁶ Melanie Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*, (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975).

¹⁷ Shaheem Reid, "Eminem Admits He 'Almost Died' From Drug Overdose," *MTV News*, Accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1610557/eminem-admits-he-almost-died-from-drug-overdose/>

¹⁸ World Health Organization: *The ICD-10 classification of mental and behavioral disorders: clinical descriptions and diagnostic guidelines*, Geneva, 1992.

could infer a potential diagnosis of emotionally unstable personality disorder of the borderline type.

We highlight the feasibility of using Hip Hop lyrics to open up dialogues in mental health. In this article, we have speculated on the possibilities of mental health problems and diagnoses in a fictitious character; however, diagnosing a mental health disorder is a complex process and clinicians who diagnose mental health disorders take information from patients and obtain collateral history from close relationships around them. We also need to stress that we are not attributing violent acts to a significant number of people with mental health problems, and are aware of the vulnerability and stigma faced by people experiencing mental health problems. The social venture, HIP HOP PSYCH, generates material available for use by practitioners in order to open up youth-focused dialogues with patients.

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White Chicks with a Gangsta' Pitch: Gendered Whiteness in United States Rap Culture (1990-2017)

Melvin L. Williams

The current research analyzed the authenticating strategies employed by White female rappers to establish legitimacy in Rap culture. Specifically, the study investigated the lyrical content of 109 Rap songs, produced by seven White female rappers signed to major record labels from 1990 to 2017 in the United States. An analysis of Rap lyrics from Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, Kreyshawn, K.Flavy, and Iggy Azalea revealed a number of findings that complicated and supported Edward Armstrong and Mickey Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies. These rappers emphasized authenticity in their lyrical content and chronicled the multiple systems of oppressions facing White women in Rap, among other strategies. The seven rappers also presented themes that articulated a new Hip Hop authenticating strategy: "Look but don't touch." This strategy indicated a shift in the tactics used by White male rappers to establish legitimacy in the musical genre and captured the unique standpoints of White women in Rap culture.

The majority of the discourse in Hip Hop has primarily been about the thoughts, feelings, and ethos of Black men.¹ While Hip Hop has experienced some diversity over the years with the acceptances of Eminem, Macklemore, and Ryan Lewis, and more recently, Mac Miller, Logic, and Post Malone, White female rappers still have not achieved the same level of mainstream success as their White male counterparts. The advent of a White female "rocking the mic" is still heavily questioned and scrutinized by Hip Hop artists and fans. In Rap, "rocking the mic" is used to describe Rap artists, who are able to rap "effectively and impressively" and "use or wield Rap lyrics effectively with a sense of style or self-assurance."²

Despite changes throughout the years, Hip Hop remains a hypermasculine and heteronormative subculture, where White women are minimally represented. Rap lyrics coming from a White woman have been viewed historically as comical attempts to embody the attributes of Hip Hop's vision of Black masculinity and hysterical gender disjunctions that are similar to a woman wearing her husband's clothes.³ However, there is an existing lineage of White female rappers, who strived to make a mark in Rap and Hip Hop. From Blondie's "Rapture" in the 1980s to the mass popularity of Iggy Azalea in 2014, the occurrences and significance of White female participation in Hip Hop culture have evolved over the past three decades.

¹ Touré Neblett, "Challenging Hip Hop Masculine Ideal," *New York Times*, December 23, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/arts/music/white-female-rappers-challenging-Hip-Hop-masculine-ideals>.

² Ben Zimmer, "When Did We First Rock the Mic," *New York Times*, July 9, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/11/magazine/11FOB-onlanguage-t.html?_r=0

³ Ibid.

White female performers have aimed to challenge the masculine dominance of Hip Hop, although their small surge has barely garnered notice.⁴ Despite the growing history of White female performers in Rap culture, the historical contributions and authenticating strategies of White female rappers remain topics largely unexamined in academic research. A review of scholarship and articles from refereed and mainstream publications concerning White participation in Rap and Hip Hop suggests authors have established a robust discussion on the authenticating strategies of White men, but not those related to White women.

Recognizing this void in Rap research, the current research investigated the discursive space of White women in Rap through an analysis of the authenticating strategies used by White female rappers to attain legitimacy in the musical genre. Specifically, the current research investigated the lyrical content of 109 Rap songs from nine studio albums and three extended plays (EPs), produced by White female rappers signed to major labels in the United States from 1990 to 2017, to examine the presence of Edward Armstrong and Mickey Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies in the following seven White female rappers: Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, Kreyashawn, Iggy Azalea, and K.Flay.⁵ This twenty-seven-year time period was particularly significant for the current research because it captured the onset of White female rappers signing to major labels and releasing full-length albums in the Rap genre. More specifically, Tairrie B recorded the first Rap studio album released by a White female rapper signed to a major label in 1990.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Critical Whiteness Studies, Gendered Whiteness, and Rap Culture

Drawing from the theory of social constructionism, Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) raised questions about the construction of Whiteness and investigated how diverse groups in the United States “came to identify, and be identified by others, as White—and what that has meant for the social order.”⁶ CWS aims to critique and destabilize the hegemonic conceptualization of Whiteness by providing researchers with the tools to “look behind the privilege that Whiteness provides.”⁷ By investigating racial division and racial hierarchy through the lens of the dominant racial group, CWS

⁴ Carolyn Corrado, “White Noise: Negotiating Boundaries and Constructing Whiteness in Hip Hop America” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Albany, 2013).

⁵ Edward Armstrong, “Eminem’s Construction of Authenticity,” *Popular Music and Society* 27, no. 3 (2004): 335–55; and Mickey Hess, “Hip Hop Realness and The White Performer,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (2005): 372–89.

⁶ Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 155.

⁷ Aida Hurtado and Abigail J. Stewart, “Through The Looking Glass Implications of Studying Whiteness For Feminist Methods,” in *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance*, ed. Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda Powell Pruitt, and April Burns (New York: Routledge, 2004), 297.

complicates notions of race by “studying up” the racial hierarchy.⁸ Under this prism, Whiteness is systematically dissected, rather than taken for granted and left unexamined.

Scholarly writing and empirical research on Whiteness can be organized into three major themes: 1) the omnipresence, yet invisibility of Whiteness, 2) White privilege, and 3) the social construction of Whiteness.⁹ Indicative of such power relations is third wave Whiteness, an emerging area of CWS research that illustrates an analytical shift in the study of White identities towards a more complex investigation of Whiteness to include gender.¹⁰ Drawing on this contemporary wave of CWS, the researcher’s conception of “Gendered Whiteness” considers the similarities and differences in the ways White masculinity and White femininity are constructed and signified through Rap culture. The social construction of White femininity has encouraged White women to be demure, deferential, and delicate to warrant the protection and support of their White fathers and husbands.¹¹

Connecting Gendered Whiteness and CWS to the current research, Hip Hop culture stands as one of the few cultural spaces where Whiteness is regarded as the “Other” and considered subordinate to Blackness.¹² When examining Whiteness through the lens of Hip Hop culture, the three major themes of CWS research studies become complicated because Whiteness is not as invisible or privileged in the musical genre when compared to the society at large. The relations of power and privileges that make Whiteness powerful in a societal context make the racial category powerless for White artists in Hip Hop culture due to rising fears of cultural appropriation and imitation among other factors.

Because of the strong influence of gender order on society and Rap’s push for female rappers to be hypersexual and tough in their deliveries, White women must embody Rap’s cultural styling differently than their White male counterparts. Carolyn Corrado noted White women in Hip Hop and Rap culture have often taken on “stereotypically Black feminine identified traits (for example, being short tempered, quick to engage in physical altercations with other girls, aggressively yelling in another girl’s face, and using particular hand gestures in these enactments), but not necessarily dressing the part.”¹³ Under this prism, White women in Hip Hop and Rap culture have

⁸ Michael Messner, “Becoming 100% Straight,” in *Inside Sports*, ed. Jay Coakley and Peter Donnelly (New York: Routledge, 1999), 104–10.

⁹ Kathryn Sorrells, *Intercultural Communication: Globalization and Social Justice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2015).

¹⁰ France Winddance Twine and Charles Gallagher. “Introduction: The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the Third Wave,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 4–24.

¹¹ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹² Todd Boyd, *Am I Black Enough for You: Popular Culture from the Hood and Beyond* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

¹³ Corrado, “White Noise,” 68.

performed an alternative enactment of Black feminine characteristics that both guarded a White feminine aesthetic and complicated the borderlines of racialized styles.¹⁴

Authenticity in Hip Hop and Rap

Authenticity claims have been pervasive in Hip Hop music communities, which previously existed on the margins of mainstream American culture.¹⁵ In popular music studies, the concept of authenticity deals with the performance's proximity to an original culture that once existed outside of the record industry.¹⁶ Peterson summarized the scholarship of Maurice Halbwachs by stating, "Authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed upon construct."¹⁷ This "socially agreed upon construct" serves as a discursive formation with multiple meanings.¹⁸ According to Imani Perry, Hip Hop music is "Black American music" that is reluctant to accept White artists because of its history as a resistant culture.¹⁹ Since its dominant culture is Black, "Whiteness stands outside of Hip Hop as a force that threatens to appropriate its culture."²⁰ Despite the racial tensions that underpin Rap's reluctance to render White Hip Hop artists as authentic, a White rapper's performance of authenticity is still his or her biggest asset in the genre's hypermasculine and consumerist world.

Katja Lee noted, "The discourse of authenticity in Rap has been and continues to be bound up in the performance of self, although what constitutes an acceptable performance of identity and even what constitutes a legitimate identity have changed over the years."²¹ Hip Hop journalist David Drake addressed the changing dynamics of authenticity in the musical genre, stating, "Authenticity in Hip Hop is less about appealing to an objective truth—after all, there are as many truths as there are people on the planet—than it is a social code."²² According to Drake, authenticity is a "loose, unspoken set of rules that orient credit to the art form's creators" and is "flexible, always in flux and decided by audiences in different ways in different places."²³

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kembrew McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 134–50.

¹⁶ Hess.

¹⁷ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁸ McLeod.

¹⁹ Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 10.

²⁰ Hess, 375.

²¹ Lee, 352.

²² David Drake, "No Idea's Original: Authenticity in Rap Is a Myth," *Complex*. Accessed July 25, 2015, <http://www.complex.com/music/2015/07/rap-authenticity-myth-meek-mill-drake-action-bronson-ghostface-killah>.

²³ Ibid.

In the context of the United States, authenticity is particularly complex, given its legacy of stolen labor, capitalism, and the commodification of Black art forms.²⁴ When situated within this sociopolitical context, the veneration of authenticity in Hip Hop is equally about providing credit and more importantly, money to those who have “done the work,” a factor that opens the door for multiple creators of a Rap artist’s identity and art forms.²⁵ Acknowledging these trends, contemporary Rap record labels have become increasingly strategic about how Rap artists’ identities are created, performed, and distributed to a mass public, especially in the case of White female rappers.

Despite Rap’s push for an “authentic self,” White female cultural production in the musical genre often results in a carefully constructed process of manufacturing by music executives, who alter components of the White female rapper’s identity to market to a larger Rap audience. White rappers have historically presented multilayered identities constructed by Rap record labels to 1) appeal to contemporary and historic Rap trends, 2) acknowledge and reject White privilege, and 3) advance a narrative of Hip Hop authenticity to foreground a presumably “original” and “authentic” self.²⁶ Within this complex process, White female rappers navigate through multiple systems of oppression to immerse into a Black masculine culture that is presumably foreign to them. As a result, the authenticity claims and identities advanced by these artists are products of both lived and manufactured experiences that are equally important for Rap audiences, as they choose to validate or not validate them based on the genre’s socially agreed upon construct of authenticity and its larger consumer culture.

Exploring Rap’s racial politics and its implications for White rappers, Edward Armstrong identified three forms of Rap authenticity evident in the authenticating strategies of Eminem.²⁷ Eminem’s music conveyed to Rap fans the traditional characteristics that represent authenticity in Rap, but also renegotiated those same attributes to construct his identity as a strong performer in a historically Black culture.²⁸ Acknowledging the autobiographical nature of Eminem’s lyrics and articulations of authenticity, Armstrong advanced the following authenticating strategies based on his declarations of authenticity to both the Rap music industry and popular culture: 1) “being true to oneself” or “keeping it real,” 2) claiming “local allegiances and territorial identities,” and 3) establishing a connection to “an original source of Rap” through locale, style, or links to an established artist.²⁹

Extending Armstrong’s model of Rap authenticity, Mickey Hess constructed the concept of “Hip Hop realness.” According to Hess, Hip Hop realness is “conveyed when an artist performs as a unique individual and maintains a connection with the

²⁴ Michael Hodgman, “Class, Race, Credibility, and Authenticity in the Hip Hop Music Genre,” *Journal of Sociological Research* 4, no. 2 (2013): 402–13.

²⁵ Drake, “No Idea’s Original: Authenticity in Rap Is a Myth.”

²⁶ Hess, “Hip Hop Realness and the White Performer.”

²⁷ Armstrong, “Eminem’s Construction of Authenticity.”

²⁸ Katja Lee, “Reconsidering Rap’s ‘I’: Eminem’s Autobiographical Postures and the Construction of Identity Authenticity,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 351–73.

²⁹ Armstrong, “Eminem’s Construction of Authenticity,” 336.

original culture of Hip Hop.”³⁰ Hess detailed three forms of Hip Hop authenticity employed historically by White artists over a three-era time period of White male participation in Hip Hop and Rap culture: 1) Pre-Vanilla Ice era, 2) Vanilla Ice era, and 3) Eminem era, respectively. According to Hess, each era had its own distinct authenticating strategy, which described the strategies used by White artists to frame their Rap identities as a personification of “real” Hip Hop. The three Hip Hop authenticating strategies are:

1. Cultural immersion – The White Hip Hop artist(s) asserts his or her immersion in Hip Hop culture without imitating a model of Black authenticity.
2. Imitation – The White Hip Hop artist(s) imitates explicit models of the Black aesthetics including, but not limited to, language, oral culture, musical traditions, and political location.
3. The inversion of the rags-to-riches success stories of Black Rap stars – The White Hip Hop artist(s) frames his or her Whiteness as a career disadvantage in a form that remains dominated by Black artists.³¹

Literature Review

History of Prominent White Female Rappers in United States Rap

The 1980s saw the audiences of Rap music increase dramatically, as the genre transformed from a fad to a musical form with great commercial appeal.³² From the widespread popularity of LL Cool J and Salt N’ Pepa to Run DMC’s \$1.5 million endorsement deal with Adidas, rappers absorbed and recontextualized popular culture as White audiences warmed up to Rap in the 1980s.³³ Although the Sugar Hill Gang was able to land on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1979, wide-scale public attention was not paid to the genre until a White female artist appropriated it, or at least helped it along.³⁴ Blondie’s “Rapture” became one of the first Rap songs to get substantial radio airplay and was the first Rap song to reach number one in the United States in 1981.³⁵ “Rapture” infused a combination of new wave, disco, Rhythm and Blues (R&B), and Hip Hop that pioneered a nationwide interest in Rap music and was notable for acknowledging Hip Hop pioneers Fab Five Freddy and Grandmaster Flash. When asked about the

³⁰ Hess, 374.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

³² Steven Stoute, *The Tanning of America: How Hip Hop Created a Culture That Rewrote the Rules of the New Economy* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012).

³³ Sorrells, *Intercultural Communication: Globalization and Social Justice*.

³⁴ Paul J. Olson and Bennie Shobe, “White Rappers and Black Epistemology,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 6 (2008): 994–1011.

³⁵ “The Hot 100,” *Billboard*, March 28, 1981, <http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1981-03-28>; Alex Ogg and David Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years: A History of Rap* (New York: Fromm International, 2001).

significance of Blondie's "Rapture" for Whites in Hip Hop during an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, MC Serch (former member of White Rap group 3rd Bass) discussed his initial reluctance to take the Pop singer seriously.³⁶ He stated, "At the time, I thought she was just goofing around. It wasn't until later that I appreciated it as a piece of Hip Hop history."³⁷

Whether an attempt at cultural appropriation or a sincere showcase of her identification with Hip Hop culture, Deborah Harry's rap on "Rapture" increased the number of White female rappers signed to record deals in the United States.³⁸ Following the widespread success of "Rapture," record labels began to recognize how profitable the merger of Pop and Rap could actually be. The 1990s brought on a surge of White female rappers backed by record labels who were looking to cash in on the new phenomenon. Rap's popularity and audience, also grew considerably throughout the 1990s and 2000s, making room for many technological, lyrical, and thematic innovations to reflect its expanding White audience.³⁹ Materialism, licentiousness, dumb misogyny, and violence were main themes of the genre during this time period, a factor that impacted White female rappers as they attempted to position themselves within its hypermasculine, violent culture.⁴⁰

In spite of these challenges, White female participation in Rap crystallized in 1990 and 1991 with the release of studio albums from Tairrie B (*Power of a Woman*) and Icy Blu (*Icy Blu*). These albums were the first full-length Rap albums released by White female artists signed to major record labels. While their albums did not perform well on the *Billboard* charts, the commercial failures of Tairrie B and Icy Blu did not stifle the increasing number of White female Rap acts during the decade. In 1990, former *Soul Train* dancer Misa signed to the historic Motown label and released a modest single, "Shake the House," which failed to garner much attention from the public.⁴¹ Consequently, Misa's self-titled album was never released due to management issues.

The trend of White female rappers signing to major labels and releasing extended plays and studio albums continued in the 2000s with the following White female Rap acts: Sarai, Lady Sovereign, Kreayshawn, K.Flavy, and Iggy Azalea.⁴² These

³⁶ Michael Endelman, "White Rhymes: A Brief History of Pale-Faced Rap," *Entertainment Weekly*, January 26, 2007, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20010033,00.html>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "The 50 Biggest White Girl Rap Moments of All Time," *Spin*, October 2, 2012, <http://www.spin.com/gallery/50-biggest-white-girl-rap-moments-of-all-time/>.

³⁹ Guillermo Rebollo-Gil and Amanda Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence, and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45, no. 1 (2012): 118-32.

⁴⁰ John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing. The Marketing of Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 74.

⁴¹ Kyleigh, "Rare and Obscure Music: Misa," June 5, 2009, <http://musicrareobscure.blogspot.com/2009/06/misa.html>

⁴² Sarai, *The Original*, Epic Records, 2003, compact disc; Lady Sovereign, *Public Warning*, Def Jam Recordings, 2006, compact disc; Kreayshawn, *Somethin' Bout Kream*, Columbia Records, 2012, compact disc; K.Flavy, *Eyes Shut*, RCA Records, 2012, compact disc; and Iggy Azalea, *The New Classic*, Island Records, 2014, compact disc; Iggy Azalea, *Reclassified*, Island Records, 2014, compact disc.

artists, with the exception of Iggy Azalea, only achieved mild commercial success at best. Because these White female rappers comprise the sample for the current investigation, their histories and contributions will be discussed in greater detail in the Methodology portion of this study. While the aforementioned White female Rap acts gained public recognition through support from a major record label, there have been a number of White female rappers who have gained moderate exposure under independent labels.

Bay Area Rap trio Yeastie Girlz surfaced in the late 1980s and resurfaced in the 1990s under the guidance of an independent record label. Drawing on the name of iconic Hip Hop group The Beastie Boys, the short-lived feminist Rap trio, comprised of members Jane, Cammie, and Kate, hailed from the fertile punk scene of Gilman Street in Berkeley, San Francisco. Yeastie Girlz pushed forward a third-wave feminist message, as they spoke out against the FCC and rapped about not shaving their armpits.⁴³ While the trio released their debut album in 1988, it was not until they hopped on “Consolidated,” a 1992 industrial track by fellow Bay Area radicals, that the Yeastie Girlz captured the attention of a mass public, turning a diss phrase into a celebration of going down and moving your tongue around.⁴⁴ Aside from a brief reintroduction in 1992, the trio did not release any more material and failed to remain in the spotlight.

The political consciousness sparked by Yeastie Girlz resurfaced in the 2000s with the debuts of White female rappers Dessa and Invincible. Minneapolis rapper Dessa debuted as a member of the indie Hip Hop collective Doomtree. As a member of the collective, Dessa appeared on numerous albums before releasing her own solo EP, *False Hopes*. Dessa went on to release three solo albums through Doomtree’s independent record label. Similar to Dessa, Invincible gained a reputation as “one of Hip Hop and Rap’s sharpest political storytellers” with the release of her debut album, *ShapeShifters*, in 2008.⁴⁵ The album was released on Emergence, an independent record label she cofounded. Since the release of her debut album, Invincible has been compared to Eminem and positively reviewed by *Washington Post*.⁴⁶

While Dessa and Invincible rose to fame through politically conscious Rap messages, there have also been White female rappers who have capitalized on the nation’s fascination with the merger of Pop and Rap music. Some noteworthy examples are Princess Superstar, Kitty (formerly Kitty Pryde), and, most recently, Chanel West Coast. It bears noting that the most successful White female performers have primarily been R&B and Pop singers who delved into the Rap genre temporarily and did not release full Rap albums. Examples of these early White female rappers include Teena

⁴³ Greg Prato, “Artist Biography: Yeastie Girlz,” AllMusic, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/yeastie-girlz-mn0001218992/biography>

⁴⁴ “The 50 Biggest White Girl Rap Moments of All Time.”

⁴⁵ “Invincible: Shapeshifters,” *Spin*, August 2008, <http://books.google.com/books?id=UI7jcf4HvN4C&pg=PA100&dq=Invincible+Shapeshifters&hl=en&a=X&ei=zwVKUZK1ForKqQGupYCQBw&ved=0CEMQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=Invincible%20Shapeshifters&f=false> 1990.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Marie (also known as Lady Tee), a protégé of Black funk artist Rick James, who rapped on the record “Square Biz,” and Deborah Harry of the group Blondie.⁴⁷ Specifically, Deborah Harry was the first White rapper of any gender to top the *Billboard* charts in 1981, catapulting the still-nascent sound of Rap into the consciousness of a mass public.

Deborah Harry’s rap on “Rapture” undoubtedly served as a precedent to a host of White female Pop acts who rapped on widely successful musical hits. These women include but are certainly not limited to Dev (“Like a G6”), Fergie (“London Bridge,” “All of the Lights,” “L.A. Love,” “You Already Know”), Ke\$ha (“Tik Tok”), Madonna (“American Life”), and Miley Cyrus (“Ain’t Worried Bout’ Nothin’” and “24”). Though these women have been pivotal in discussions about White female participation in Rap and Hip Hop, the artists did not primarily identify as rappers and subsequently did not release a commercial album solely centered on the Rap genre. Such factors disqualified these artists from consideration in the current research. Despite the presence of White women in Rap since the 1980s, the White female rapper remains largely uninvestigated in Rap research. White female rappers have all strived to create a discursive space for White women in Rap culture, but have only achieved limited, if any, commercial success. However, the lack of commercial success gained by White female rappers does not negate the necessity of an investigation centered on their histories.

Research Questions

In considering the goal of the study and the lack of scholarship exploring this phenomenon, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Which strategies emerge in the lyrical content of the seven rappers under investigation that illustrate their attempts to establish Hip Hop authenticity using Armstrong and Hess’s White Hip Hop authenticating strategies?

RQ2: Which, if any, of these strategies complicate Armstrong and Hess’s White Hip Hop authenticating strategies?

RQ3: Which strategies, if any, emerge that articulate additional Hip Hop authenticating strategies for White rappers?

Methodology

The current research investigated the Hip Hop authenticating strategies of seven White female rappers through an analysis of lyrical content. The researcher focused on White female rappers who were signed to major labels and released full albums and electronic plays (EPs) over a twenty-seven-year period. With the goal of interpreting Rap lyrics for meaning, the researcher employed textual analysis, a systematic qualitative research method for this study. In academic research, textual analysis is a

⁴⁷ Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens, “Oppositional Consciousness within an Oppositional Realm: The Case of Feminism and Womanism in Rap and Hip Hop, 1976–2004,” *Journal of African-American History* 90, no. 3 (2005): 256.

research methodology used in a variety of ways to provide criticism of media culture and seeks to determine the meaning in language—individual words, idiomatic expressions, and other phrases.⁴⁸

When using textual analysis, researchers focus on meaning in texts by interpreting narrative elements and evaluating how these meanings act as examples of larger stories or existing broader social systems.⁴⁹ Rappers “situate themselves on the margin of society aligning their voices with other oppressed people.”⁵⁰ According to Lincoln, their voices are interpreted as “resistance against silence, resistance to disengagement, and resistance to marginalization.”⁵¹ Language is discursive and its discourse involves “the production of knowledge through language.”⁵² Recognizing the role of Rap lyrics as texts that serve as “storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic beats,” and its ability to share insight into the personal experiences of rappers, the researcher’s use of textual analysis provided a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon under investigation that is culturally, contextually, and historically appropriate.⁵³

Sampling

The current research employed a criterion sampling technique to address the research questions. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance.⁵⁴ The logic of criterion sampling is to review and analyze all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance for quality assurance purposes.⁵⁵ The purpose of utilizing a criterion sampling technique in this study was two-fold. First, the sampling technique was used to capture the perspectives of White female Rap artists, who all qualified for inclusion in the study based on very specific criteria. Secondly, the sampling technique enabled the researcher to select Rap

⁴⁸ Douglas Kellner, “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,” In *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, edited by Gale Dines and Jean McMahon Humez, 7-18 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011); Norman Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003).

⁴⁹ W. James Potter, *An Analysis of Thinking and Research about Qualitative Methods* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996).

⁵⁰ Aisha S. Durham, “Let’s Get Free, A Soundtrack for Revolution: A Textual Analysis of Black Power and Counterhegemony in Dead Prez Debut Rap Album” (Master’s thesis, University of Georgia, 2002), 49.

⁵¹ Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (1995): 282.

⁵² Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” In *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 44.

⁵³ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop and Why It Matters* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2008).

⁵⁴ Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001), 238.

⁵⁵ Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990).

artists over an extensive period of time. The categories were as follows: 1) rapper, 2) Rap album, 3) signed to a major label, and 4) released the Rap album between 1990 and 2017.

Approaching this investigation required the researcher to determine the difference between a “rapper” who released a full commercial album and “someone who has simply rapped on a song.” In *Homegirls and Divas: A Thematic Analysis of Black Female Rap Videos from 2005–2011*, Natasha Howard defined a rapper as “a person who performs Rap music.”⁵⁶ However, this broad definition left many gray areas that needed to be addressed when determining the sample for the current investigation. The performers examined were White female rappers who appeared as the primarily featured artist and released full Rap albums and/or extended plays (EPs) through major record labels between January 1, 1990 and June 1, 2017. This twenty-seven-year time period was particularly significant for the current research because it captured the onset of White female rappers signing to major labels and releasing full-length albums in the Rap genre under examination.

Only White female artists who released albums that met The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences’ standards for the categorization of a “Rap album” were considered for inclusion in the current research. According to the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, an album must contain at least 51% playing time of rapped performances to be considered a “Rap album.”⁵⁷ This criterion was utilized for EPs as well. According to Howard, in addition to “rapper” and “Rap album,” a “major record label” was defined as any record label or affiliate that was covered under the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). The RIAA covers the intellectual property of artists, who are affiliated with a record label distributed through one of the following major distribution companies: Warner Music Group, Universal Music Group, Sony/BMG, and Capitol/EMI.⁵⁸ Based on the aforementioned criteria and the nature of the criterion sampling technique, lyrics come from a total of 109 Rap songs from nine studio albums and three EPs produced by seven artists served as the sample for the current research.

Rappers under Investigation

The current section strived to provide brief biographical information about the seven artists under investigation. Artists are listed in chronological order based on their Rap debuts and studio album or EP release dates.

⁵⁶ Natasha Howard, “Homegirls and Divas: A Thematic Analysis of Black Female Rap Videos from 2005–2011” (PhD diss., Howard University, 2012), 43.

⁵⁷ “52nd OEP Category Description Guide,” National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, accessed October 15, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20091027172820/http://www.grammy.com/PDFs/Recording_Academy/52guide.pdf.

⁵⁸ “About RIAA,” Recording Industry Association of America, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.riaa.com/aboutus.php?content_selector=about-who-we-are-riaa.

Tairrie B. Tairrie B (born Theresa Beth on January 18, 1965) is a rapper from Anaheim, California, who began her career as a part of a female dance group entitled Bardeux.⁵⁹ Tairrie B recorded *The Power of a Woman* on June 12, 1990, an album that served as the first full-length Rap album released by a White female rapper in the United States.⁶⁰ The album failed to make much of an impact, and Tairrie B disappeared from the Rap industry, later becoming an alternative metal vocalist.⁶¹ In August 2015, Tairrie B returned to her Rap roots and released a studio album entitled *Vintage Curses* independently.

Icy Blu. Hailing from Austin, Texas, Icy Blu (born Laurel Urchik on June 1, 1974) encountered moderate success on the *Billboard Hot 100* with her two released singles “Pump It” and “I Wanna Be Your Girl,” peaking at #78 and #46, respectively.⁶² However, despite this moderate success, Icy Blu’s self-titled Rap album, released on July 9, 1991 through Giant Records, failed to achieve commercial success.⁶³

Sarai. As a native of upstate New York, Sarai (born Sarai Marie Howard on January 23, 1981) did not imagine herself as a rapper, but was introduced to the musical genre by her older brother.⁶⁴ In 2000, Sarai signed a record deal with Epic Records, making her the first White female rapper to be represented by a major American label.⁶⁵ Sarai released her debut album, *The Original*, on July 29, 2003.⁶⁶ Lacking promotion by Epic Records, the album failed to gain public interest and subsequently did not generate sales.⁶⁷

Lady Sovereign. London rapper Lady Sovereign (born Louise Amanda Harman on December 19, 1985) used social media to promote her music to a mass public. The media attention created by Lady Sovereign’s online posts landed the rapper in the office of Rap mogul Jay-Z, who was so impressed by her rap ability that he signed her to Def Jam Records, making Lady Sovereign the first female British artist to sign with the label.⁶⁸ Aside from the success of her popular, first single, “Love Me or Hate Me,” Lady Sovereign’s debut album, *Public Warning* (released on October 31, 2006), did not

⁵⁹ Kyleigh, “Rare and Obscure Music: Tairrie B,” June 6, 2009, <http://musicrareobscure.blogspot.com/2009/06/tairrie-b.html>.

⁶⁰ Tairrie B, *The Power of a Woman*, Ruthless Records, 1990, compact disc; “Icy Blu CD,” CD Universe, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://www.cduniverse.com/productinfo.asp?pid=4169892&style=music>.

⁶¹ Kyleigh, “Rare and Obscure Music: Tairrie B.”

⁶² Kyleigh, “Rare and Obscure Music: Icy Blu,” June 3, 2009, <http://musicrareobscure.blogspot.com/2009/06/icy-blu.html>.

⁶³ “Icy Blu CD.”

⁶⁴ Sarai Marie Howard, “About,” Facebook, accessed April 8, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/SaraiMarieHoward/info>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tom Breihan, “Lady Sovereign: I Needed To Stop,” *Pitchfork*, January 12, 2009, <http://pitchfork.com/news/34335-lady-sovereign-i-needed-to-stop/>

perform well, only selling 300,000 copies.⁶⁹ After being released from Def Jam, Lady Sovereign released a second album entitled *Jigsaw* independently. *Jigsaw* did not chart on the *Billboard* 200.

Kreayshawn. Born Natassia Gail Zolot on September 24, 1989 in San Francisco, California, Kreayshawn's fascination with Rap began at the age of seventeen when she began recording songs and exploring her interest in cinematography, shooting music videos for local artists, such as Lil B.⁷⁰ Capitalizing on the power of YouTube, Kreayshawn released a video for the single "Gucci Gucci" in 2011, and the song quickly became an Internet hit and landed the female rapper a million-dollar record deal with Columbia Records.⁷¹ Her debut album, *Somethin' Bout Kreay*, was released in September 2012 under Columbia Records and was met with negative reviews and poor album sales.⁷² *Somethin' Bout Kreay* currently stands as the all-time lowest first week sales by an artist signed to a major record label, according to HitsDailyDouble.⁷³ After a five-year, musical hiatus, Kreayshawn announced, via Twitter on August 15, 2017, plans to leave her rapping career behind to combat White privilege and make room for more women of color in Rap.⁷⁴

K.Fl原因ay. With dual degrees in psychology and sociology from Stanford University, K.Fl原因ay (born Kristine Flaherty on June 30, 1985) grew up outside of Chicago, Illinois.⁷⁵ During K.Fl原因ay's freshman year at Stanford University, she started rapping one night after deciding that Rap was "rife with misogyny and materialism," and by her junior year, Flay was making mixtapes and gaining acclaim at the university.⁷⁶ After signing with RCA in 2012, K.Fl原因ay released two EPs entitled *Eyes Shut* and *What If It Is* through the major record label. K.Fl原因ay parted ways with RCA in 2014, citing frustrations from "recording a shit ton of songs" and released her debut album *Life as a Dog* independently in 2014.⁷⁷ The album peaked at number two on the *Billboard Heatseekers*

⁶⁹ Hattie Collins, "Lady Sovereign: 'I Lost the Plot a Few Times,'" *Guardian*, April 7, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/apr/08/lady-sovereign>

⁷⁰ Rebecca Nicholson, "Kreayshawn: Haters Are 'Old and Don't Know What Swag Is,'" *Guardian*, September 30, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/oct/01/kreayshawn-gucci-white-girl-mob>

⁷¹ "The 50 Biggest White Girl Rap Moments."

⁷² X. Alexander, "Kreayshawn Album: 'Somethin Bout Kreay' Deemed 'Fairly Empty,'" *Huff Post San Francisco*, accessed September 18, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/19/kreayshawn-album-somethin_n_1898119.html

⁷³ Marjua Estevez, "Kreayshawn Earned One Cent from Her Album Sales," *XXL*, January 17, 2014, <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2014/01/kreayshawn-earned-one-cent-from-her-album-sales/>.

⁷⁴ Kyle Eustice, "Kreayshawn Quit Rapping Because She Was 'Too Privileged' and needed to Make Room for POC," *HipHop DX*, August 16, 2017, <http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.44395/title.kreayshawn-quit-rapping-because-she-was-too-privileged-needed-to-make-room-for-poc#>.

⁷⁵ "K.Fl原因ay," JamBase, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://www.jambase.com/Artists/86708/K.Fl原因ay/Bio>.

⁷⁶ "The 50 Biggest White Girl Rap Moments."

⁷⁷ "K.Fl原因ay: New Album: Life as a Dog on PledgeMusic," PledgeMusic, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.pledgemusic.com/projects/kflay>.

chart.⁷⁸ The success of *Life as a Dog* led to K.Fl原因's most recent record deal with Interscope Records under Dan Reynold's Night Sheet Records Imprint.⁷⁹ On April 4, 2017, she released her major label debut studio album, *Every Where is Some Where*, which debuted at 118 on the *Billboard 200*.⁸⁰

Iggy Azalea. Referred to by Rap critic Charlamagne Tha God as the "next Macklemore," Iggy Azalea (born Amethyst Amelia Kelly on June 7, 1990) gained praises from *XXL Magazine* after the release of her first full-length project, *Ignorant Art*.⁸¹ Following *Ignorant Art*, Iggy Azalea signed with Mercury Records and later Island Def Jam.⁸² After being named the first female and non-American rapper on *XXL's Top 10 Freshmen* cover issue in 2012, Iggy Azalea released *Glory*, her debut EP, which was executive produced by her longtime collaborator and mentor T.I. under Grand Hustle Records.⁸³ Iggy Azalea's debut album, *The New Classic*, was released on April 22, 2014 under Island Def Jam Records and debuted at number three on the *Billboard 200* and number two on the *Billboard Top R&B/Hip Hop Albums* and *Rap Albums* chart, making her album the highest debut by a White female rapper on both charts.⁸⁴ The album earned the rapper four nominations at the 2015 Grammy Awards, including Best New Artist, Best Rap Album, and Record of the Year.⁸⁵ In the same year, Iggy Azalea announced plans to release her sophomore studio album, *Digital Distortion*, and has since then released five singles ("A-Zillion," "Team," "Can't Lose," "Mo' Bounce," and "Switch") in support of the project.⁸⁶ The singles achieved lackluster commercial

⁷⁸ "K.Fl原因 Chart History," *Billboard*, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/6143419/k-flay/chart?f=335>

⁷⁹ Roman Gokhman, "K.Fl原因 Releases Video for First Single with Interscope Records," *Riff Magazine*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.riffmagazine.com/news/k-flay-blood-in-the-cut-video/>

⁸⁰ "K.Fl原因 Chart History."

⁸¹ Crystal Bell, "Charlamagne Tha God Talks 2014 Woodie Awards and Why Iggy Azalea Is the Next Macklemore," *Wet Paint*, March 14, 2014, <http://www.wetpaint.com/charlamagne-tha-god-woodie-awards-iggy-azalea-video-1-515989/>.

⁸² Erika Ramirez, "Iggy Azalea Signs to Island Def Jam," *Billboard*, April 23, 2013, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/1559163/iggy-azalea-signs-to-island-def-jam>.

⁸³ Latifah Muhammad, "Iggy Azalea – *Glory* EP," *Hip Hop Wired*, July 30, 2012, <http://hiphopwired.com/2012/07/30/iggy-azalea-glory-ep-listendownload/>.

⁸⁴ Paula Meara, "Rap Release Dates: Redman, Iggy Azalea, Wu Block, Swollen Members," *Hip Hop DX*, March 25, 2014, <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/news/id.28046/title.rap-release-dates-redman-iggy-azalea-wu-block-swollen-members>.

⁸⁵ "Sia, Iggy Azalea Each Score Four Grammy Nominations Including Record of the Year," *ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) News*, December 7, 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-07/sia-iggy-azalea-score-grammy-nominations/5949378>.

⁸⁶ Iggy Azalea, *Digital Distortion*, Island Records, 2017, compact disc; Elias Leight, "Billboard Winterfest: Iggy Azalea Talks about Grammy Awards, Her 2015 Tour, and Her Next Album," *Billboard*, January 26, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/events/sundance-2015/6450936/iggy-azalea-winterfest-interview>.

success at best, a factor that forced Iggy Azalea and Def Jam to push back her album's release date on multiple occasions.⁸⁷

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

In the current study, the lyrics from each Rap song were examined separately and then organized into a collective group based on the Rap artist who authored them. The researcher then analyzed the lyrical content of Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Lady Sovereign, Kreayshawn, Iggy Azalea, and K.Flav separately. The researcher noted whether the rappers' lyrical content presented discourse that aligned with Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies. The researcher also noted whether the lyrical content of the seven rappers offered any discourses that complicated Armstrong and Hess's strategies. A Hip Hop authenticating strategy was considered to be "complicated" by an artist under investigation if they remained true to key aspects of the strategy, but altered components of it to articulate a unique standpoint.

Once data were collected, the researcher conducted a qualitative deductive thematic analysis to discover themes within the texts. In a deductive approach to thematic analysis, the researcher "approaches the coding process of his or her data with pre-existing themes linked to past research on the phenomenon in question;" thus allowing the researcher to "extend or refute the works of previous researchers on a specific subject."⁸⁸ A deductive approach to thematic analysis was used in the present study because the data collected were analyzed for themes found in alignment with Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies.

After a systematic analysis was completed, the researcher considered findings within the context of each individual rapper under investigation. This task was achieved through close investigations of the texts as a means to determine how dominant themes manifested within the context of the seven rappers and the 109 Rap songs under investigation.

Findings and Discussion

Brief Overview of Findings

An analysis of the 109 Rap songs from the seven White female rappers under investigation revealed a number of findings that supported and complicated Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies. Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, Kreayshawn, and Iggy Azalea incorporated familiar strategies associated with Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies in their attempts to validate

⁸⁷ C. Vernon Coleman, "Iggy Azalea Doesn't Know When Her Album Is Coming Out," *XXL Mag*, June 3, 2017, <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2017/06/iggy-azalea-doesnt-know-when-album-coming-out/>.

⁸⁸ Howard, "Homegirls and Divas: A Thematic Analysis of Black Female Rap Videos from 2005-2011" 41.

themselves as credible artists in a musical genre dominated by Black men. Rappers Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea employed the most of Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies, each presenting themes in their lyrics that corresponded with five and six of the strategies, respectively. This finding was particularly significant because both rappers, unlike the five other rappers under investigation, were signed under and affiliated with established Black Rap groups.

However, the seven rappers did not all place the same emphasis on establishing and sustaining authenticity, with many artists either complicating the already existing Hip Hop authenticating strategies or not pursuing legitimacy at all. Lady Sovereign and K.Flax presented discourses in their Rap lyrics that suggested an indifference towards legitimizing themselves in the musical genre. Interestingly, K.Flax did not enact any of the Hip Hop authenticating strategies and served as the only artist in the sample whose song lyrics did not correspond with any of the strategies advanced by Armstrong and Hess. K.Flax made noticeable attempts to "Other" herself from Black male rappers and communicate apathy towards skeptics of her music. For example, K.Flax stated in her song "Sunburn," "Not worried about my taxes, not giving a flying fuck. Not worried about my ashes that one day will turn to dust." K.Flax also rejected comparisons to established Black Rap acts stating in the song, "10th Avenue," "I am no Kanye, Barry Bonds only hits I am making are ones on a bong." Overall, K.Flax's lyrics suggested a rejection of the Hip Hop authenticating strategies commonly employed by White rappers in Rap and Hip Hop's larger commodified culture. The theme of rejecting Hip Hop authentication was not as popular among the other five White female rappers and thus failed to be considered a major finding for the study.

Similarly, two artists presented discourses in their lyrical content that suggested attempts to imitate explicit models of the Black aesthetic. Both Icy Blu and Iggy Azalea demonstrated imitation in their attempts to remake successful songs originally performed by Black male and female Rap artists. While Icy Blu's "Pump It" stands as her most successful song to date, it was a remake of Rap group Salt-N-Pepa's classic hit "Push It" released in 1987. Using the song to discuss her search for a man to party with on the dance floor, the White rapper did not acknowledge the originators of the song and mimicked Black oral culture. While Iggy Azalea did acknowledge Jamaican dancehall legend Patra in her Reggae-inspired song "Lady Patra," the Australian rapper imitated Jamaican speech by altering her voice to mimic its oral culture. The pattern continued with her *Digital Distortion* single "Team." In this song, the Australian rapper remixed the flow from New Orleans rapper Juvenile's classic hit "Back That Azz Up," failed to acknowledge the song's originators, and claimed the obvious song similarities were unrelated. A complete list of the Hip Hop authenticating strategies employed by the six rappers is outlined in Table 1.

Hip Hop Authenticating Strategy	Artist(s)
The White Rap artist claims to be true to oneself and claims to be “natural” or “real” without “artifice”	Iggy Azalea, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, Tairrie B
The White Rap artist claims local allegiances and territorial identities.	Iggy Azalea, Kreayshawn, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, Tairrie B
The White Rap artist attempts to establish a connection to an original source of Rap through locale, style, or links to an established artist.	Iggy Azalea, Kreayshawn, Lady Sovereign, Tairrie B
Cultural Immersion	Iggy Azalea, Kreayshawn, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, Tairrie B
Imitation	Icy Blu, Iggy Azalea
The inversion of the rags-to-riches success stories of Black Rap stars	Iggy Azalea, Sarai, Tairrie B

Table 1 - Hip Hop Authenticating Strategies Presented in White Female Rappers' Lyrics

White Chicks Keeping It Real in Rap Culture

Iggy Azalea, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, and Tairrie B claimed to be “real,” “keep it 100,” and “natural rhymers” whose access to a Rap audience reportedly came from years of hard work and dedication to perfecting their crafts. These rappers used Armstrong’s strategy of “being true to oneself,” “natural,” or “real without artifice” to authenticate themselves as emcees and communicated a strong dedication to Rap culture. More importantly, the four rappers adopted aliases such as “The Gangster’s Moll,” “The Original,” “The New Classic,” and “The Realest” to signify the originality of their Rap identities. Comparable to Armstrong’s research on Eminem’s Rap authenticating strategies, the women used aliases and declarations of “keeping it real” to communicate a sense of “first-person authenticity” and convey that their utterances were ones of integrity and originality.⁸⁹ For these four rappers, it was very important to emphasize self-creation and authorship in their lyrical content to combat accusations of imitation.

For Tairrie B, her realness was evidenced through trademark Rap skills that allowed her to stand alongside NWA, Comptown, and the Syndicate Mob. She

⁸⁹ Armstrong, 337.

continually used aliases, such as “The Gangster’s Moll,” “Female Mob Boss,” and “Crazed Bitch with a Gangsta’ Profanity Pitch,” to emphasize her appreciation for Rap culture, express her identity, and reveal personal truths about her Rap affiliations. In fact, Tairrie B employed a similar strategy as Eminem, as she combated critics (i.e., media and other rappers) who doubted the authenticity of her lyrics. For example, in “Step 2 This,” Tairrie B challenged all of her naysayers and made a point to highlight that when it came to her dedication to Rap and rhyming, there was “no imitating, debating or mocking, second guessing, half stepping, or stopping.” This finding was particularly significant considering Hess’s discussion on Eminem, who he argued used lyrical content to directly address any accusations regarding his Rap authenticity.

Similar to Tairrie B, Sarai claimed to “keep it real” and stressed her dedication to quality lyrical content and the larger Rap culture. Coining herself “The Original,” Sarai claimed to be the missing piece in Rap culture. In the interlude to her debut album, *The Original*, Sarai stated, “I got what you need to survive. Make no mistake, I’m the original.” Similarly, in “It’s Official,” Sarai asserted her Hip Hop realness as she proclaimed, “I keep it real with everything I do. I don’t have time to pull a front for you.” As a White female rapper, Sarai’s affirmation of “being real” was supported by her longtime participation in Rap culture as both a lyricist and battle rapper. Lady Sovereign presented comparable themes in her song “A Little Bit of Shh,” claiming to be an original Rap star who developed her skills without the support of anyone. In this song, the rapper declared, “Spit it on a track and leave it so horny. And who taught me? Nobody. I did it all by myself.”

While the three aforementioned artists presented substantial discourse in their lyrics that attempted to convey the impression that their identities were authentic, no artist investigated in the current research dedicated more content in her Rap lyrics to achieve this feat than Iggy Azalea. From her collaborative song with T.I. “Murda Business” to the first line of her hit song “Fancy” (“First things first, I’m the realest”), Iggy Azalea made noticeable attempts to communicate the integrity of her utterances. For Iggy Azalea, “keeping it real” was not just a strategy but a major topic of discussion in her music. In fact, she dedicated numerous songs from her *Glory* EP and three studio albums (*The New Classic*, *Reclassified*, and *Digital Distortion*) to detail her commitment to “keeping it 100,” a euphemism used in Rap culture to describe someone who “keeps it real” all the time. For example in “Walk the Line,” a track that detailed the rapper’s journey to fame, Iggy Azalea made it clear that she only rapped about incidents that were true to her life experiences. In the song, she declared, “If I didn’t live it, I won’t ink about it.” Recognizing the many critics who doubted the authenticity of her music, Iggy Azalea dedicated a significant number of songs in her musical catalogue to clarify confusions about her artistic honesty.

White Chicks Claim Local Allegiances and Territorial Identities

Armstrong’s Rap authenticating strategy of White Rap artists “claiming local allegiances and territorial identities” was also common in the lyrical content of the

seven White female rappers under investigation. Iggy Azalea, Kreayshawn, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, and Tairrie B located themselves geographically in areas that were both local and international in scope. Although a majority of the five artists did attempt to establish legitimacy in Rap by claiming geographic locations in the United States, there were two artists who complicated Armstrong's Rap authenticating strategy by emphasizing their international territorial identities. Both Iggy Azalea and Lady Sovereign foregrounded their statuses as migrants into the United States and its Rap culture, creating a rich discourse that spoke to the musical genre's global prominence.

On the other hand, Tairrie B, Sarai, Kreayshawn, and Iggy Azalea attempted to establish geographic authenticity by claiming residence in locations considered to be in close proximity to Black culture, such as Compton, California; Lithonia, Georgia; Miami, Florida; and Oakland, California. The four rappers cited these areas and, more importantly, their experiences as residents to place themselves in greater proximity to the urban Black "street" culture synonymous with Rap. They also emphasized the role of these geographic locations in the formation of their Rap identities. The rappers spoke candidly about the role of these locations in providing them with a unique standpoint in Rap; informed by comparable experiences and marginalization faced by Black rappers. However, it is important to note that both Sarai and Iggy Azalea attempted to gain geographic authenticity by claiming allegiances to areas they were not originally born.

Sarai chronicled her relocation from New York to Lithonia, Georgia, and detailed how the move forced her to use Rap music as a coping mechanism to deal with the challenges of being a minority in a predominately Black community. In the song, Sarai stated, "Out of New York moved to Lithonia, Georgia, me and my roommate stand out in the complex. Ain't no thing, I relate through rhyme contests. I earned my respect through rhymes." Similarly, Iggy Azalea claimed local allegiances in Miami, Florida, as she spoke candidly about her decision to relocate from Australia to the United States and the perils of being an immigrant in the United States. Iggy Azalea portrayed Miami as being integral to the establishment of her Rap identity and indicative of the humble beginnings that ultimately led to her success as a rapper. In Iggy Azalea's "Work," the rapper detailed the perils of scrubbing floors in Miami to achieve upward mobility, as she stated throughout the song's bridge, "No money no family, 16 in the middle of Miami."

Tairrie B and Kreayshawn claimed cities in close proximity to their actual hometowns of Anaheim and San Francisco, California. Both artists represented areas largely populated by Blacks and claimed to be royalty in these areas. For example, in "Anything You Want," Tairrie B made local allegiances to Compton, California, and claimed to always wear a cap that "reads Compton on it." Tairrie B detailed her experience as a "Female Mob Boss" in the city, where she engaged in fights with men and women to prove she was down with Compton. When analyzing Tairrie B's lyrics, it became clear that her mission was to place herself in close geographic proximity to her fellow Compton artists (i.e., Eazy E, Ice T., and Dr. Dre), who mostly originated from the Compton, California, area.

However, it bears noting that Tairrie B's Compton identity did not go without criticism. In "Anything You Want," a man questioned the validity of Tairrie B's territorial identity and stated, "Bitch you ain't from Compton." The man was then combated by Rap legend Eazy E, who declared Tairrie B as the "Queen of Compton." Eazy E's validation of Tairrie B's territorial identity supported her push to appear more authentic than a White female rapper claiming residence in a similar area without the backing of an established Black Rap artist. While Tairrie B stressed her street lifestyle in Compton, California, in her lyrics, Kreyashawn only spoke briefly about her geographic location in "Gucci Gucci," stating, "Oakland city representer, address me as your majesty." Kreyashawn's brief statement of her geographic location suggested an attempt to achieve Hip Hop authenticity by acknowledging an area of residence with a considerable African American population.

White Chicks Connect to Established Rap Artists

Kreyashawn, Lady Sovereign, Iggy Azalea, and Tairrie B established connections with commercially successful Rap artists who corroborated their claims to territorial identities, combated critics of their music, served as featured guests on their albums, and signed them to affiliated record labels and Rap groups. Additionally, these White female rappers made references to established Black male and female Rap artists in their songs, citing them as major influencers in their Rap careers and boasting about engaging in affiliative activities with the artists.

For Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea, their affiliations with established Rap artists were vital in combating accusations of cultural appropriation and acculturating into Rap culture. Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea both affiliated themselves with gangster rappers who attempted to add dimensions of street credibility to their Rap identities by granting them access to their larger Rap crews or groups. This finding supported Armstrong and Hess's research on Hip Hop authenticity that highlighted the role of Dr. Dre in integrating Eminem into Rap culture and "maintaining some level of control over representations" of the White rapper. Like Eminem, Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea received support from Black Rap acts and their larger Rap groups that "established their right to perform Hip Hop despite their Whiteness."⁹⁰

However, these Black male collaborators and mentors also benefited from the White female performers, serving as executive producers of their albums and maintaining a high level of control and financial ownership over their brands. Like Dr. Dre, rappers Eazy E and T.I. presented Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea to Rap audiences as their protégés, who were credible and, more importantly, affiliated with their record labels. When coupled with Rap's commercial appeal and its history of White performers (such as Eminem) outselling Black Rap artists, it becomes clear that their collaborations with Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea could be interpreted as feeble attempts to cash in on Rap's fascination with White female performers during both time periods.

⁹⁰ Hess, 383.

Kreayshawn and Lady Sovereign also associated themselves with established Rap artists. However, instead of using them to gain credibility in the same manner as Eminem, Iggy Azalea, and Tairrie B, these two rappers followed an approach comparable to the Beastie Boys to collaborate and connect with Black Rap artists. According to Hess, the Beastie Boys did not attempt to be a part of a Rap group, but rather gained acceptance from Black Rap artists through collaborative records that supported their Rap messages. Connecting this approach to Kreayshawn and Lady Sovereign, both rappers featured Rap artists on their albums who served as collaborators and supporters of their messages.

In her remix to "Love Me or Hate Me," Lady Sovereign featured Rap veteran Missy Elliott, who rapped about her originality as an artist before telling Lady Sovereign to "tell 'em how it is." Missy Elliott's feature on the song worked to spark a sense of solidarity between two artists whose messages of self-expression and individuality were similar and compatible. Comparably, Kreayshawn's connections with established Rap acts were indicative of the content discussed on her album. Throughout *There's Something Bout' Krey*, Kreayshawn placed a heavy emphasis on drug use and partying, featuring rappers 2Chainz and Kid Cudi. As a result, her connection with these rappers focused little on validating Kreayshawn as an authentic Rap artist and more on engaging in heavy drug use.

The Cultural Immersion of White Chicks into Rap Culture

Tairrie B, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, Kreayshawn, and Iggy Azalea openly acknowledged their Whiteness while employing a variety of tactics to immerse into Rap's Black masculine culture. These tactics included drug use, claiming of international territorial identities, and capitalizing on affiliations with established Rap acts. For Tairrie B, reminding listeners of her Whiteness and affiliation with Compton was integral to her immersion into Rap. However, it is important to highlight that Tairrie B made a noticeable effort to emphasize the ethnicity of her Whiteness, referring to herself as a "platinum blonde with Italian roots" in "Anything You Want." This trend is not a new one historically for White artists in Rap, as White Rap group House of Pain emphasized their Irish heritage, avoiding all accusations of attempting a performance of Blackness.

Iggy Azalea leveraged her affiliation with gangster rapper T.I. to immerse herself into Rap culture, while embracing her status as both a White woman and a migrant to the United States. As mentioned in the previous section, gangster rapper T.I. was critical to the validation of Iggy Azalea's street credibility. T.I. championed Iggy Azalea as "Grand Hustle Record's First Lady" and promoted his acceptance of her in several collaborative records. However, Iggy Azalea did not solely speak about established Rap artists affiliated with her record label or group. Iggy Azalea also discussed successful artists such as 2Pac, Beyoncé, Chance the Rapper, Jay-Z, Lil Wayne, and Nicki Minaj, boasting about relationships with them, citing their influences on her career, and making metaphorical connections to them in songs such as "Goddess," "Team," and

“Work.” With regard to racial identification, Iggy Azalea signified her own immersion into Rap through explicit discussions of her status as a White female rapper. Throughout the sample, the Australian rapper referred to herself as a “White bitch” and “White girl” and rapped about material gains, “mobster connections,” and Pop success in Rap culture.

While Tairrie B and Iggy Azalea achieved cultural immersion primarily through the support of established Rap acts; Sarai, Kreyashawn, and Lady Sovereign employed a variety of tactics. In the case of Sarai, the rapper did not attempt to imitate a model of Blackness and constantly referred to herself as “Mrs. Strawberry Blonde” and a “minority” in Rap. Acknowledging her status as an outsider, the rapper made it no secret that she was a White woman trying to achieve success in a musical genre that did not cater to her demographic. However, it can be argued that her immersion into Rap culture was somewhat stifled due to limited acceptance and support from established Rap acts. On the contrary, Kreyashawn asserted her immersion into Rap culture by capitalizing on the genre’s fascination with money, women, and drugs. The California rapper foregrounded her drug use as a strategy to gain cultural immersion and the support of established Rap acts who shared common interests.

Both of her collaborative efforts with rappers, 2 Chainz and Kid Cudi, discussed the topics of drug use and sexual encounters with women. In these songs, Kreyashawn presented discourse that mirrored the misogynistic actions of Black men in Rap, who utilized what Neal referred to as “neo-pimpin” discourse to name, dominate, and exploit female sexuality and sexual behavior.⁹¹ However, it is important to note that Kreyashawn did not attempt to imitate a Black vocal style or model of Blackness in her lyrics. Rather, Kreyashawn’s heavy drug use and personification of a comparable hypermasculinity associated with Black male rappers served as key strategies in her cultural immersion into Rap. Kreyashawn repeatedly rapped about “smoking a million Swisher blunts,” referred to women as “bitches,” and detailed pursuits of women on “college campuses with a baggie full of Adderall.”

Aiming to differentiate herself from American acts, Lady Sovereign, foregrounded her status as an international artist as a tactic to immerse herself into Rap culture. The London rapper made no attempts to imitate a model of Blackness, rapping in her native British accent and proudly proclaiming her status as an “English misfit” in the song “My England.” For Lady Sovereign, her Rap influences came from a British upbringing that gave her a distinct sound. Like Iggy Azalea, Lady Sovereign suggested that her international identity granted a level of sophistication that differed from prior Black and White female Rap acts.

⁹¹ Mark Anthony Neal, *Songs in the Key of Black Life: A Rhythm and Blues Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 59–60.

A Shift to Intersectionality: White Chicks Complicate Hess's Inversion of the Rags-to-Riches Success Stories

While all seven artists presented discourses that complicated Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies, the most common complication among this sample was a shift from a narrow focus on race in the commonly used "inversion of the rags-to-riches success story" Hip Hop authenticating strategy advanced by Mickey Hess to a discussion of intersecting systems of inequality (i.e., race, class, gender, nation, etc.) facing White women in Rap. For Tairrie B, Sarai, and Iggy Azalea, race was just one of the many systems of inequality that positioned them as outsiders in Rap culture. Collectively, these women foregrounded a discussion on the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression that created challenges in their pursuit of Rap careers. Their narratives undoubtedly opened up a discussion on intersectionality and the prejudices faced by White women in Rap. For these women, the success of their Rap careers served as prosperous finales to their challenging journeys marked by relegations based on class, gender, race, and nationality.

In her lyrics, Tairrie B noted that being White and a woman embodied dual forms of oppression in Rap that created major obstacles in her journey to achieving commercial success. As a result, she spoke candidly about critics who doubted the quality of her talent due to race and gender and offered stern rebuttals. The White female rapper discussed gender discrimination in the song "Murder She Wrote" when she warned skeptics against judging her on the basis of gender. The rapper declared, "So don't underestimate or be assumed. That my Rap is weak or my music ain't booming because I'm a woman." Throughout *The Power of a Woman*, Tairrie B placed a heavy emphasis on discussing the perils of being a woman in a male-dominated Rap industry.

For Sarai, her long journeys to success and perception by Rap fans as an outsider in Rap culture were key narratives in her rags-to-riches story. Sarai's lyrics reflected on her actual biography, discussing prior criminal offenses, her relocation to an urban location, and prior encounters with racial prejudice in the Rap community. No song captured this component of her rags-to-riches narrative more than "Black and White." The autobiographical track addressed issues of institutional racism and sexism, criticized prejudice in Rap, and linked those issues to the problematic socialization of children in the United States. Ultimately, Sarai framed her gender and Whiteness as structural disadvantages that made it more difficult for her to achieve commercial success in Rap.

Of the three rappers, Iggy Azalea most frequently discussed her rags-to-riches success story in Rap lyrics. The Australian rapper continually detailed how class, gender, nation, and race served as intersecting forms of oppression that impacted her pursuit of Rap superstardom. Beginning in her *Glory* EP, Iggy Azalea spoke about the desire to run away from her status as a misfit in both American and Rap culture. In this same EP, Iggy Azalea detailed the challenges of being signed to her former record label,

Interscope Records, and the mass public's reluctance to deem her credible due to race and nationality.

In "Work," Iggy Azalea highlighted how being a migrant to the United States positioned her as an oppressed woman in a global society where migration stands as one of the defining global issues of the 21st century.⁹² "Work" served as Iggy Azalea's most biographical track to date, as the Australian rapper discussed her move to the United States and detailed how humble beginnings of "scrubbing floors just to make it past where she was from" taught her the importance of perseverance. When situated within context of global migration patterns, the rags-to-riches success story shared by Iggy Azalea in "Work" was indicative of contemporary migration patterns in which women constitute half the world's migrants and largely work as domestic workers and home health care workers, as part of what Kirk and Okazawa-Rey described as a global care chain.⁹³ The Australian rapper's migration to the United States placed her in subservient roles comparable to those occupied by women, who assume jobs in the global care chain due to a high demand for women as domestic workers.

New Hip Hop Authenticating Strategy

Icy Blu, Iggy Azalea, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, and Tairrie B presented lyrical content that articulated a new Hip Hop authenticating strategy based on their standpoints as White female rappers. The five rappers commonly presented themes that advanced one new Hip Hop authenticating strategy. While none of these themes are relatively new features in Rap, their appearances in the lyrical content of the White female rappers signify unique strategies employed by White women to establish legitimacy in the musical genre. The strategy was "Look but don't touch," which signified the rejection of sexual objectification. The five rappers rejected the hypersexual stereotypes commonly associated with Black female rappers, as they combated sexual objectification and claimed to be above using sex as a tool to achieve success in the Rap industry. In particular, they rapped about resisting the misleading tactics used by men to solicit sex from women and pushed forward an agenda of self-empowerment and virtue. This new Hip Hop authenticating strategy is particularly significant considering the historic representation of Black and White women in popular culture and Rap, a topic that will be discussed in the latter portion of this section.

The five rappers communicated an unwillingness to be played by men and presented their reluctance to engage in sexual activity as an admirable quality that made them different from other women in Rap. They often referred to these promiscuous women as "after show hoes" who "divided their legs" for career advancement and were in "videos with their asses hanging out." Such discourse

⁹² "About IOM," International Organization for Migration, accessed November 22, 2014, <https://www.iom.int/about-iom>.

⁹³ Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey, *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013).

illustrated a strong effort by the rappers to “Other” themselves from Black female rappers who used their sexuality to reinforce sexist ideals in Rap culture. Instead of attempting to embody the typical representations of Black women in Rap music that reduced them to “cunts, bitches and all-purpose hoes,” Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, and Iggy Azalea distanced themselves from promiscuity and claimed to be above those who were.⁹⁴

Throughout her songs, Tairrie B claimed to be “dope emcee not on her knees” for a career in Rap, threatening to dismantle men who approached her in an inappropriate way. Emphasizing her virtue, Icy Blu heavily discussed her decision to abstain from sex despite its unpopularity in society. Throughout her self-titled album, the rapper chronicled the many men who attempted to charm her for sexual favors. Icy Blu’s lyrics suggested a strong annoyance with the hypersexual nature of young men. Similarly, Sarai’s lyrics indicated a resistance to sexual objectification, as she too distanced herself from promiscuity. However, the rapper focused heavily on the hypersexual representation of women in Rap and vowed to never use those tactics to achieve commercial success in the genre.

Iggy Azalea enacted the “Look but don’t touch” strategy in comparable ways, separating herself from women who she claimed “divided their legs” to achieve success in the industry. However, Iggy Azalea differed from Tairrie B and Sarai by also discussing her sexuality as a fantasy that everyone wanted, but few would actually experience. For Iggy Azalea, “Look but don’t touch” was a consistent theme in her music, as she claimed that everybody wanted to put their hands on her body and used the term to communicate her reluctance to engage in sexual activity. For example, in “Fancy,” Iggy Azalea rapped, “Hot girls hand up, don’t touch. Look at it, but you wish you could clutch that.” Comparatively, in “Can’t Lose,” she described herself as a “Leprechaun with that pot of gold” that “everyone wanted to taste,” but never would.

While Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, and Iggy Azalea exhibited the “Look but don’t touch” Hip Hop authenticating strategy in Rap lyrics when discussing relationships with men, Lady Sovereign portrayed herself as someone who was not sexy and unwilling to change her image to fit the Rap industry’s beauty standards for female artists. Lady Sovereign rejected sexual objectification by positioning herself as a maverick in a Rap industry dominated by hypersexual images of women. For these rappers, the Rap industry was a place of work, and their lyrics illustrated a bold attempt to reject sexual exploitation and correct any allegations of using sex for career advancement.

As a result, the rappers’ decisions to not be sexualized by their Rap peers served as a strategy to foreground their talent and virtue in an industry dominated by women who are presented in a misogynistic way. Moreover, the strategy worked to challenge the hypermasculine script in Hip Hop by providing a clear rebuttal to Rap’s history of

⁹⁴ Kimberlé Williams-Crenshaw, “Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew,” In *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*, ed. Mari Matsuda (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 122.

sexually humiliating women for commercial gain.⁹⁵ Collectively, all five rappers presented an intriguing counter-narrative to the longstanding, misogynistic gender relations in Rap and Hip Hop, where women of color (specifically Black and Latina women) have been devalued and denigrated to “bitches, hoes and hoochies” and are typically “shown as exchanging money or status for sex.”⁹⁶

When applied to the history of Black and White female representation in Rap and popular culture, there are a number of connections that can be made. Since the days of slavery, American society has allowed Whites to sexualize their world by projecting onto Black women a narrative of impurity and sexualization disassociated from White women.⁹⁷ The Black female body has historically given both White men and women access to forbidden or taboo forms of sexual expression.⁹⁸ Similarly, in Rap, according to Howard, Black women have historically been linked to the stereotype of being morally loose and hypersexual in both the musical genre and the larger public sphere. On the contrary, White women have been portrayed in popular culture as fantasies that were demure, deferential, and delicate.⁹⁹ Connecting White female representation to Rap culture, Neal argued that White women could subject themselves to the misogynist excesses of Rap and Hip Hop’s affinity for hypersexual displays and walk away unharmed. While Black women face male sexist discourses in Rap based on the aforementioned behaviors, White women are shielded by their Whiteness from the assumption of sexual availability faced by Black women.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, these rappers’ overt rejection of sexual objectification aligned with a longstanding history of White women positioning themselves as superior to Black women solely on the basis of virtue.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

The study revealed that despite its focus on White female rappers, the overall findings remained consistent with earlier research on White participation in Rap culture

⁹⁵ Melvin L. Williams, “My Job Is to Be a Bad Bitch: Locating Women of Color in Postfeminist Media Culture on *Love and Hip Hop: Atlanta*,” *Race, Gender, and Class Journal* 23, nos. 3–4 (2016): 68–88; Melvin L. Williams and Tia C. M. Tyree, “The Unquiet Queen: An Analysis of Rapper Nicki Minaj in the *Fame Comic Book*,” In *Feminist Theory and Pop Culture*, ed. Adrienne Trier-Bieniek (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2015), 49–64.

⁹⁶ Beretta E. Smith-Shormade, *Shaded Lives: African-American Women and Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 93; Margaret Hunter and Kathleen Soto, “Women of Color in Hip Hop: The Pornographic Gaze,” *Race, Gender, & Class* 16, nos. 1–2 (2009): 172.

⁹⁷ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 62.

⁹⁸ Melissa Campbell, “Go White Girl’: Hip Hop Booty Dancing and the White Female Body,” *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4 (2004): 501.

⁹⁹ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁰ Neal, 59–60; Rose, 45–46.

¹⁰¹ Melvin L. Williams, “Miley’s Wrecking Ball Takes a Whack out of Hip Hop,” *HuffPost*, May 29, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mileys-wrecking-ball-takes-a-whack-out-of-Hip-Hop_us_592c4e9fe4b0a7b7b469cc56.

and the strategies employed by this population to establish and sustain authenticity. Overall, the lyrical content of Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, Kreayshawn, and Iggy Azalea demonstrated most of Armstrong and Hess's Hip Hop authenticating strategies. As noted earlier in the Findings and Discussion section, K.Flav did not enact any of the Hip Hop authenticating strategies and served as the only artist in the sample whose song lyrics did not correspond with any of the strategies advanced by Armstrong and Hess. These rappers emphasized authenticity and credibility in lyrical content, claimed local and international territorial allegiances, and discussed the multiple systems of oppressions facing White women in a musical genre dominated by Black men. The rappers also made strong attempts to situate themselves within Rap's social milieu by highlighting past experiences, neighborhoods, and allegiances in their lyrics.

Undoubtedly, Tairrie B, Sarai, Icy Blu, Lady Sovereign, Kreayshawn, and Iggy Azalea aimed to showcase to listeners that their lyrics and personas were ones of integrity. For these rappers, it was important to counter allegations that they were not the authors of their lyrics. This strong emphasis on authorship prompted the researcher to review the song credits for the albums and EPs of all seven rappers under investigation to gain additional information on the songs' writers. After reviewing the song credits, it was very evident that all seven of the rappers penned their own song lyrics. As a result, the songs performed by these White female rappers helped to challenge existing stereotypes about White womanhood in Rap that positioned them as inauthentic, and bring their unique standpoints as White women from margin to center in Rap's Black masculine culture.

After reviewing the findings of this research, it was clear that all seven rappers presented a number of themes that supported its theoretical framework. When situated within the contexts of Critical Whiteness Studies and Gendered Whiteness, the findings demonstrated the privilege of Whiteness and its role as a social construction situated within a particular place, time, and relations of power. The two most prominent themes were 1) a push to emphasize the ethnicity of Whiteness and 2) an allegiance to maintaining an image of virtue that countered the hypersexual lyrics and imagery of Black female rappers. As noted by McIntosh, one of the key privileges experienced by Whites and not by other racial groups is the ability to pick and choose one's ethnic identification.¹⁰²

Connecting this form of White privilege to the artists under investigation, Tairrie B, Iggy Azalea, and Lady Sovereign heavily emphasized their ethnic heritage in Rap lyrics. To avoid all accusations of attempting a performance of Blackness, they focused on other ethnic identities, portraying themselves as Irish, Australian, and British, respectively. For these women, the discursive shift signified the ethnic character of their Whiteness, as they positioned their ethnic identification as distinct from a generic "White" identity. By turning to different constructions of White identities, the rappers

¹⁰² Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," In *Race Class and Gender: An Anthology*, ed. Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins, 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth, 2007), 74-78.

aligned with prior research on Critical Whiteness Studies and White participation in Rap, mirroring the authenticating strategy used by the White male Rap group House of Pain to immerse into Rap culture.

Perhaps, the most prevalent theme among the seven rappers was their strong effort to maintain an image of virtue. Advanced as a new Hip Hop authenticating strategy coined by the researcher as “Look but don’t touch,” the artists under investigation rejected the hypersexual stereotypes commonly associated with Black and Latina women in Rap. Icy Blu, Iggy Azalea, Lady Sovereign, Sarai, and Tairrie B employed this new Hip Hop authenticating strategy in ways that correlated with the gender order of Whiteness in American society and its role in the social construction of White femininity. While the practice of White women participating in Rap’s Black masculine culture might suggest an act of resistance against the typical social construction of White femininity in America, Tairrie B, Icy Blu, Sarai, Lady Sovereign, and Iggy Azalea ultimately maintained a strong level of allegiance to White supremacist gender roles that upheld virtue and morality as core values.

The current study revealed the complicated nature of White female participation in Rap culture, symbolizing both a simultaneous allegiance and resistance to White supremacist gender roles. Additionally, this research foregrounded the history of the White female rappers to showcase the presence and more importantly, Hip Hop authenticating strategies of a unique sample of White female Rap artists. Through an analysis of lyrical content and their unique Hip Hop authenticating strategies, this study showcased how White female rappers brought what Gwendolyn Pough described as “wreck” to the public sphere of Rap culture as they “disrupted themselves into,” “made themselves visible,” and claimed both a voice and living for themselves in a subculture “bereft of opportunity for them.”¹⁰³

Contributions to the Field of Hip Hop Studies

Authenticity has been a heavily discussed topic in popular music and Hip Hop research when examining White male rappers who achieved commercial success in the musical genre. A number of scholars, including Edward Armstrong, Mickey Hess, Bakari Kitwana, Kembrew McLeod, and Ian Verstegen, have examined the contributions of White male rappers to the musical genre and issued progressive commentary detailing the strategies used by them to establish authenticity.¹⁰⁴ However, these scholars did not capture the experiences of White female rappers, despite their debuts and studio album releases before and during the publication dates of their research. For example, Tairrie B, Icy Blu, and Sarai released studio albums before

¹⁰³ Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 27.

¹⁰⁴ Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabees, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005); Ian Verstegen, “Eminem and the Tragedy of the White Rapper,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44:4 (2011): 872–89.

Mickey Hess's study on Hip Hop authenticity and the three eras of White participation in Hip Hop, but were not included.

Recognizing such voids in Rap research, the current study served as a much-needed contribution to the field of Hip Hop Studies. It provided a solid historical account of White female rappers in the United States, incorporating artists who were signed to independent and major labels. This historical account of White female participation in American Rap enabled the researcher to situate the seven White female rappers under investigation within Hess's three-era chronicle of White participation in Hip Hop.

The history of White female rappers revealed a continual process of renaming in relation to their successful White male counterparts. For example, since the debut of Yeastie Girlz in the late 1980s, White female rappers have been given aliases that placed them in positions of comparison and proximity to established White male Rap acts (i.e., The Beastie Boys). For example, Icy Blu was often referred to as the "female Vanilla Ice" in the 1990s, while Sarai and Iggy Azalea were coined as the female equivalents to Eminem and Macklemore. Giannino and Campbell note, "A name is a unique personal signifier for an individual."¹⁰⁵ A name often represents a cultural identity that "can have symbolic and linguistic (connotative and/or denotative) meaning."¹⁰⁶

Though each White female rapper adopted a stage name distinct from their birth name, Icy Blu, Sarai, and Iggy Azalea were given aliases or alternative names by a larger Rap audience, who attempted to locate them in relation to previously successful White male rappers. In many ways, the aliases given to these White female rappers showcased how White female Rap artists were positioned in the sociopolitical climate of each era of White male participation in Hip Hop despite their presumed invisibility in American Rap culture.

The current study also detailed the unique enunciations of authenticity provided by White female rappers. Specifically, 109 Rap songs from nine studio albums and three extended plays (EPs) were analyzed for the greater purpose of understanding how White female rappers internalize, negotiate, and challenge Rap's hypermasculine, misogynistic culture. Additionally, the study explored the topic of cultural appropriation in a more comprehensive nature, revealing the complicated nature of White female participation in Black popular culture. As noted by Walsh, the "gendered nature of Whiteness is an important but under-researched dynamic of power."¹⁰⁷ More importantly, Gendered Whiteness is a dynamic of power that becomes very complicated when situated in the context of Rap's Black masculine counterculture.

White femininity is marked as marginal and subordinate in Rap, a factor that primarily led to the "presumed invisibility" of White female rappers before Iggy Azalea. While Iggy Azalea stands as the most commercially successful White female rapper in

¹⁰⁵ Steven S. Giannino and Shannon B. Campbell, "The Reality of the Gaze: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Flavor of Love*," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2012): 63.

¹⁰⁶ Giannino and Campbell, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Eileen T. Walsh, "Representations of Race and Gender in Mainstream Media Coverage of the 2008 Democratic Party," *Journal of African American Studies* 13 (2008): 123.

America to date, she was not the first, nor the only White female rapper in United States Rap history. She was also not the first White female international rapper to release an album through a major record label. For such reasons, this research foregrounded the history of White female rappers to showcase the presence and more importantly, Hip Hop authenticating strategies of a unique sample of White female Rap artists.

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APPENDIX A

List of Rap Songs Examined (1990-2017)

Artist	Song Title	Album or EP Title	Year of Release
Icy Blu	"Pump It"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"He's Got It Going On"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"I Wanna Be Your Girl"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"My Guitar's Funky"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"Girls Just Wanna Have Fun"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"All Nite Thang"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"My Love is Real"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"It's Your Birthday"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"He Loves Me [Not]"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Icy Blu	"Pump It [Presence Dub]"	<i>Icy Blu</i>	1990
Iggy Azalea	"Millionaire Misfits feat. B.O.B"	<i>Glory</i>	2012
Iggy Azalea	"Murda Business feat. T.I."	<i>Glory</i>	2012
Iggy Azalea	"Runway feat. Pusha T"	<i>Glory</i>	2012
Iggy Azalea	"Flash feat. Mike Posner"	<i>Glory</i>	2012
Iggy Azalea	"Glory"	<i>Glory</i>	2012
Iggy Azalea	"Walk the Line"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Don't Need Y'all"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014

Iggy Azalea	"100 feat. Watch the Duck"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Change Your Life feat. T.I."	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Fancy feat. Charli XCX"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"New Bitch"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Work"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Impossible is Nothing"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Goddess"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Black Widow feat. Rita Ora"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Lady Patra feat. Mavado"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Fuck Love"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Bounce"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Rolex"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Just Askin'"	<i>The New Classic</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"We in This Bitch"	<i>Reclassified</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Beg for It feat. MO"	<i>Reclassified</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Trouble feat. Jennifer Hudson"	<i>Reclassified</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Iggy SZN"	<i>Reclassified</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Heavy Crown feat. Ellie Goulding"	<i>Reclassified</i>	2014
Iggy Azalea	"Azillion"	<i>Digital Distortion</i>	2016
Iggy Azalea	"Team"	<i>Digital Distortion</i>	2016
Iggy Azalea	"Can't Stop"	<i>Digital Distortion</i>	2017

WHITE CHICKS GANGSTA PITCH

Iggy Azalea	"Mo'Bounce"	<i>Digital Distortion</i>	2017
Iggy Azalea	"Switch"	<i>Digital Distortion</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"10 th Avenue"	<i>Eyes Shut</i>	2012
K.Fløy	"Stop, Focus"	<i>Eyes Shut</i>	2012
K.Fløy	"Sunburn"	<i>Eyes Shut</i>	2012
K.Fløy	"We Hate Everyone"	<i>Eyes Shut</i>	2012
K.Fløy	"Easy Fix"	<i>Eyes Shut</i>	2012
K.Fløy	"Rawks"	<i>What If It Is</i>	2013
K.Fløy	"Hail Mary feat. Danny Brown"	<i>What If It Is</i>	2013
K.Fløy	"Starf***Er"	<i>What If It Is</i>	2013
K.Fløy	"So What"	<i>What If It Is</i>	2013
K.Fløy	"The Cops"	<i>What If It Is</i>	2013
K.Fløy	"Dreamers"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"Giver"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"Blood in the Cut"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"Champagne"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"High Enough"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"Black Wave"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"Mean It"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"Hollywood Forever"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"The President Has A Sex Tape"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Fløy	"It's Just A Lot"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017

K.Flax	"You Felt Right"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
K.Flax	"Slow March"	<i>Every Where Is Some Where</i>	2017
Kreayshawn	"Blasé Blasé"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Ch00k Ch00k Tare feat. Chippy Nonstop"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Gucci Gucci"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Summertime feat. V-Nasty"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Left Ey3"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Like it or Love it feat. Kid Cudi"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"K234ys0nixz"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"BFF (Bestfriend)"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Twerkin!!! Feat. Diplo & Sissy Nobby"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Breakfast (Syrup) feat. 2Chainz"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Go Hard (La.La.La)"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"The Ruler"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Kreayshawn	"Luv Haus"	<i>Somethin' Bout Kreay</i>	2012
Lady Sovereign	"9-5"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Gatheration"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Random"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Public Warning"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006

WHITE CHICKS GANGSTA PITCH

Lady Sovereign	"Love Me or Hate Me"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"My England"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Tango"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"A Little Bit of Shh"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Hoodie"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Those Were the Days"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Blah Blah"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Fiddle with the Middle"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Lady Sovereign	"Love Me or Hate Me Remix feat. Missy Elliott"	<i>Public Warning</i>	2006
Sarai	"Intro"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"I Know"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"Mind Ya Business"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"Ladies"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"What Mama Told Me"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"It's Not a Fairytale"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"Pack Ya Bags"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"Swear feat. Beau Dozier"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"You Could Never"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"L.I.F.E. feat. Jaguar"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"It's Official"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Sarai	"Mary Anne feat. Black Coffey"	<i>The Original</i>	2003

Sarai	"Black & White"	<i>The Original</i>	2003
Tairrie B	"Swingin' with T"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Anything You Want"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Vinnie The Moocha"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Step 2 This"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Murder She Wrote"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Packin' a Punch"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Let the Beat Rock"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Player"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"School's In"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990
Tairrie B	"Ruthless Bitch"	<i>The Power of a Woman</i>	1990

Addict Rap?: The Shift from Drug Distributor to Drug Consumer in Hip Hop

CalvinJohn Smiley

In 2000, “purple drank,” a concoction of prescription medicines was introduced to mainstream Hip Hop. The genre has seemingly always had a relationship with drug content, earlier Hip Hop artists glorified upward financial mobility of selling drugs, whereas some contemporary artists exploit achievements via the consumption of drugs. In other words, there has been a cultural shift from being the drug distributor to drug consumer in Hip Hop. Celebration of drug consumption creates a new forum of deviant and criminal performance within the genre, which challenges previous Hip Hop culture. Furthermore, this promotion of drug use and emersion with societal goals of wealth, status, and prestige, offers a space for discourse about the creation of “apathetic resistance” within Hip Hop culture. Finally, this must be measured by the context of understanding how the intersection of race, gender, class and respectability plays into Hip Hop’s reception compared to other musical genres’ relationship with drug consumption.

While Hip Hop scholarship has grown and continues to develop, there has been minimal academic discourse that challenges the issue of hard-drug consumption from the perspective of the narrator (e.g. MC/rapper). Hence, the objective of this article is to initiate a dialogue about the trajectory of Hip Hop in contemporary society and as a cultural movement based-on political and social expression, particularly with the incorporation of drug consumption by the narrator (e.g. M.C.). In no way does this article speak for all of Hip Hop as a musical form or culture aesthetic¹ but highlights the complexities and intricacies that form within this particular sub-set that addresses lyrics and lifestyle choices based on the perspective of the drug consumer as opposed to the traditional drug distributor. Therefore, analysis of lyrical content and lifestyle of artists is important to investigate the relationship drug consumption has with Hip Hop.

In December 2007, Texas-based rapper Chad “Pimp C” Butler died in a West Hollywood hotel room. According to the Los Angeles County Coroner's office, “the combination of codeine and promethazine found in the rapper’s system, coupled with the sleep disorder apnea, caused his death.”² Pimp C along with Bernard “Bun B” Freeman formed the Underground Kingz (UGK), an influential voice in the growth of Southern Hip Hop. His untimely death resulted partly from his overconsumption of “purple drank.” “Purple drank” is also known as “sizzurp,” “lean,” or “mud,” and refers to a beverage that is commonly made by mixing codeine and promethazine with

¹ The author acknowledges the fact that Hip Hop is a global movement with various political and social meanings (see volume 1, issue 2 of the Journal of Hip Hop Studies for special edition of Afrikan Hip Hop).

² Kristie Rieken, “Cough Syrup Found in Pimp C's Hotel Had No Label.” Houston Chronicle. February 5, 2008. Accessed September 3, 2015.

<http://www.chron.com/entertainment/music/article/Cough-syrup-found-in-Pimp-C-s-hotel-had-no-label-1656505.php>

soda and jolly rancher candy.³ Three 6 Mafia's release of "Sippin' on Some Sizzurp" featuring UGK and Project Pat in February of 2000 popularized the relatively unknown "purple drank" in American society. Since its inauguration into mainstream Hip Hop, the beverage has become a prevalent item discussed by rappers in their lyrics. However, this substance has been known to be addictive and a contributor to the death of rappers such as DJ Screw and Big Moe.⁴ Most notably, speculatively, a "bootleg" form of sizzurp caused Lil Wayne to suffer multiple seizures in March 2013.⁵

The overrepresentation and consumption of recreational drugs, particularly marijuana, is nothing new to Hip Hop culture.⁶ In fact, an array of musical genres have seen a share of drug consumption, stemming from European genres such as Northern Soul to other popular music forms such as jazz, doo-wop, rock, punk, and dance.⁷ The 1960s psychedelic rock age became a significant era for drug content in music because musicians began to see themselves as artists and drug use became part of the experience and artistry.⁸ Nevertheless, Hip Hop's relationship with drugs is magnified by the intersections of race, gender, class, and respectability. Hip Hop is part of the legacy of

³ Laura E. Agnich, John M. Stogner, Bryan Lee Miller, and Catherine D. Marcum, "Purple Drank Prevalence and Characteristics of Misusers of Codeine Cough Syrup Mixtures," *Addictive Behaviors* 38 (2013): 2445-449; William Elwood, "Leaning on Syrup: The Misuse of Opioid Cough Syrup in Houston, Texas," Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (1999); Melanie Hart, Laura E. Agnich, John Stogner, and Bryan Lee Miller, "'Me and My Drank': Exploring the Relationship Between Musical Preferences and Purple Drank Experimentation," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 39, no. 1 (2013): 172-86.

⁴ Eric Demby, "Codeine Overdose Killed DJ Screw, Medical Examiner Says," (2001) Retrieved January 13, 2013; Eyder Peralta, "Houston Rappers Remember Big Moe, Dead at 33," Houston Chronicle. October 15, 2007. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.chron.com/entertainment/music/article/Houston-rappers-remember-Big-Moe-dead-at-33-1797262.php>

⁵ Allison Samuels, "Rapper Lil Wayne and His Struggle with Sizzurp 'Drank'," The Daily Beast. March 18, 2013. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/03/18/rapper-lil-wayne-and-his-struggle-with-sizzurp-drunk.html>; Andrew Gruttadaro, "Lil Wayne: Did Dangerous Concoction He Drank Nearly Kill Him?" Hollywood Life. March 16, 2013. Accessed April 6, 2014. <http://hollywoodlife.com/2013/03/16/lil-wayne-seizure-sizzurp-bootleg/>

⁶ Ernest Allen, "Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of Message Rap," In *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap music and Culture* (Ed.) W. Perkins (pp. 159-191), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press (1996); Andrew Golub, Bruce D. Johnson, and Eloise Dunlap, "The Growth in Marijuana Use among American Youths during the 1990s and the Extent of Blunt Smoking," *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* 4 (2006): 1-21; David S. Timberlake, "A Comparison of Drug Use and Dependence between Blunt Smokers and Other Cannabis Users," *Substance Use & Misuse* 44 (2009): 401-15; Mark Pawson and Brian C. Kelly, "Consumption and Community: The Subcultural Contexts of Disparate Marijuana Practices in Jam Band and Hip Hop Scenes," *Deviant Behavior* 35 (2014): 347-63.

⁷ Andrew Wilson, *Northern Soul: Music, Drugs and Subcultural Identity* (Cullompton: Willan Pub., 2007); Harry Shapiro, *Waiting for the Man: The Story of Drugs and Popular Music*, [Ed. Rev. and Updated]. ed. London: Helter Skelter, 2003; Barry Spunt, *Heroin and Music in New York City* (Gordonsville, Virginia: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁸ Sheila Whiteley, "Progressive Rock and Psychedelic Coding in the Work of Jimi Hendrix," *Popular Music* 9, no. 1 (1990): 37-60; Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

the Black Arts Movement⁹, coming out of Black liberation freedom struggle. Therefore because of the politicized nature of Hip Hop, coming from the inner city, mainstream White America has traditionally viewed this art as “bad” or “criminal.” Consequently, the representation of drugs in Hip Hop culture is not seen as a form of experimentation of artistry as other musical genres, but rather reinforces stereotypes and myths of a deviant community.

Research suggests there has been growing use and consumption of pharmaceutical drugs such as codeine, promethazine, dextromethorphan, and diphenhydramine because the drug is legally obtainable, free of cost with medical insurance, and perceived as safe.¹⁰ Despite public perception and feelings of euphoria and enhance awareness by consumers, the drug has potential harmful side effects such as hallucination, drowsiness, dry mouth, blurred vision, deafness, light-headedness, agitation, confusion, dizziness, disturbed coordination, headaches, insomnia, vertigo, serious brain damage, and addiction.¹¹

“Licensed To Pill,” an article written by DJ and producer, A-Trak, calls out Hip Hop artists for their overuse and representation of hard drugs. He does not condemn the lyrics but criticizes artists for not having an open discussion about the effects of these substances. A-Trak claims rap has reached the “psychedelic” age and says, “Rap went from glorifying selling hard drugs to glamorizing their effects. And beneath the surface there may be a profound lack of understanding of these substances.”¹² In other words, Hip Hop is seeing a shift in the types of drugs used to authenticate the culture, ranging from marijuana and alcohol consumption to pharmaceutical drugs and “purple drank.” In addition, the point of view is shifting from the third person narrative to a first-hand account of drug use.

Methods

Project Know, an online website that provides information about substance

⁹ Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *The Drama Review: TDR* (1968): 29-39.

¹⁰ William N. Elwood, "Leaning On Syrup: The Misuse of Opioid Cough Syrup in Houston," Texas, Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1999.

¹¹ Ibid; Laura E. Agnich et al, "Purple Drank Prevalence and Characteristics of Misusers of Codeine Cough Syrup Mixtures"; Gerald B. Hickson, William A. Altemeier, and Ellen W. Clayton. "Should Promethazine in Liquid form be Available without Prescription?" *Pediatrics* 86, no. 2 (1990): 221-225.; Ronald J. Peters, Steven H. Kelder, Christine M. Markham, George S. Yacoubian, Lecresha A. Peters, and Artist Ellis, "Beliefs and Social norms about Codeine and Promethazine Hydrochloride Cough Syrup (CPHCS) Onset and Perceived Addiction among Urban Houstonian Adolescents: An Addiction Trend in the City of Lean," *Journal of Drug Education* 33, no. 4 (2003): 415-425; Haifeng Hou, Shugui Yin, Shaowei Jia, Shu Hu, Taotao Sun, Qing Chen, and Rong Fan, "Decreased Striatal Dopamine Transporters in Codeine-Containing Cough Syrup Abusers," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 118, no. 2 (2011): 148-151; Myroslava K. Romach, Beth A. Sproule, Edward M. Sellers, Gail Somer, and Usoa E. Busto. "Long-Term Codeine Use Is Associated with Depressive Symptoms." *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology* 19, no. 4 (1999): 373-376.; Brian W. Blakley, and Heather Schilling. "Deafness Associated with Acetaminophen and Codeine Abuse," *Journal of Otolaryngology--Head & Neck Surgery* 37, no. 4 (2008).

¹² A-Trak. "License to Pill." The Huffington Post. May 20, 2013, accessed January 14, 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/atrak/license-to-pill_b_3306753.html.

addiction, conducted a study of drug mentions in rap lyrics called “Drug Slang in Hip Hop.”¹³ The study looks at various drugs and the frequency they were used over time (1988-2013) by Hip Hop artists. While certain substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine have remained relatively consistent overtime in the lyrics, other drugs such as codeine, pharmaceutical drugs, and MDMA have become more prevalent in recent years. One major critique of this study is that while consistency and frequency are shown, *context* is missing from this report. In other words, the ways in which these substances are being discussed is not included. Furthermore, this paper seeks to explore the shift in the dialogue of drug use in Hip Hop lyrics. In other words, exploring how the artists discussing drug content in their lyrics.

Over the course of one year, April 2014 - April 2015, a review of twelve self-described Hip Hop websites and blogs were used for this study. These were chosen based on an article entitled, “Hip Hop Wired Presents: The Top 30 Hip Hop Blogs & Websites.”¹⁴ Over the course of this study, songs (n=501) that specifically addressed or mentioned drug consumption were identified. To give a more robust analysis, ten percent (n=50) of the songs were randomly selected by using a random sampling generator.¹⁵ Songs were given a specific number between 1-501. The generator produced a random list of numbers and a systematic random sampling of every 10th number was selected, resulting in fifty songs chosen for analysis.

All songs sampled (n=50) discussed drug consumption of various drugs such as: “Purple drank” (n=34), pharmaceutical pills/medicines (n=13), cocaine (n=11), molly (n=13), marijuana (n=15), and miscellaneous substances [e.g. alcohol] (n=9) and all songs included at least two substances discussed. Based on my reading, two themes emerged from this analysis, which embodied forms of hyper-masculinity, particularly issues of “gangsterism” and hyper-sexuality. The former, indulges in the traditional sense of “gangster” rap where the narrator asserts their power through dominance over others and showcases their masculinity in their ability to be violent or engage in criminal activity, if necessary. The latter, engages in ideas of masculinity weaved through forms of hyper-sexuality and ability to attract and seduce women. The drugs discussed in these songs highlight the theme of drug consumption for both the narrator (i.e. rapper) and other potential users throughout the lyrics.

Hip Hop Authenticity: From Drug Distributor to Drug Consumer

Hip Hop culture is recognized as a lifestyle as well as an art form. Growing out of the South Bronx in the 1970s, Hip Hop became an outlet for urban youth to release

¹³ “Drug Slang in Hip-Hop,” *Projectknow.Com*, accessed October 15, 2016
<https://www.projectknow.com/discover/hip-hop-drug-mentions/>.

¹⁴ Alvin Blanco, “Hip-Hop Wired Presents: The Top 30 Hip-Hop Blogs & Websites,” *Hip-Hop Wired*, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://hiphopwired.com/211142/hip-hop-wired-presents-the-top-30-hip-hop-blogs-websites/>.

¹⁵ “Research Randomizer,” *Social Psychology Network*, accessed October 15, 2016,
<https://www.randomizer.org/>.

tension, experiment with musical forms, and create their own identity. The culture of Hip Hop was founded in the post-Civil Rights Movement and developed in neighborhoods that were rampant with urban decay, poverty, and violence.¹⁶ Young Blacks and Hispanics produced Hip Hop, a cultural form within the Black community. According to Afrika Bambaataa, an early founder of Hip Hop, the art form was a way to curb gang violence in New York City.¹⁷ In addition, Bambaataa outlined the five elements to Hip Hop culture, which included: MC'ing (rapping), DJ'ing, writing (graffiti), several dance forms (e.g. break dancing), and most importantly, knowledge.¹⁸ As the genre grew, the MC (rapper) took a more prominent role, becoming the griot, or storyteller, narrating the experiences of ghetto life and beyond.

Hip Hop music focuses and places an emphasis on the narrative to authenticate the music. Mickey Hess writes:

Hip Hop music is a black form, given the involvement of African Americans in its creation, and because its concepts of authenticity are so tied to the roots of its culture. Hip Hop authenticity is rooted in African-American rhetoric; its emphasis on the performer's staying true to himself grows out of black rhetorical traditions such as testifying and bearing witness, in which the authority to speak is negotiated through claims to knowledge gained through lived experience.¹⁹

Lived experience, which creates self-truth, is an important staple in the Hip Hop community because Hip Hop is a performed identity.²⁰ The artist's ability to authenticate their race, space, and place becomes the bridge into being accepted by the culture of Hip Hop.²¹

Furthermore, Hip Hop culture places a certain emphasis on being able to authenticate the performer's role and style in the narrative they articulate. It goes beyond just the rhetoric, but as Andreana Clay points out, Hip Hop is about performance through manipulations of fashion, gestures, and music.²² Similarly, Robert Garot's work on gang affiliation, recognizes fashion and how one claim's style authenticates the self through a set of markers such as the way a hat is tilted, specific colors of clothing, or brand of shoe being worn, which all exhibit the performance of

¹⁶ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2005); Martin Lamotte, "Rebels without a Pause: Hip Hop and Resistance in the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 2 (2014): 686-94.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "History of Hip Hop," *Universal Zulu Nation*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.zulunation.com/Hip-Hop-history/>.

¹⁹ Mickey Hess, "Hip Hop Realness and the White Performer," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (2005): 372-89.

²⁰ Greg Dimitriadis, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

²¹ Murray Forman, "'Represent': Race, Space and Place in Rap Music." *Popular Music* 19, no. 1 (2000): 65-90; Dustin Engels, "Baadasssss Gangstas: The Parallel Influences, Characteristics and Criticisms of the Blaxploitation Cinema and Gangsta Rap Movements," *Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, 1 no.1 (2014): 62-80.

²² Andrea Clay, "Keepin' it Real: Black Youth, Hip Hop Culture, and Black Identity," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46 no.10 (2003), 1346-1358.

identity.²³ Hip Hop, closely tied to urban gang culture, is produced similarly. The culture is consistently re-inventing itself through various forms and trends.

Hip Hop culture is arguably the largest contemporary youth movement in the world and became an outlet as a form of resistance to the heroin and crack epidemics of the 1970s and 80s, respectfully.²⁴ Traditionally, Hip Hop culture has taken a two-prong stance on drugs: abstinence and self-distancing. The former is seen in early rap songs such as "The Message" and "White Lines (Don't Do It)" by Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, which overtly cautions of the ills of cocaine and crack. In the song "White Lines" Melle Mel raps, "My white lines go a long way/Either up your nose or through your vein/With nothing to gain except killing your brain."²⁵ Ironically, Melle Mel was using cocaine while recording this song. Nevertheless, these public service announcement-type songs were short-lived and replaced with the latter more self-distancing from drugs, which happened in several ways. During the "D.A.I.S.Y." (da inner sound y'all) Age, otherwise known as the "Golden Age" of Hip Hop, artists brought with them a Black Nationalist identity that was visible through their style and fashion.²⁶ Scholar Michael Eric Dyson states, "During the 'Golden age of Hip Hop,' from 1987 to 1993, Afrocentric and black nationalist rap were prominent."²⁷ Groups such as A Tribe Called Quest, The Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, and Public Enemy wore African medallions, natural hairstyles, and used other forms of dress to express their acceptance and embrace of African heritage, while their lyrics paid attention to issues of urban poverty and White supremacy furthering the Black Arts Movement.

The other form of social distancing away from drug consumption came from the sub-genre of "gangster rap," where the MC would narrate about their own experiences as a drug dealer or distributor of narcotics.²⁸ In other words, pushing the drugs unto others, who were seemingly weaker to fall victim to becoming a user. West coast rappers, N.W.A. (Niggas Wit Attitude), were critical of police brutality, but became

²³ Robert Garot, *Who You Claim: Performing Gang Identity in School and on the Streets* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Andrew Golub, Bruce D. Johnson, and Eloise Dunlap, "The Growth in Marijuana Use among American Youths during the 1990s and the Extent of Blunt Smoking," *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* 4 (2006): 1-21.

²⁵ "Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five - White Lines (Don't Do It)." Genius, accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/Grandmaster-flash-and-the-furious-five-white-lines-dont-do-it-lyrics>.

²⁶ William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Michael Eric Dyson, *Know what I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2007); Tony Green, "Remembering the Golden Age of Hip Hop," *Today*, August 2, 2004, accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.today.com/id/5430999#.VeizktNViko>; Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*; Charise Cheney, *Brothers Gonna Work it Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

²⁷ Michael Eric Dyson, *Know what I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop*, 64.

²⁸ Russell Simmons, *Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money, and God* (California: Three Rivers Press, 2002); Dimitri A Bogazianos, *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine, Rap Music, and the War on Drugs* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Ethan Brown, *Queens Reigns Supreme: Fat Cat, 50 Cent, and the Rise of the Hip Hop Hustler* (Anchor, 2010).

more vocal in discussing criminal activity and hyper-masculinity. N.W.A. became the symbol of “gangster” with Eazy-E being known as “The Godfather of Gangster Rap.” There was an embrace and adoption of a different fashion style, which sought out more expensive clothing with expensive brand labels and differing hairstyles such as the “Jheri Curl.” “Gangster rap” became the dominant form of mainstream Hip Hop music as the genre pushed forward into the 1990s.

The culture of “gangster” rap exploited the idea of authenticity throughout the genre. Two of the most iconic Hip Hop artists, The Notorious B.I.G. (commonly known as “Biggie”) and Tupac Shakur, helped spread the gangster image of rap music through lifestyle and lyrics about drug dealing. Biggie used aggressive and complex lyrics that outlined his days as a street hustler, particularly selling crack and other drugs. His song, “Ten Crack Commandments” is an outline and guide on how to become the best drug supplier. He states, “There’s rules to this shit, I wrote a manual/A step-by-step booklet for you to get your game on track.”²⁹ Biggie then proceeds to go through all ten rules on being a drug dealer. Rule number four being the most important, paying tribute to the cult gangster film, *Scarface*, “never get high on your own supply,” advocating for the dealer to never dabble or use his own narcotics, otherwise, like *Scarface*, would lead to demise. Moreover, Tupac Shakur was a multifaceted rapper with family ties to the Black Power movement, wrote the “Thug-Life” code of conduct with his stepfather, Mutulu Shakur, a former member of the Republic of New Afrika.³⁰ These codes describe the points of who is off-limits to sell drugs to, such as children and pregnant women. There lyrics and codes are embroiled with content that shows what Black struggle meant for those coming out of low-income communities, particularly having to resort to selling drugs as a means to make financial upward mobility.

Beginning in the early 2000s, a cultural shift occurred in Hip Hop music. In particular, the types of drugs being discussed and the perspective of the user transformed. Songs about substances such as codeine and prescription medicines began to emerge: “Sippin on Some Sizzurp” by Three 6 Mafia (2000), “Purple Pills” by D12 (2001) and “I Feel like Dying” by Lil Wayne (2007). Rappers began to overtly talk about using and abusing pharmaceutical drugs and codeine in their lyrics. While the trope of being a drug dealer remains prominent in Hip Hop music, some rappers have placed themselves at the center, the consumer, of drug substances, whereas in previous decades, drug use in songs was always about the “other.” The consumer is no longer an unfamiliar face that is indistinguishable from the next, nor is it the third person narrative. Rather the dialogue has been reinvented (remixed) so that the drug user is from the first person perspective.

²⁹ “The Notorious B.I.G. – Ten Crack Commandments,” *Genius*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-notorious-big-ten-crack-commandments-lyrics>.

³⁰ “Thread: Code of Thug Life,” Assata Shakur Speaks Hands off Assata Lets Get Free Revolutionary Pan Africanism Black On Purpose Liberation Forum RSS. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.assatashakur.org/forum/open-forum/9011-code-thug-life.html>.

Apathetic Resistance: The Symbiosis of Innovator and Retreatist Adaptations

The growth in consumption of “hard-drugs” in Hip Hop music by the narrator has modified the genre’s authenticity of performance as well as the goals and means of Hip Hop culture. Robert Merton’s 1938 article, “Social Structure and Anomie”³¹ provides an outline for various social adaptations, which signify the schisms between goals and means in society. While critiqued by other social scientists as not broad enough or too limiting, Merton’s analysis provides a framework to discuss the shift in Hip Hop culture, from being a drug distributor to a drug consumer. According to Merton, there are five social adaptations that guide individual’s adoption of cultural values. Adaptation II, *innovation*, shows a rupture between the culture goals and institutionalized means, whereas Merton states, “Be it noted that where frustration derives from the inaccessibility of effective institutional means for attaining economic or any other type of highly valued ‘success’...”³² In other words, in communities where resources are scarce or opportunities are few, individuals might have to resort to alternative lifestyles to achieve and obtain their means (success). A frequent example of this adaption is of the drug dealer, who is an individual without many conventional options to achieve their means of success. In this case, selling drugs and then becoming a rapper is a way out of communities that do not present legitimate options to success. This archetype of rags to riches became the standard rule to become a successful Hip Hop artist. Artists such as: Notorious B.I.G., Jay Z, T.I., Young Jeezy, 50 Cent, Lloyd Banks, Beanie Sigal, Freeway, Cam’ron, Jim Jones, Fat Joe, Big Pun, Joell Ortiz, Rick Ross, Pusha T, and many others have narrated their journey, moving from a drug dealer to a successful rapper. Conversely, adaptation IV, known as “retreatism” is a rejection of both goals and means in society. A primary example of this type of person would be that of a drug addict. This person has given up on trying to appeal to institutionalized standards or being seen as someone that wants to move up the ladder of achievement. While new artists embrace drug consumption culture are not fully a retreatist because they profit monetarily, they do embody aspects of this fourth adaption by rejecting conventional norms towards drug use and embracing narcotics as part of their identity. Therefore, “drug consumption rap” becomes a mesh of Merton’s innovative and retreatist adaptations, which produces new ways to understand both goals and means in contemporary society. On one hand, there is an embrace of cultural goals (e.g. success/wealth), while on the other hand; there is rejection of institutional means (e.g. drug abstinence/obedience).

Biggie released his debut album, *Ready to Die* in 1994. The hit single “Juicy” begins with him stating, “To all the people that lived above the buildings that I was hustling in front of that called the police on me when I was just trying to make some money to feed my daughter,” refers to his days of being a drug dealer on the streets of

³¹ Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 5 (1938).

³² *Ibid*, 678.

Brooklyn, New York.³³ Resembling many of his counterparts, Hip Hop culture and the art of MC'ing became an outlet to a generation of urban Black youth coming of age during the de-industrialization of American cities.³⁴ Many scholars have written that Hip Hop culture grew as a form of resistance or as Biggie raps, "And all the niggas in the struggle" to larger socio-economic problems devastating urban communities around the United States.³⁵ While Hip Hop continues to be a mechanism of resistance and a way out of impoverished communities, this new sub-genre of drug consumption shifts the perspective and modifies the narrative. Therefore, an "apathetic resistance" has emerged in this new subculture of Hip Hop, which, like other forms of the Black Arts Movement rejects White supremacy. However, artists are simultaneously embracing conformity and retreatist adaptations of wanting institutional success as well as rejection of institutional values. Unlike their predecessors, artists who engage in drug consumption Hip Hop do not deflect the negative associations of being a "user" but use it to promote lyrics and lifestyle.

"Addict" Rap

Drugs, in some form, authenticate and create Hip Hop culture. The overuse and consumption of drugs is viewed as a way of validating drug consumption subculture, but unlike earlier musical genres that are viewed artistically for indulging in drug use, Hip Hop artists are demonized, considered less credible, and dismissed as lacking talent. Nevertheless, the glorification of "addict" rap is done in ways that highlight issues of overconsumption, authenticity, and hyper-masculinity, which then reinforce these notions of Hip Hop culture by dominant society.

Roughly 38% of the songs used in this sample overtly used the name or slang term of a drug in the title. For example, rapper Soulja Boy has two songs in this study named, "Zan with That Lean" and "Molly with That Lean." Both titles suggest his use of various drugs, the prescription pill of Xanax and Molly, otherwise known as MDMA

³³ "The Notorious B.I.G. – Juicy," *Genius*, Accessed July 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics>.

³⁴ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*; Andrea Clay, *The Hip Hop Generation Fights Back Youth, Activism, and Post-civil Rights Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Rivke Jaffe, "Hip Hop and Urban Studies," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 2 (2014): 695-99.

³⁵ Simon Black, "'Street Music', Urban Ethnography and Ghettoized Communities," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 2 (2014): 700-05; Patricia Collins, *From Black Power to: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Michael Eric Dyson, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop*; Marc Lamont Hill, *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* (New York, New York: Teachers College Press, 2009); Mark Anthony Neal and M. Forman, eds. *That's the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Geneva Smitherman, "'The Chain Remain the Same' Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation," *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997): 3-25; Katina R. Stapleton, "From the Margins to Mainstream: The Political Power of Hip Hop," *Media, Culture & Society* 20 (1998): 219-34; "The Notorious B.I.G. – Juicy," *Genius*, Accessed July 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics>.

or Ecstasy, respectfully. In both songs, Soulja describes how he uses these drugs and uses "lean" to help facilitate swallowing these pills, which only adds to his high. In each song he invokes his gangster and sexual prowess with his drug use. In the song, "Molly with That Lean," he raps, "Molly with that lean/rolling through the streets/Man I do my thing, boy I stay clean/Boy you know I'm packing."³⁶ In these lyrics he discusses his use of drugs but his ability to either defend or assault someone because he is "packing." In other words, he has a gun and will use it. In "Zan with That Lean" he discusses, "Zan with that Lean/Nothin but Irene [marijuana]/Hoes going crazy when I'm on the scene."³⁷ Unlike the previous lyrics where Soulja Boy is ready to show off his masculinity via use of violence, his drug use here makes women ecstatic to be around him, which gives him the ability to have sex with them because of his status. Soulja Boy's lyrics are indicative of how many rappers portray their imagery through drug consumption as both tough and sexually appealing.

While not all rap songs overtly title their music after or about drugs, there are heavy drug-laden lyrics that would indicate overuse drug consumption. Kevin Gates refers to himself as a "drug user" in his song "4:30 am." He embraces his drug use and glorifies the amount of "purple drank" he is able to consume rapping, "Drug user, don't drink sprite/And when I do, it ain't pink sprite, a lot of lean, its purple."³⁸ This song lyric is meant as a "diss" to other rappers who claim to use "purple drank" but "water it down" by adding too much soda. In this instance, Gates affirms his masculinity by sticking to only the purest form of lean and thus reiterates his authenticity. Interestingly, later in the song, Gates raps, "6:00 am water boiling, think I'm addicted to the strong aroma."³⁹ It is a safe assumption that Gates is referring to the method in which powder cocaine is turned into rock cocaine (otherwise known as crack) by boiling it and adding baking soda. However, it is his mention of being addicted to the aroma that leaves the listener with ambiguity if he is mixing this up to sell or use, but either way he enjoys the aroma of crack. Similar to Kevin Gates, Lil Wayne does not shy away from celebrating or discussing his use of drugs. He raps in the song, "Rich as Fuck", "And I got Xanax, Percocet, promethazine with codeine."⁴⁰ Lil Wayne's drug use is well documented, however, this litany of drugs and the inference of them all being used together can prove to be fatal. Medical professionals would discourage mixing medicines; particularly Xanax and Percocet, since both produce similar effects and can cause respiratory depression or stopped breathing.⁴¹ Adding, "purple drank" to the equation, which Lil Wayne boldly indicates he uses, only intensifies this potential lethal

³⁶ "Soulja Boy - Molly with That Lean," *Genius*, Accessed May 9, 2014. <http://genius.com/Soulja-boy-molly-with-that-lean-lyrics>.

³⁷ "Soulja Boy (Ft. J-Money) - Zan with That Lean," *Genius*, Accessed May 2, 2015. <http://genius.com/Soulja-boy-zan-with-that-lean-lyrics>.

³⁸ "Kevin Gates - 4:30 AM," *Genius*, Accessed May 4, 2014. <http://genius.com/Kevin-gates-4-30-am-lyrics>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Lil Wayne (Ft. 2 Chainz) - Rich As Fuck," *Genius*, Accessed May 9, 2014. <http://genius.com/Lil-wayne-rich-as-fuck-lyrics>.

⁴¹ "5 Dangerous Drug and Alcohol Combinations," (2012, September 11). Retrieved April 2, 2014.

combination. Lil Wayne is joined by other rappers who also discuss mixing of various drugs, such as Travis Scott in Drake's song "Company." In Scott's verse he discusses using Percocets and "purple drank," "Pop a couple percs let's get it in right now...Drink so long, for a year I didn't cough."⁴² Sticking to the theme of sexual masculinity, Scott decides it's best for him and his sexual partner to use Percocets to lessen inhibitions to engage in sexual activity. Along with the prescription pills he asserts his masculinity by insinuating the quantity of lean he has used, which would prevent a cough for an entire year.

A glaring display of open drug consumption and glorification is Miami-based rapper, Stiches. Resembling more of a sideshow freak of the early 20th century than a typical rapper, Stiches is a White rapper who has a skeleton mouth tattooed on his face, which is amidst many other facial and body tattoos, gold teeth, and a Mohawk haircut. Many of the songs Stiches produce deal with the consumption and distribution of cocaine. In his song, "Facts" he raps, "Do I get high off my own supply? Guess what? Hell yea, hell yeah! I do get high on my own supply!"⁴³ This lyric refers back to Biggie's "Ten Crack Commandments" and the film *Scarface*, which explicitly states no one should ever use the drugs they distribute. Stiches renounce's this premise and relishes in his use of cocaine, which he is seen using in multiple music videos. To authenticate his use of cocaine and to prove to his fans he is not a fraud, Stiches openly used cocaine at a live show inviting four female fans on stage to join in his indulgence.⁴⁴ During the stunt, Stiches re-affirmed his gangster image by saying to the crowd, "I got dope money, you think I'ma [sic] buy some fake shit?"⁴⁵ While Stiches is not the standard rapper, his extreme performances indicate the shift in cultural acceptance within Hip Hop from being about solely using drugs as financial mobility to social recognition because of consumption.

The female voice in representation of drug consumption is minimal, finding two songs in my sample that discussed ingestion of drugs from the narrator's perspective. Lil Debbie's song entitled, "2 Cups," discusses her use of "lean" and weed. Additionally, the music video showcases Lil Debbie pouring, "Purple drank" and sipping it out of a Styrofoam cup. The other artist that this study found discussing drug consumption was Nicki Minaj's "Pills n Potions." In this song, Minaj raps, "Pills n' potions/We're overdosin."⁴⁶ The reference to overdosing could have many meanings, such as love in an unstable relationship or drug consumption of pills (e.g. pharmaceutical drugs) and potions (e.g. "purple drank"). Hip Hop music is still male-dominated and notions of hyper-masculinity are still conveyed even within female Hip Hop voices. For example,

⁴² "Drake (Ft. Travi\$ Scott) - Company," *Genius*, Accessed June 5, 2015. <http://genius.com/Drake-company-lyrics>.

⁴³ "Stiches - Facts," *Genius*, Accessed January 25, 2015. <http://genius.com/Stiches-facts-lyrics>.

⁴⁴ Zach Frydenlund, "Stiches' Wife Shut Down a Recent Show After He Brought Girls on Stage to Do Cocaine," *Complex*, October 27, 2014. Accessed March 15, 2015. <http://www.complex.com/music/2014/10/stiches-wife-shut-down-one-of-his-recent-concerts>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ "Nicki Minaj - Pills N Potions," *Genius*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/Nicki-minaj-pills-n-potions-lyrics>.

Lil Debbie raps, "All I need is 2 cups of some lean/And a bad bitch just to roll up my weed."⁴⁷ Like many of Lil Debbie and Nicki Minaj's male counterparts, these artists discuss drugs in the same aggressive nature by using it to control other's movements (gangster) or for love (sexuality), respectfully.

Chief Keef and The Weeknd are two examples and illustrations of drug consumer culture in Hip Hop music. While both embrace drug consumption, they authenticate themselves differently. The former, Chief Keef's embrace of drug use validates and establishes him as a gangster. The latter, The Weeknd's consumption of drugs authenticates his sex appeal as an R&B artist in Hip Hop culture.

Chief Keef is a rapper from Chicago who has become the poster-child for "America's Nightmare" when it comes to stereotypes of young, Black, male youth. Already having a lengthy felony record by the age of sixteen, which included narcotics and weapons charges, Keef, has had a turbulent and intensive relationship with the criminal justice system during his short career thus far. Over the past several years, he has failed several drug tests and subsequently been detained for other probation violations, including DUI and posing with guns.⁴⁸ Keef has not helped his public persona indicating that his December 2013 mixtape, *Bang 3*, would raise the murder rate stating, "Bang 2 And Almighty So On iTunes Right Now But Bang 3 No Lie Y'all Really Don't know How crazy Im goin #ImFinnaRaiseTheMurderRateUp...If I'm Lien I Can Get Killed right Now this Sh*t Is So f*ckin hardcore #ThatOldSosa #bang3 N*ggas Better Be Scared."⁴⁹ Coming from the city of Chicago, with some of the highest murder rates in recent years, there has been debate within the Hip Hop community if Chief Keef is a positive or negative role model for the culture. Fellow Chicago rapper, Lupe Fiasco stated, "Chief Keef scares me...Not him specifically, but just the culture that he represents ... The murder rate in Chicago is skyrocketing and you see who's doing it and perpetrating it, they all look like Chief Keef."⁵⁰ Whereas other rappers such as Talib Kweli have stated, "He's somebody who comes out of a very horrifically violent neighborhood of Chicago. Whether you think he's skilled or not, what he's doing is extremely positive...Even if he's gang banging on records, I'd rather him gang bang on records than in the streets and if you gang bang on records, you're at some point going to have respect for music and you're going to grow out of that."⁵¹ Despite the controversy about the image of Chief Keef the common denominator throughout his career is his recreational consumption of "hard drugs."

⁴⁷ "Lil Debbie (Ft. DollaBillGates) - 2 Cups," *Genius*, Accessed August 3, 2014. <http://genius.com/Lil-debbie-2-cups-lyrics>.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel C.M., "Chief Keef Is Arrested For DUI," *XXL*, Retrieved June 3, 2014, from <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2014/03/chief-keef-arrested-dui/>

⁴⁹ Miranda J, "Chief Keef Says New Mixtape Will Raise the Murder Rate," *XXL*, December 11, 2013. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2013/12/chief-keef-says-new-mixtape-will-raise-murder-rate/>.

⁵⁰ Tayla Holman, "Chief Keef Promises to 'Raise the Murder Rate Up' With 'Bang 3' Mixtape," *The Inquisitr News*, December 18, 2013, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.inquisitr.com/1066508/chief-keef-raise-the-murder-rate-up-bang-3-mixtape/>.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

Chief Keef's debut album, *Finally Rich*, includes a track entitled, "Hate Bein' Sober," which celebrates his abundant drug use. Chief Keef raps, "Damn I hate being sober, I'm a smoker/Fredo a drinker, Tadoe off molly water/We can't spell sober."⁵² Keef exploits the drug use of both himself and friends, particularly distinguishing the types of drugs each prefers. He goes on to state, "Anti-sober, for no reason,"⁵³ which is a direct reflection of his retreatism from conventional norms and goals in society. He is at some level, consciously choosing to embrace an over-consumption drug behavior for the only purposes of the high. Keef raps about mainly using marijuana in this song, however, discusses his use of "purple drank" in songs such as "Love No Thotties," rapping, "I'm off this Activis, it got me leanin over/I poured up 4 of Purp in some Peach soda."⁵⁴ Despite his overt celebration of being high, Keef checked into a rehabilitation facility in February 2014. He stated, "I was on promethazine, all drugged out. I was tweaking. I don't sip the lean no more though."⁵⁵ Whilst making this statement, Keef was arrested in March 2014 on marijuana DUI charges. Then on his birthday in August 2014, Keef posted a picture on Instagram of a bottle of Sprite, Styrofoam cup filled with a purple substance, a blunt, and black handgun. In the caption, Chief Keef wrote, "Said I wasn't leaning Nomore [sic] Only for one night!" By his own caption, Keef admits to using "purple drank."

Despite his own acknowledgment and struggles with drugs, Keef's *Bang 3* mixtape single, "Fuck Rehab" is an outright rejection of sobriety and continuing drug use. He exclaims in this song, "Fuck rehab, rehab make me laugh/ I'd rather be up in jail, getting a lot of mail!"⁵⁶ His use of illegal substances is so prominent that he would choose to sit in a jail cell as opposed to being sober profiting from his rap career by his own accord. This direct opposition to earlier Hip Hop artists contradicts the very boundaries of what it means to be a good hustler. Biggie states, "Follow these rules you'll have made bread to break up/ If not, 24 years on the wake up."⁵⁷ This is the idea that you will be sentenced to a long prison sentence, which every hustler wants to avoid at all costs but something Chief Keef is willing to do for his anti-sobriety.

While Chief Keef is viewed as the antithesis of American values because of his overt drug consumption, propensity to exude violence in his lyrics, and his unapologetic attitude for his lifestyle, it is important to point out the significant similarity Keef has with the late pop singer, Amy Winehouse. Winehouse, an English singer and songwriter, had a profound connection to drug consumption. Her song,

⁵² "Chief Keef (Ft. 50 Cent & Wiz Khalifa) - Hate Bein' Sober," *Genius*, Accessed March 28, 2015. <http://genius.com/Chief-keef-hate-bein-sober-lyrics>.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ "Chief Keef - Love No Thotties," *Genius*, Accessed February 12, 2015. <http://genius.com/Chief-keef-love-no-thotties-lyrics>.

⁵⁵ Christian Bonoan, (2014, February 14), "Chief Keef Is Done With Drugs," Retrieved June 3, 2014, from <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2014/02/chief-keef-done-lean/>

⁵⁶ "Chief Keef (Ft. Blood Money) - Fuck Rehab," *Genius*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/Chief-keef-fuck-rehab-lyrics>.

⁵⁷ "The Notorious B.I.G. - Ten Crack Commandments," *Genius*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-notorious-big-ten-crack-commandments-lyrics>.

"Rehab" won several Grammy awards and other prestigious accolades in which Winehouse discusses her refusal to enter rehabilitation for her alcohol and drug use. She sings, "They tried to make me go to rehab but I said 'no, no, no' / Yes I've been black but when I come back you'll know know know / I ain't got the time and if my daddy thinks I'm fine / He's tried to make me go to rehab but I won't go, go, go."⁵⁸ Her blatant disregard for drug treatment and embrace of drug consumption was applauded by critics, saying, "What she is is mouthy, funny, sultry, and quite possibly crazy...it's impossible not to be seduced by her originality."⁵⁹ Winehouse, who ultimately died from drug and alcohol abuse, was applauded for her unabashed references to drug consumption, whereas artist like Chief Keef are regarded as "thugs" and disregarded as lacking musical talents.

R&B singer, The Weeknd, does not have the "gangster" image his rapper counterparts embody, but nevertheless cloaks his music in drug-laden lyrics. The Weeknd gained popularity by releasing several free mixtapes on the Internet in 2011. Since that time, he has become a major musical figure in Hip Hop culture. A-Trak states, "Singer Abel Tesfaye [The Weeknd] spins disturbing, dark tales of cocaine and abandon, but that's a genuine breakthrough in a genre [R&B] that rarely strayed away from the themes of romance."⁶⁰ Being applauded by many of his contemporaries for his sultry falsetto voice, major themes in his music deal with the use of hard-drugs, such as prescription pills, cocaine, and codeine, along with other drugs such as alcohol, weed, and molly. The Weeknd's entire moniker is manifested in drug content. In an article entitled, "Who Is the Weeknd? 5 Things You Should Know," the author explains his signature of "XO" probably does not stand for the traditional idea of hugs and kisses but symbols of the drugs ecstasy and oxycodone.⁶¹ In other words, the embodiment of The Weeknd is a symbol of drugs. He becomes the physical representation of drug use within his genre, which has been labeled as "PBR&B."⁶²

The Weeknd's overt drug use is seen in his remix of Beyoncé's song "Drunk in Love." He explains how he has been using pills such as Molly since the age of 17 and on "lean" since the age of 20 without any signs of giving up either of these recreational drugs. In addition, he goes on to state, "Droppin' albums like a pill/Percocets, Adderall, ecstasy, pussy, money, weed/Faded for a week."⁶³ The Weeknd finds comfort in

⁵⁸ "Amy Winehouse - Rehab," *Genius*, Accessed June 9, 2015. <http://genius.com/Amy-winehouse-rehab-lyrics/>.

⁵⁹ Josh Tyrangiel, "Top 10 Everything of 2007," *Time*, December 9, 2007, Accessed September 3, 2015. http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1686204_1686244_1690616,00.html.

⁶⁰ A-Trak, "License to Pill."

⁶¹ Keith Wagstaff, "5 Things You Should Know About The Weeknd: The Daily Details: Blog," *Details*, November 9, 2012, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.details.com/blogs/daily-details/2012/11/5-things-you-should-know-about-the-weeknd.html>.

⁶² Barry Walters, "Frank Ocean, Miguel, and Holy Other Usher in PBR&B 2.0 | SPIN," *Spin*, August 22, 2012, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.spin.com/articles/frank-ocean-miguel-and-holy-other-usher-in-pbrb-20/>.

⁶³ "The Weeknd - Drunk In Love (Remix)," *Genius*, Accessed August 19, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-weeknd-drunk-in-love-remix-lyrics>.

diversity of drug use as the consumer and this is what keeps him going. His music is a telling tale of someone who does not feel like they can function without using hard-drugs, as is a main theme throughout his music. He recognizes this in the song, "Love in the Sky," singing, "But I'm always getting high/Cause my confidence low."⁶⁴ Here, the audience sees the vulnerable side of The Weeknd, who opens up about why he believes he needs drugs to function. Unlike his rapper counterpart who would be more hesitant to admit to personal flaws, The Weeknd does it here, which speaks to the sexual appeal of vulnerability.

The Weeknd's embrace of drug-use is not only a space to experiment with drugs but also how these substances allow him to experiment sexually with women. In other words, The Weeknd claims his authenticity through explicit sexual lyrics that are intertwined with his drug use. It is the high that allows all parties to be comfortable in exploring sexual desires with no emotional attachments after the fact. The Weeknd sings, "She repping XO to the death, I'm tryna make these bitches sweat/I'm tryna keep that pussy wet, I'm tryna fuck her and her friends."⁶⁵ Referring to himself as XO (ecstasy and oxycodone), The Weeknd feels no monogamous emotions towards any of the women he sleeps with and wants to be able to have the freedom to sleep around while these women sweat (reference to them being high on molly). He consistently mixes references of abusing drugs and the ability to have sex because of drugs. In the song, "Glass Table Girls" he sings, "And we can test out the tables/Got some brand new tables/All glass and it's four feet wide/But it's a must to get us ten feet high/She give me sex in a handbag/I got her wetter than a wet-nap."⁶⁶ This song references his use of cocaine and ability to have sex. He also gloats about how well he can perform by giving his female partner an orgasm. The ability to glorify his drug use through hypersexual and masculine tendencies as well as having the ability to choose which women he will sleep with validates and authenticates his drug use.

Even beyond his sexual appetite, The Weeknd highlights his addiction by dismissing doctor's orders to keep sober. In the song, "Kiss Land" he sings, "My doctor told me to stop/And he gave me something to pop/I mix it up with some Adderall's and I wait to get to the top/And I mix it up with some alcohol and I pour it up in a shot/I don't care about you, why you worried 'bout me?"⁶⁷ Instead of taking the medical advice, he used these drugs in combination with other substances to remain high. Additionally, he explains that he doesn't care about others so they should not care about him. This outright rejection to conformity and embracing drugs falls within the rules of "YOLO" (You Only Live Once) by not caring or looking to the future but rather

⁶⁴ "The Weeknd - Love in the Sky," *Genius*, Accessed February 12, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-weeknd-love-in-the-sky-lyrics>.

⁶⁵ "The Weeknd (Ft. Ty Dolla \$ign & Wiz Khalifa) - Or Nah (Remix)," *Genius*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/The-weeknd-or-nah-remix-lyrics>.

⁶⁶ "The Weeknd - Glass Table Girls," *Genius*, Accessed August 1, 2015.

⁶⁷ "The Weeknd - Kiss Land," *Genius*, Accessed November 7, 2014. <http://genius.com/The-weeknd-kiss-land-lyrics>.

living in the present moment.⁶⁸

Moreover, pop star, Katy Perry has made songs such as “E.T.” and “Last Friday Night,” which discuss and celebrate sex as well as drug and alcohol consumption, which rival The Weeknd’s discussion of both topics. It is important to recognize distinctions that are made. Perry, a White female pop-star, is able to crossover frequently into the realm of sex and drugs and remains an icon that young girls should aspire to be like. On the other hand, The Weeknd is someone who should not be trusted because of his drug use.

Both Chief Keef and The Weeknd highlight and represent a growing movement of drug consumer artistry within Hip Hop culture along with artists such as Future who also embraces drug use, particularly pills and lean. The embrace and use of hard-drugs has become a new marker of authenticity. Those who use and abuse pharmaceutical drugs, codeine, pills, and cocaine, along with more traditional Hip Hop embraced drugs such as marijuana and alcohol are now seen as authentic keepers of the culture.

Conclusion

The simultaneous embrace and rejection of specific values of American culture give the sub-genre of “addict” rap a dichotomous relationship within Hip Hop culture. On one hand, these artists are producing music and benefiting both financially and socially from their art form. They have pushed boundaries to create new spaces for subject matter that was previously considered taboo. On the other hand, the culture of apathy through this very embrace of drugs creates both social and physical risks. Social risks of embracing a lifestyle of drugs can create both criminal and societal problems for individuals. Being caught with illegal drugs could create legal problems leading to arrests, fines, and/or incarceration. Socially, labels of being a drug addict or criminal leaves stigmas and other deviant social sanctions on a person. The embrace of being a drug-user, particularly in the quantities many of these artists talk about can lead to very real physical health risks as well. These health factors can debilitate a person’s ability to function as well as could lead to death as seen with such artists such as Pimp C.

Many of these artists are glamorizing the drugs in their music and only showing the social benefits, which in this case is the authenticity of being seen as a gangster (Chief Keef) or having sex appeal (The Weekend). Whereas, reality suggests that over-consumption of any of these substances have potential risks. A few artists have discussed the downside of drug addiction in their music, such as, Eminem and Joe Budden who have both struggled with drug abuse. Eminem released two albums, *Relapse* (2009) and *Recovery* (2010), both of which discuss his continued battles with prescription pills. Joe Budden talked publicly about his “addictive” personality and continued struggle with drugs stating, “I started with drugs very early, maybe 12 or 13

⁶⁸ Calvin John Smiley, “From Silence to Propagation: Understanding the Relationship between ‘Stop Snitchin’ and ‘YOLO,’” *Deviant Behavior* 36 (2014): 1-16.

years old."⁶⁹ On his debut album entitled, *Joe Budden*, he released a song entitled, "Calm Down" which was an open discussion about his addiction to drugs and how this fractured the relationship with his mother rapping, "Listen...ain't shit like seeing your moms crying on the floor/Knowing you the reason why she ain't alright no more."⁷⁰ Throughout the very candid and at times uncomfortable song, Budden talks about his addiction and recovery, citing many 12-step program sayings such as "it's a slow process," "one day at a time," and "people, places, and things." This song might be one of the most honest rap songs looking at the negative side of drug use.

Revisiting A-Trak's position, Hip Hop artists and Hip Hop culture, more broadly, needs to examine the content and over-celebration of drug-use in the music. Unlike previous decades or other contemporary genres, Hip Hop music's relationship with drugs is very much associated with crime and deviance and not artistic form or celebration of creativity. The intersection of race, class, gender, and respectability, privilege those in other genres to be seen as individuals who create unique sounds and contributions to music, whereas, young Black males are lumped into a group of social misfits who perpetuate deviance and criminal behavior.

Recently, Black speech in the form of Hip Hop lyrics was at the center of a murder trial. Hip Hop music has been brought into the judicial process, "as rap lyrics are being admitted as evidence in trials."⁷¹ The Black voice has historically and continues to be policed, monitored and repressed as something counter to mainstream American values. Hence, unlike other musical genres, where lyrics are seen as fun, artistic, or fictitious, Hip Hop language is viewed as real, authentic, and troublesome. As Hip Hop music continues to grow with new sub-genres such as "addict" rap emerging it will only further the stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions of Black life, without proper acknowledgement, representation and discourse about the art, lifestyle, and lyrical content.

⁶⁹ Trevor Smith, "Joe Budden Talks about His Drug Addiction & Feud with Consequence," *HotNewHipHop*, May 11, 2013, Accessed September 4, 2015. <http://www.hotnewhiphop.com/joe-budden-explains-consequence-feud-and-battle-with-addiction-news.5625.html>.

⁷⁰ "Joe Budden - Calm Down," *Genius*, Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://genius.com/Joe-budden-calm-down-lyrics>.

⁷¹ Matthew Pulver, "America's Hip Hop Travesty: How Rap Lyrics Are Being Used in Court – to Police Black Speech," *Salon.com* RSS. February 8, 2015, Accessed September 3, 2015. http://www.salon.com/2015/02/08/americas_hip_hop_travesty_how_rap_lyrics_are_being_used_in_court_to_police_black_speech/.

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Making Movie Money: A 25-Year Analysis of Rappers' Acting Roles in Hollywood Movies

Tia Tyree

Since the 1980s, moviemakers and rappers have collaborated to churn out an extensive body of cinematic work. With rappers moving from small cameo roles to obtaining lead acting roles, there is an undeniable influence rappers and rap music had and still have on the movie industry. The purpose of this research was to explore the existence of rappers in the movie industry by investigating the appearances of rap artists in Hollywood movies, connections that existed between rap artists' musical personalities and the movie characters they portrayed as well as connections between Hip Hop movements and rappers' roles in Hollywood. Key findings indicated gangsta, hardcore and party rappers were cast in movies most frequently, and rap artists with popular gimmicks or the strongest or most unique personalities within rap groups were more likely to be cast in movies. Further, findings indicate there were connections between the realities rap artists portrayed in the music industry and the characters they portrayed in Hollywood movies, and the 1990s was the "Golden Age of Rappers in Movies." Finally, while most films did have rap artists speaking, acting and looking similar to their rap personas, there were opportunities for rappers to break away from their rap personas. Most notably, the elite rap actors discussed in this research – LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Ice T, Ice Cube, Marcy Mark, Snoop Dog, Fresh Prince and Mos Def – showed rappers can progress in the Hollywood movie system, transcend their rap personas and become successful actors.

As 2016 ended, Will "Fresh Prince" Smith's¹ *Collateral Beauty* was released in theaters. With more than twenty-five movies to his credit, it might be hard for some to watch his dramatic cinematic portrayal of a father struggling to accept the death of his daughter and remember he earned his notoriety as the pop rapper Fresh Prince. He is arguably one of the most popular actors in entertainment. Fresh Prince topped the Ulmer Scale's "Hot List" multiple times, which scores an actor's worldwide bankability on a scale from zero to one hundred, and it is based on several criterion, including risk factors, value in the film worldwide marketplace, professionalism and talent.² Further punctuating his success in the film industry is the lifetime gross of his films tops more than \$3.1 billion.³ Yet, Fresh Prince, and many other rappers, transitioned from rapping to acting and penetrated the movie industry with fervor for decades.

O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson, Dana "Queen Latifah" Owens, Tracy "Ice T" Marrow, James "LL Cool J" Smith III, Calvin "Snoop Dogg" Broadus Jr. and others have moved from the stage to the movie screen. According to successful rapper, screenwriter, actor and producer Ice Cube, rappers had a term for the lure of large Hollywood

¹ All rappers will be presented first using their entire names with stage names. Then they will only be referred to using their stage names.

² "Will Smith Tops the List of Most Bankable Actors Worldwide," *Ulmer Scale*, Accessed on June 16, 2010, <https://www.blackentrepreneurprofile.com/profile-full/article/will-smith-tops-list-of-most-bankable-actors-worldwide/>.

³ "Will Smith," *Box Office Mojo*, accessed on December 21, 2016, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/people/chart/?id=willsmith.htm>.

paychecks. He called it “movie money,” and he said it drove rappers to put down their microphones and pick up movie scripts.⁴ However, at the time, Ice Cube noted Hollywood movie producers - more than other actors and directors - were more likely to accept rappers as actors. Ice Cube insisted producers look for any “edge” in the marketplace to attract moviegoers to theaters and rappers gave them a competitive “edge.” Further, actor, screenwriter and producer Spike Lee was noted as stating that Hollywood producers must seriously take into consideration the presence of rappers in film. He said, “You can’t deny it, you have to deal with it, or you’re making very uncool movies. And if you don’t make them, your competitor will.”⁵

From LL Cool J’s role in *Krush Grove* in 1985 to Yasiin “Mos Def” Bey (Dante Smith) and Queen Latifah’s leading roles in the *Just Wright* in 2010 to Christopher “Ludacris” Bridges role in the *Fast & Furious* movie franchise, the occurrences and significance of the roles rappers play in Hollywood movies has evolved over the last two decades. Rappers are not only obtaining roles, but prominent ones. A review of scholarship concerning rap and Hip Hop indicates scholars are focusing on certain aspects of these movements, but have not systematically chronicled the quantity and type of appearances of multiple types of rappers as a cohesive group within the movie industry over an extended period.

Much scholarly research has been written about the history and current influence of Hip Hop on culture; its influence on fashion, art, culture and behavior; impact on youth, and even its influence in the movie industry.⁶ Yet, this research fills a much-needed gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the number and types of acting roles of rappers in Hollywood without prejudice to the types of movies or rappers being investigated.

In the movie industry where studio executives covet a sure thing, rap artists bring hordes of young Black, White, and Latino moviegoers to urban and suburban theaters, and rap artists have appeared in some of the highest grossing and most profitable films in Hollywood.⁷ Rap artists’ natural stage presence and fan base make them shine on the big screen.⁸ By investigating how rap artists emerged and staked a considerable claim within the movie industry, this study will be significant, because it will be the much-needed analytical scholarship used to assess exactly how this pop culture phenomenon materialized and blossomed over more than a twenty-five year period. Furthermore, this work describes how influential certain rap styles or personas were within the movie industry.

⁴ Tia C. M. Tyree, interview by author, Washington, D.C., January 8, 2007.

⁵ E. Feimster, “From Hip Hop to Hollywood,” accessed on April 10, 2006, http://channels.netscape.com/celebrity/becksmith.jsp?p=bsf_hiphop.

⁶ See examples in the bibliography for works by Robin Boylorn; Kimberly Monteyne; Ronald Jackson and Sakile Kai Camara; Monica White Ndounou; S. Craig Watkins; as well as Yasser Arafat Payne and LaMar Rashad Gibson.

⁷ Sakina P. Spruell, “Hip Hop at the Movies,” *Black Enterprise* 32, no. 12 (2002): 62-66.

⁸ Hall, Regina, “Hip Hop Inc.,” *Essence*, 36.2 (2005): 102.

Theoretical Underpinnings: The Social Construction of Reality and the Rapper

Ultimately, rap is not just words; it is multidimensional. Rap is pedagogy, mass culture, subversion and farce.⁹ Not only does rap dictate the major focus be placed on the performer and not the group or DJ, but the dynamics of rap require the performer focus on personal narrative.¹⁰ Tricia Rose posits the power of rappers' voices and their roles as storytellers ensured rapping would become the central expression of Hip Hop culture. Rose also argued rappers speak with "authority, conviction, confidence and power," and those with impressive verbal dexterity and performative skills captivate their audiences' attention.¹¹

Rappers personally construct realities for consumers to believe in for their own reasons. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann outlined several key concepts concerning the interactions between individuals and society. Most notably, Berger and Luckmann argued society is a human product and acts as if it is an objective reality and man is a social product. There are three steps in the social construction of reality, which are externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of the individual self into the world, and objectivation is attained by the products of this activity – both the physical and mental activities – and the reality that faces its original producers and becomes institutionalized. Internalization is the re-appropriation of individuals of this same reality, which is transformed again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness or socialization.¹² Ultimately, social reality is not a true social fact within itself. Instead, social reality is created and communicated; it derives meaning within and through systems of communication. Essentially, people consciously help to develop or construct their realities based on their existing values, beliefs and ideological positions.¹³ These values, beliefs and ideologies are not individual choices; instead, they are components of complex and dynamic social and cultural patterns.¹⁴

Social construction of reality is an important concept to understand when investigating how rappers came into the Hollywood moviemaking process, because it helps ground the idea that societies are based on cultural and personal experiences. As a social group, rap artists describe and sell their realities to their audiences. Most rap lyrics are first-person narratives that retell what the artists (allegedly) saw or did and

⁹ Clarence Lusane, "Rap, Race and Power Politics," *The Black Scholar* 23, no. 2 (1993): 37-51.

¹⁰ Robin Roberts, "Music Videos, Performance and Resistance: Feminist rappers," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 25, no. 2 (1991): 141-152.

¹¹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) p. 55.

¹² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (UK: Penguin, 1991).

¹³ See Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane's research "Media and the Social Construction of Reality: Toward an integration of Theory and Research" and George Gerbner's research "Communication and Social Environment."

¹⁴ Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 50, no. 2 (1991): 248-287.

recount events that happened personally or specifically to them.¹⁵ In addition, speech can be translated as action; a text is axiomatically an ethnography.¹⁶ Rap is speech, and when text is accompanied by music, there is an explicit conceptual framework that begins to provide answers concerning musical meaning and social significance. Individuals not only live their realities, but they express them to others. Rappers have their music to help manifest and express their realities to others, and Hollywood moviemakers spend millions of dollars attempting to construct realistic stories to sell to audiences.

As noted by Celine Parrenas Shimizu, narrative Hollywood movies are a manifestation of the White male fantasy and imagination, and as characters, times and places are constructed for the art of moviemaking, audiences are shown what moviemakers want to see happen, which may even be a reflection or response to what audiences, too, desire to see.¹⁷ For example, Hip Hop gangsta films expose the racist ideology that exists in Hollywood that not only encourages the development of African-American cinema, but also limits it. The most commercially successful genres of African-American films are Hip Hop gangsta films and comedies. Yet, it is exactly the preferences of these types of films by Hollywood audiences that limit the existence of complex cinematic portrayals that highlight the humanity within the spectrum of the Black experience.¹⁸

To further this point, Ronald Jackson and Sakile Camara, assert the existence of a “parasitic” relationship between the movie industry and Hip Hop, which manifests itself through a seduction of Hip Hop and Black movie artists entangled in a courtship that pays them money in exchange for popularity and movie roles.¹⁹ However, these scholars warned audiences are often engulfed in the, “insidious arrangement where they are pleased at their own risk. Unfortunately, although these artists are aware these industries have ghettoized blackness, then turned it into a commodity and packaged it for mass consumption, they have been complicit with this stereotype.”²⁰ Ultimately, Hip Hop’s entrance into Hollywood was complex. Hip Hop films were celebrated for they allowed Black audiences to see themselves in Black actors on movie screens and White audiences could voyeuristically experience Black culture. However, there was concern of the continued commodification of the Black experience, especially Black male images.²¹

¹⁵ Robin DG. Kelley, *Race Rebels* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

¹⁶ John Van Maanen, *Representation in Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

¹⁷ Celine Parreñas Shimizu, "Equal Access to Exploitation and Joy: Women of Color and Hollywood Stereotype" *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 33, no. 4 (2016): 303-321.

¹⁸ Monica White Ndounou, *Shaping the Future of African American Film: Color-Coded Economics and the Story Behind the Numbers* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Ronald L. Jackson and Sakile Kai Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies in Hip Hop Music and Pimp Movies," *Association for the Study of African American Life and History*, 2010, p. 179.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Robin M. Boylorn, "From Boys to Men: Hip Hop, Hood Films, and the Performance of Contemporary Black Masculinity." *Black Camera* 8, no. 2 (2017): 146-164.

Understanding Rap Music, Rap Styles and Rap Movements

The history, current state and influence of rap music and Hip Hop is much too vast and extensive to outline in this work. However, it is important to note some basic ideas about the categorization of rappers, create an understanding of what rap truly is and means as well as identify some trends, as this helps to lay the foundation for what created rappers' pathway into the movie industry and possibly undergirded their casting.

In 2009, Yasser Arafat Payne and LaMar Rashad Gibson argued there was no consensus in Hip Hop literature on the proper classification of rap music genres, and this author argues that nearly two decades later the same holds true.²² The variations, contradictions and historical demarcations that exist in both the categorization of rap music styles and rap movements are vast. However, what follows is this author's selection of rap and Hip Hop scholarship that created the foundation for this study, which notably may not be universally accepted by all in the Hip Hop community.

Specific Rap Music Styles

Taylor and Taylor assert there has never been one "all-inclusive" form of rap music.²³ This can be attributed to the styles, ideas and techniques rappers have as a result of their locations within demographic regions, geographic regions, territories and locales.²⁴ Rap styles, forms and categories are critical to note in this research, because they become the building blocks to understand exactly how rap artists can be situated within the rap music genre, Hip Hop community and quite possibly the Hollywood movie industry. Perhaps, their locations within specific categorizations listed in this work position them differently within the Hollywood movie industry and either assist or hinder their efforts to be cast in a major movie production.

With rap being such a dynamic art form, many scholars have attempted to classify the types, forms and themes within rap music. S. Craig Watkins noted rap various based on "regions, styles, subgenres and gender" and that there is no "monolithic constituency operating within the Hip Hop community...different subjective positions, ideas and experiences are communicated through Hip Hop, thus creating a vastly diverse body of discourses and cultural practices."²⁵ Don Elligan classified rap into five categories: gangsta rap, materialistic rap, political or protest rap,

²² Yasser Arafat Payne and LaMar Rashad Gibson, "Hip Hop Music and Culture: A Site of Resiliency for the Streets of Young Black America," *Handbook of African American Psychology* (2009): 127-141.

²³ Carl S. Taylor and Virgil Taylor, "Hip Hop and Youth Culture: Contemplations of an emerging cultural phenomenon," *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 12, no. 4 (2004): 251.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 257.

positive rap and spiritual rap.²⁶ According to Elligan, gangster rap focused on violence, guns, misogyny and profane language. Materialistic rap focuses on monetary wealth, possessions and women. Elligan noted political/protest rap focuses on political issues, racism, sexism, equality and ethnic identity. In addition, he stated "Positive rap promotes the values of education, responsibility and ethnic pride. Spiritual rap incorporates rap music with traditional gospel music to appeal to young African American men."²⁷ Matt Diehl clearly defined an additional style of rap music: pop rap. The "pop" is derived from the word "popular" and "signifies music that's reaching for the biggest conceivable audience."²⁸

Roy Shuker penned a book titled *Key Concepts in Popular Music* and noted five major forms of rap music, which are gangsta, hard-core, reggae, female and East Coast or Daisy Age.²⁹ Shuker defined his subgenres as follows: "gangsta rap was machismo in orientation and includes themes of gang violence, drugs and the mistreatment and abuse of women, often with explicitly violent and sexual lyrics."³⁰ Shuker defined hardcore rap as focusing on serious political messages about the Black community, and reggae rap had a distinctive reggae-style beat and rhythm. In addition, the lyrics are sung, instead of rapped. Female rappers were not simply described by their gender. Instead, Shuker describes them as "female vocalists emphasizing gender solidarity and/or power over men."³¹

Several Key Movements in Rap Music

Since its beginnings, rap has undergone several key movements. Similar to the manner in which scholars and music fans have offered several definitions of the types of rap styles that exist, scholars, too, outline a number of different trends that exist in rap music history. Michael Eric Dyson posits rap has undergone three distinct stages.³² Initially, rap music was "light-hearted banter and boastful self-assertion."³³ Rap moved to a second phase that was marked by "social critique" because of carrying the message about "the hurt and horror that make urban life a jungle."³⁴ The second stage has three subgenres – gangsta, hardcore and activists. Finally, the last stage was "pluralization," which involves the experimentation and merging of rap with other musical styles as well as a coupling of elements from the previous stages.³⁵

²⁶ Don Elligan, "Rap Therapy: A culturally Sensitive Approach to Psychotherapy with Young African American Men," *Journal of African American Studies* 5, no. 3 (2000): 27-36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸ Matt Diehl, "Pop Rap," *The Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999), 122

²⁹ Roy Shuker, *Key concepts in Popular Music*, Routledge, 1998.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 248.

³² Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1996).

³³ *Ibid.*, 143

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 143

Mtume ya Salaam noted four distinct periods in the creation of rap music.³⁶ The first period was from 1970 to 1979 and was marked by the early innovators who were perfecting their rap and deejay skills, but were not necessarily conscious of the impact of their overall actions. From 1979 to 1983, rap music began to spread across the United States and the world, but the primary creators remained in the birthplace of the music style, New York. This second phase was now affectionately called “old school” and was birthed alongside breakdancing, graffiti art and other elements of Hip Hop. The third or most creative period was from 1983 to 1989, and it marked a shifting of popularity of rappers away from New York to other areas, such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Oakland. Unlike the other periods, the fourth period was more focused on consumers than rap artists. Salaam acknowledged commercialism was the driving force behind rap music. It was the tastes and morals of the public that drove record sales, and those forces were pushing the creative products of rap artists, not expression or communication.³⁷

Still others noted different critical periods in rap music. Sasha Frere-Jones noted prior to 1983, rap rhymes were mostly centered on stories about bragging and boasting of partying and being who you are.³⁸ Rose also noted key changes in rap music in the 1980s. Rap themes began to denote increased intertextual references and complexity and were reflective of stories from new “Hip Hop crews” from Miami, Boston and Houston.³⁹ Charise Cheney identified the late 1980s through the early 1990s as the “Golden Age of Hip Hop,” which was a time ripe with political expression from certain rappers, such as Public Enemy and Ice Cube, that paralleled historic Black nationalist-masculinist discourse.⁴⁰

Mako Fitts argued since the late 1980s, three distinct, often coexisting movements, in Hip Hop authentication were present, which were Afrocentricity (social consciousness and political awareness), ghettocentricity and ostentatious displays of consumption (i.e., bling bling).⁴¹ The latter two reflected commercial hip hop’s movement of showcasing mainstream media representations of violent criminality and wealth accumulation.⁴² The early 1990s saw an emergence of the “Dirty South,” which was originally promoted as a new type of rap music blending older rap styles with southern music, accents, and themes, but by the end of the decade, rappers from this region had earned attention, critical acclaim and a reputation as “innovators of a fresh, new sound and style in Hip Hop culture.”⁴³ In the 1990s, gangsta rap also found a place

³⁶ Mtume Ya Salaam, “The Aesthetics of Rap,” *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 303-315.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sasha Frere-Jones, “Run-DMC,” *The Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999): 61-68.

³⁹ Rose, *Black Noise*, 58.

⁴⁰ Charise Cheney, *Brothers Gonna Work it Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism*. (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

⁴¹ Mako Fitts, “Drop It Like It’s Hot’: Culture Industry Laborers and Their Perspectives on Rap Music Video Production,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8, no. 1 (2007): 211-235.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Darren E. Grem, “The South Got Something to Say: Atlanta’s Dirty South and the Southernization of Hip Hop America,” *Southern Cultures* 12, no. 4 (2006): 55-73.

in mainstream culture.⁴⁴ Finally, in the new millennium, with east and west coast rappers dominating rap for years, other parts of the country grabbed the attention of rap fans. It was then more regional acts with established fan bases exploded in the Hip Hop industry.⁴⁵ The commercialization of rap music was driven into selling the lifestyle of rap, not just songs, sex, or politics,⁴⁶ and it, too, saw the trend of White rock-rap bands or White rock and rap musicians working on collaborations that decontextualized the Black origins of rap and worked to erase the context by which the music and culture emerged.⁴⁷

The Emergence of Rappers in Hollywood and Understanding Blacks in Movies

African-American culture has been persistently exploited in America, but corporate America's aggressive commodification of Hip Hop culture is unprecedented and shocking, especially in the way the declining urban centers that spawned Hip Hop are packaged as a glossy, dangerous, pleasure-filled, tough and racialized space.⁴⁸ In particular, Clarence Lusane asserted rap is "the packaging and marketing of social discontent by some of the most skilled ad agencies and largest record producers in the world...it's this duality that has given rap its many dimensions and flavors...empowerment and reaction."⁴⁹ Rap is attractive to corporations for it requires little investment, but has great potential for profits, and while most artists are young Blacks, they are not the main purchasers of rap, as most consumers are non-Blacks.⁵⁰ This paradox is actually the reverse when it comes to moviegoing. In the early 2000s, Blacks made up less than 12 percent of the population, but constituted about 25 percent of the movie-going audience.⁵¹ However, in 2015, the African-American percentage of the U.S. moviegoing audience nearly matched its U.S. national population, but unlike Hispanics and Whites, African-American moviegoers frequency increased.⁵² The clear

⁴⁴ Persaud, E. Jerry, "The Signature of Hip Hop: A Sociological Perspective," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 4, no. 1 (2011).

⁴⁵ Rashuan Hall, "R&B/Hip Hop Industry Examines Trends on Eve of Confab," *Billboard*, August 19, 2000.

⁴⁶ Margaret Hunter, "Shake it, Baby, Shake it: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip Hop," *Sociological Perspectives* 54, no. 1 (2011): 15-36.

⁴⁷ Jason Middleton and Roger Beebe, "The Racial Politics of Hybridity and 'Neo-Eclecticism' in Contemporary Popular Music," *Popular Music* 21, no. 2 (2002): 159-172.

⁴⁸ Guthrie P. Ramsey, "Muzing New Hoods, Making New Identities: Film, Hip Hop culture, and Jazz Music," *Callaloo* 25, no. 1 (2002): 309-320.

⁴⁹ Clarence Lusane, "Rap, Race, and Politics," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader* eds. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Foreman, (New York: Routledge, 2004): 403.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 405.

⁵¹ See Karen Grigsby Bates, "They've Gotta have us," *New York Times Magazine* (14 July 1991), p. 18, and Lewis Beale, "Boyz' in your Hood?," *Washington Post* (3 March 1992).

⁵² Bret. Lang, "Box Office Hits Record, But Number of Frequent Moviegoers Drops 10%," accessed on February 3, 2017, <http://variety.com/2016/film/news/box-office-hits-record-but-frequent-moviegoers-down-1201751770/>.

connection evident here is that rap music's fan base and the African-American interest in moviegoing possibly made the pathway to rappers in films kismet.

Yet, historically, Black involvement and representations in movies have a noted ebb and flow marked by concentrated moments of production and Black-focused features and years of marginalization; all demarcated by popular tropes that exemplify changing conceptualizations of Blackness.⁵³ Most notably, following decades of White, patriarchal exploitation in the movie industry, Blaxploitation movies were an intentional anti-establishment movie genre, paralleling rap's development as an alternate and true Black representation.⁵⁴ Another key moment was the development of "hood cycle" films in the early 1990s, which included rappers as a way to evoke credibility similar to the way Blaxploitation-era movies cast football players to authentically reflect the Black urban experience.⁵⁵ Jackson and Camara argue the movie industry exploded with these images focused with a Black representational gaze "fixated on almost nothing but the ugly aspects of Black existence that celebrate trifling ghetto living and poverty, neither of which are indicative of a composite Black culture, but pretend to be."⁵⁶

Ultimately, realities help develop social knowledge and shape what become cultural norms and values, and much of this can be translated in movies by moviemakers for the benefit of moviemaking and moneymaking as well as the pleasure and consumption of audiences, despite the damaging effects present. While every rapper is not Black and every rapper to earn a Hollywood movie role is not Black (e.g., Marshall "Eminem" Mathers III in *8 Mile* and Vanilla Ice in *Cool as Ice*), the majority are Black, and the way the movie industry has stereotyped Blacks is well documented and studied. From the groundbreaking book by Donald Bogle *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* to the multiple research studies produced since its publication, the acknowledgment of the Hollywood industry's usage of negative stereotypes and the damage they cause and caused is well noted. What is perhaps better suited for this study than naming and describing the multiple types of stereotypes in existence is to briefly describe how the communication of Black bodies through the usage of those stereotypes is problematic, especially since most rappers are overwhelmingly Black men.

When more record companies and White audiences targeted rap in the 1980s, it created the opportunity for rap artists and moviemakers to form a relationship. Spruell asserts rap artists in movies helped bring legitimacy to movie storylines, gave actor performances "juice" and demonstrated how the best personality needed to bring to life

⁵³ Keith Corson, "Ice-T at the Movies: The Hip Hop Film Cycle and the On-Screen Gangsta in Flux," *Rapper, Writer, Pop-Cultural Player: Ice-T and the Politics of Black Cultural Production* (2016): 43.

⁵⁴ Ronald Jackson and Sakile Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies in Hip Hop Music and Pimp Movies."

⁵⁵ George Nelson, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998).

⁵⁶ Ronald Jackson and Sakile Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies in Hip Hop Music and Pimp Movies," 60.

the tools and conventions of Hip Hop to the screen was the rapper.⁵⁷ Yet, what is often not considered is the communication and power dynamics present in this partnership needed to transition a rapper from the music industry to the movie industry. The systematic power that exists in the creation of Hollywood movies requires acknowledgement of what is a critical and creative process behind and in front of the movie screen.⁵⁸ The Black body in entertainment has largely been negatively portrayed and commodified by Whites for decades. There are certain narratives available to certain bodies, and since this is the case, there is a disruptive impact of those bodies on narratives, especially when they run contradictory to what is status quo or acceptable in a society.⁵⁹ For example, Linda Mizejewski specifically investigated this in her review of Queen Latifah's roles in romantic comedies and how the narratives handled the "sexuality of the unruly woman who is black, or conversely, the narratives available for racial unruliness when it is female."⁶⁰

The Black body on the movie screen is also a place where dominant institutions of White masculine power and authority-criminal justice system are present and reflect the public's intrigue with the figure of the menacing Black male criminal body, which rappers like Andre "Dr. Dre" Young, Todd "Too Short" Shaw, Ice-T, Ice Cube, Tupac "2Pac" Shakur and Snoop Dogg have used to construct or reconstruct the image of Black masculinity into one of hyper-Blackness based on fear and dread.⁶¹ To discuss just one example, early in his career, Ice T's image heavily centered on his intimate knowledge of ghetto life and his ability to authentically translate those experiences to creative mediums like music and film.⁶² As an actor, his performances are anchored in his celebrity persona, which is informed by his street life and Black experience.⁶³ In his 1990s movie appearances during the "hood cycle" of films, this "'authentic' ghetto experience rooted in criminality" was privileged over what was the typical leading man. From 2000 to 2017, Ice T's criminal connection was still being utilized, as he moved to the small screen and played the lead role of Odafin Tutuola, a criminal detective, in television show *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*.

Elligan noted rap's significant national influence on music, art, media and the social development of youth really began to "take off" in the mid-1980s, which is about the time when Hollywood started to produce rap-influenced films.⁶⁴ The appearance of rappers in film and the influence of Hip Hop can be traced back to the 1982 rap movie classic *Wild Style*, which featured Joseph "Grandmaster Flash" Saddler, Fred "Fab Five Freddy" Braithwaite and the Rock Steady Crew. Even with the movie *Breakin'* and *Beat*

⁵⁷ Spruell, "Hip Hop at the Movies," 205.

⁵⁸ Shimizu, "Equal Access to Exploitation and Joy."

⁵⁹ Linda Mizejewski, "Queen Latifah, Unruly Women, and the Bodies of Romantic Comedy," *Genders*, no. 46, (2007).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Herman Gray, "Black masculinity and visual culture," *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (1995): 401-405.

⁶² Keith Corson, "Ice-T at the Movies: The Hip Hop Film Cycle and the On-Screen Gangsta in Flux," *Rapper, Writer, Pop-Cultural Player: Ice-T and the Politics of Black Cultural Production* (2016): 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Elligan, "Rap Therapy," 28.

Street arriving in theaters in 1984, it would not be for another year that one might admittedly acknowledge that a true movement had begun. The 1985 movie release, *Krush Groove*, showed movies were a true commercial vehicle for Hip Hop artists.⁶⁵ *Krush Groove*, which was loosely based on the creation of rap mogul Russell Simmons' Def Jam Records, was designed, in part, to promote the record label's artists LL Cool J and Run DMC, who are now legends in rap music. Hip Hop musicals, such as *Breakin'* and *Krush Groove*, were groundbreaking movies marketed to teens, as they broke out of the homogeneous teen movies of the past that catered to the troubled racialized contours of the American psyche and made space in Hollywood for the existence of young, confident characters of color.⁶⁶

Purpose and Research Questions

Studies investigating rappers' roles in movies largely focus on certain topics. Much research has focused on the role of highly popular rappers in movies. Additional studies have chronicled the connections of certain types of rappers (e.g., gangsta rappers) in specific genres of films, and still others have looked at the impact of certain acting roles rappers took in Black cinema, Hip Hop cinema or overall in the movie industry.⁶⁷ Yet, what then becomes important to understand is exactly what types of movies have been produced over an extended period featuring rappers and what, if anything, can be surmised from the movie roles taken by various rappers and the Hollywood movies that featured them. More specifically, the purpose of this research was to explore the existence of rappers in the movie industry by investigating the appearances of rap artists in Hollywood movies, connections that existed between rap artists' musical personalities and the movie characters they portrayed as well as connections between Hip Hop movements and rappers' roles in Hollywood. This research sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Are certain types of rappers and personas seen more frequently in Hollywood movies?

RQ2: Are there connections between rappers' musical personas, lyrics or rap music styles and the characters played in Hollywood movies?

RQ3: Have themes and trends within Hip Hop and rap music manifested themselves within Hollywood films?

⁶⁵ Spruell, "Hip Hop at the Movies."

⁶⁶ Kimberly Monteyne, *Hip Hop on Film: Performance Culture, Urban Space, and Genre Transformation in the 1980s* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

⁶⁷ See examples in the bibliography for works by Monica White Ndouno, S. Craig Watkins, Keith Corson and Linda Mizejewsk.

Methodology

For this study, a sample was developed that included rap artists who appeared in at least one Hollywood movie. Aspects of movies that were central to the analysis of this study included, but were not limited to, release dates, genres, plotlines, gross ticket sales and character attributes. Movies distributed in theaters from 1982 to 2008 were included in this study. This covers a 26-year period, as the goal was to record 25 years, but one year within this timeframe did not include a single movie featuring rappers.⁶⁸ This over quarter of a century sample period is significant and appropriate as it covers the start of the phenomenon and enough time to discover possible patterns in the data. Several roles and movies were excluded from the sample, which were “straight to DVD” movie releases, which are not shown in theaters; roles in which the rapper played “himself” or “herself;” roles for which a rapper did not receive credit; and acting roles within movies solely produced by a rap artist or a record company to specifically promote the rap artist.

Procedure and Data Collection

It was this researcher’s intent to ensure the sample under study properly represented rappers from different rap music styles. In total, the sample included seventy-four rappers. (See Appendix A for the full list of rappers.) Rappers within the sample released albums in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. There were sixty-two male rappers and twelve female rappers. The rappers were solo artists and members of rap groups. In total, two hundred and eighty-one movies from their filmographies qualified for this study. Rappers selected for the sample were based on the criteria used by Bruno Nettl, which took into consideration historical priority, popularity, and reputation.⁶⁹ They, too, were catalogued based on the common rap categories that were prevalent among researchers, and most importantly, took into consideration S. Craig Watkins’ groundbreaking research of Hip Hop and movies that acknowledged variations in rap across regions, styles, subgenres and gender.⁷⁰

With the help of two research assistants, the rappers were placed in categories. This categorization was important to answer RQ1, as it allowed for the data to be compared based on character roles, rap styles, personas, themes and trends. While not necessary in qualitative research, there must have been agreement with at least two researchers to place a rapper in a specific category. This afforded more credibility in the categorization of rappers in the sample. The seventy-four rappers were placed into the

⁶⁸ This researcher did not conduct any analysis to investigate why there were no films in this year, nor offers an explanation in this study.

⁶⁹ Bruno Nettl, *Heartland excursions: Ethnomusicological reflections on schools of music* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

⁷⁰ S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

following eight categories: gangsta, hardcore, materialistic, knowledge or positive, regional, female, party or pop. Rappers were placed into a primary and, if necessary, secondary category. The primary category represented the category in which the rapper started his or her career as well as the category that best described most of the rapper's artistic works. The secondary rap category was designed to capture changes in a rapper's style because of the rapper separating from a group, maturation in the rapper's career or simply a change in rap style.

As noted by Russell Potter, when representativeness is a goal within a qualitative study, the researcher utilizes the principals in "quantitative research to articulate a complete sampling frame by giving every element within that frame an equal chance of being selected."⁷¹ To answer RQ 2, a smaller sample was selected. It was created by extracting the fifth artist in each category, with a minimum of three selected in each category. This type of selection process is utilized in random stratified sampling. When the number of rappers within a category was not sufficient to allow for the use of this selection technique, the first, middle and last rapper in the category was selected.

The rappers within this smaller sample had a total of one hundred and twenty-two movies that qualified for inclusion within the sample. The movies starring each rapper were placed in order by release date, and three movies were selected for analysis. The first, middle and last film completed by each rapper was selected. The intention behind this selection process was to find a fair and balanced method to analyze patterns within a rapper's filmography. The movies were analyzed using textual analysis. Unlike a content analysis, which lends itself better to more quantitative data, the textual analysis method allowed for the development of richer, more in-depth data that is more consistent with the qualitative paradigm. This method is employed to describe the content, structure and functions of the messages contained in media texts.⁷² Since meaning making and interpretation can vary from the creators to the audience, this method was beneficial as those conducting textual analyses "do not assert with absolute certainty how particular texts are interpreted. However, they suggest the kinds of interpretations that may take place, based on available evidence, and likely interpretations of a particular text."⁷³ Three types of meaning are always co-present, which are the identificatory, representational and actional, and textual analysis can help researchers to identify them.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).

⁷² Sasha Frere-Jones, "Run-DMC," *The Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999): 61-68.

⁷³ Margaret Carlisle Duncan, "Sports Photographs and Sexual Difference: Images of Women and Men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7, no. 1 (1990): 27.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, "What is enlightenment?," *Michel Foucault: Essential Works Volume 1* edited by Paul Rabinow, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994): 303-19; Fairclough Norman, "Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research," *London and New York: Routledge* (2003): 41.

Findings and Discussion

For decades, Hollywood moviemakers have transformed African-American artists into cinematic superstars, such as Diana Ross, Sammy Davis Jr. and Whitney Houston. The eventual search for rappers to portray characters in movies was inevitable. Through videos, lyrics and appearances, rappers can socially construct their persona to their fans. The findings from this study indicate Hollywood moviemakers capitalized on the socially constructed realities created by rappers and used them in their movie roles. Utilizing the credibility developed in their lyrical narratives, personal experiences and commercial images, rappers' characters reflected their cultural spaces, language and behaviors. Unfortunately, what is important to note is the White-controlled movie industry used rappers as tools to portray familiar and socially comfortable negative images frequently seen and sought after by mainstream moviegoers, which supported the existence of stereotypical roles, usage of the White patriarchal gaze of the Black male body and glorifications of the perils and social ills present in the urban centers rappers often called home.

The question of whether rap personas are real representations of the person who is the actual rapper is not an issue that can be addressed in this work. Instead what can be addressed is whether the socially constructed personas developed by the rapper for consumption were present in the movie industry. It is clear they did manifest themselves in movie roles. Moviemakers tapped into the realities constructed by rappers and used them to their advantage by bringing what at the time was usually an auditory consumption of rappers by fans to a heightened moving, visual and more realistic product to consume. Rappers vivified the movie characters portrayed, provided a shortcut for moviemakers to use to connect characters to moviegoers and perhaps gave them the competitive edge of offering "credible" individuals, not typical actors, to play characters. It became so much of a noted business practice that movie roles even paralleled music trends in Hip Hop.

Actors are critical to a movie, and when rappers were tapped to become actors, Hollywood was an equal opportunity employer. Rappers played diverse characters, and with 98% of rappers in the sample having at least three movie credits, the results showed most rappers had captured the attention of moviemakers and were not simply cast for cameo or single roles. Gimmicks and popular songs were key elements used to capitalize on their personalities. Members of rap groups with dominate personalities or their names within the group's moniker were more frequently cast in movies than their other group members. Similarly, rappers with unique personal lives, personalities or gimmicks, such as Trevor "Busta Rhymes" Smith Jr., Andre "Andre 3000" Benjamin, William "Flavor Flav" Drayton Jr., Clifford "Method Man" Smith, Ludacris, Ice Cube, Luther "Luke" Campbell and Ice T, were also utilized more in Hollywood movies, often having key elements of their rap personas manifesting themselves onscreen. In addition, rappers who broke music chart records, such as Vanilla Ice's multi-platinum Rap album or Shad "Bow Wow" Moss' title as the youngest solo rapper to have a chart-topping hit, were tapped by Hollywood moviemakers.

When it came to the types of rappers who were cast in films, Hollywood roles did not stray far from the foundational principles of “good guys” and “bad guys.” Rap artists with clearly defined good or bad personalities were often connected directly to comparative movies roles. With hardcore and gangsta rap artists playing mostly bad guys, and the party rappers portraying mostly good guys, moviemakers took the built-in personalities created by the rappers and used them within their movies. This process did not stray far from the media’s practice of providing extreme images of Black men situated on opposite sides of the proverbial representational spectrum (i.e., either threatening or nonthreatening, aggressive or nonaggressive, combative or confirmative).

The Rap Styles Most Seen in Hollywood Films

Within the sample, 1989 was the only year in which a rapper did not star in a movie. Further, there were more movies starring rappers in the last eight years of the sample period than the prior years combined. In the 1980s, five movies starred rappers, and in the 1990s, there were 102 movies that starred rappers. From 2000 to 2008, there were 174 movies starring rappers that qualified for the study. Despite variations in the overall progression of movies starring rappers, the trend within the last two decades of the sample period showed an increase in the number of movies starring rappers. (See Figure 1.)

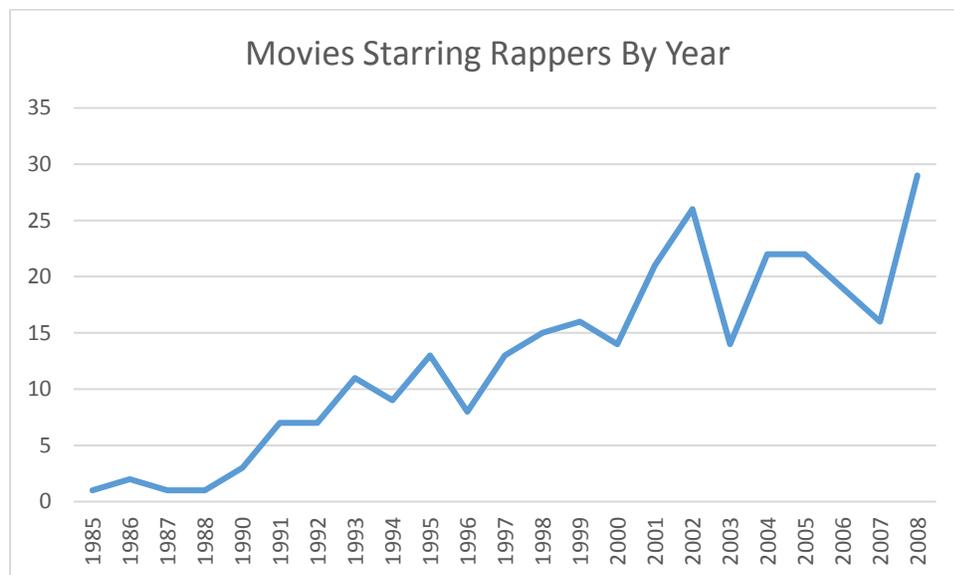


Figure 1: Movies Starring Rappers by Year

From 1985 to 1990, five rappers appeared in movies. Yet, from 1991 to 1999, the number of rappers per year in a movie never dipped below nine. In fact, the average number of rappers acting in movies was fifteen per year. The largest number of actors was in 1998 with 26. With the turn of the century, the number of rappers continued to increase. From 2000 to 2008, the lowest number of rappers to star in movies per year

was 14. In addition, the average number of rappers to star in movies from 2000 to 2008 was 23 per year. There were three years – 2001, 2002 and 2004 – that had more than 30 rappers cast in movie roles. The largest number came in 2002 with thirty six rappers starring in movies. While movies starring rappers seemed to have an overall increase in the last two decades of the sample, what can be seen from the data was a decrease in the number of rappers appearing in movies. What occurred was the same rappers appearing in more movies, instead of different rappers in more Hollywood movie releases, which could have been a result of the industry seeing the bankability and talent in certain rappers and deciding to use them more often. (See Figure 2.)

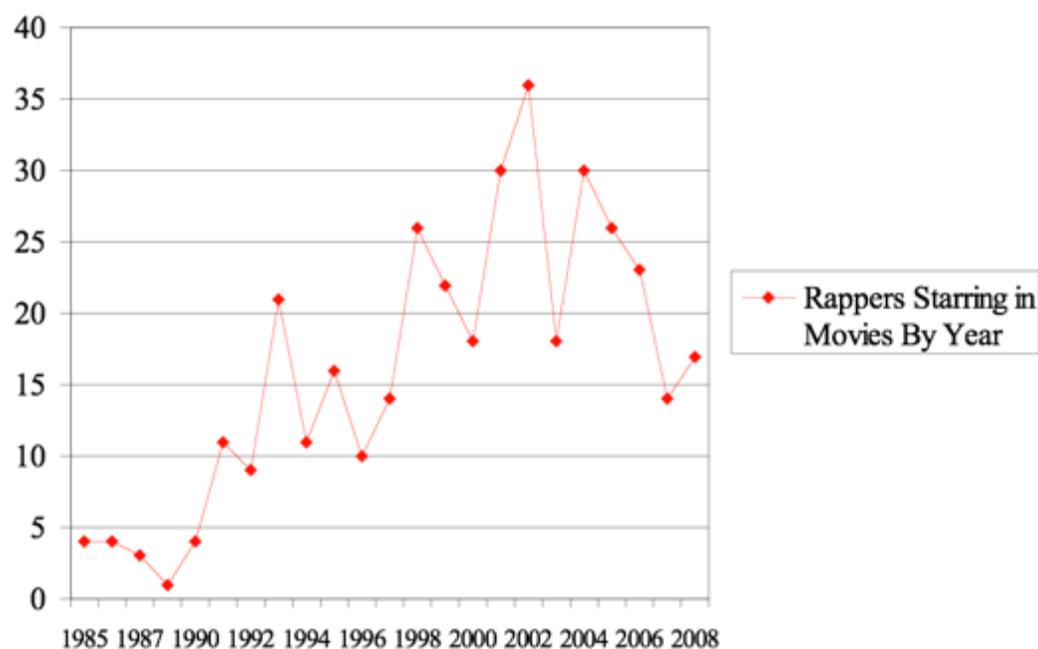


Figure 2: Rappers Staring in Movies by Year

There are certain types of rappers cast more frequently in Hollywood films. The rap categories with the largest numbers of artists to appear in films were the gangsta rap category with 11 rappers, the hardcore rap category with 15 rappers and the party category with 14 rappers. Within the gangsta rap category, rappers had a total of 70 movie roles. Most roles were in crime, action or comedy movies. More than half of the rappers within this category appeared in three movies or less. Yet, three of the most successful rappers turned actors within the overall 74-rapper sample were within the gangsta category. Ice Cube, Ice T and Snoop Dogg were credited with 47 of the cinematic roles. All three of the rappers are from California, had movies released within the last two decades, released commercially successful albums in the 1990s and spoke of similar stories of the harsh realities of their lives. Most importantly, it is critical to note that Ice Cube and Snoop Dogg were two rappers coded in a secondary category, which denoted a shift in their lyrics to less politically and socially challenging topics.

An analysis of rappers in the hardcore rap category revealed similar findings. The fifteen rappers within this category netted a total of 64 movie appearances. Most appearances were in crime, comedy or drama movies. In this category, more than half of the rappers also starred in three movies or less. However, this category had a second tier of rappers that consisted of a group who all starred in between five and seven movies each. This group included popular rappers Earl "DMX" Simmons, Eve "Eve" Jeffers-Cooper, Jeffery "Ja Rule" Atkins, Fred "Fredro Starr" Scruggs, Alvin "Xhibit" Joiner IV and Kirk "Sticky Fingaz" Jones. Eve, Xhibit and Ja Rule all starred in movies between 2000 and 2006. Similarly, DMX, Fredro Starr and Sticky Fingaz released their albums in the 1990s and began their movie careers at the same time.

The fourteen rappers within the party category had a total of seventy-eight movie appearances, which were mainly in comedies and dramas. Like the hardcore and gangsta rap categories, the majority of the rappers in the party category had three movie appearances or less. Rappers who were members of popular rap groups in the 1980s and late 1990s dominated this category. Rappers from the groups Fat Boys, Kid N' Play and Run DMC all appeared in this category and had three or four movie roles each. What is most noteworthy about the movies starring these rappers is that all of them took top billing and the plots revolved around them. The Fat Boys featured Damon "Kool Rock-Ski" Wimbley, Darren "Buffy/Human Beat Box" Robinson and Mark "Prince Markie Dee" Morales. They starred in three movies in three years. From 1985 to 1987, the group starred in *Krush Groove*, *Knights of the City* and *Disorderlies*. Kid N' Play, which features Christopher "Kid" Reid and Christopher "Play" Martin, were the main stars of four comedy movies in a five-year period, which were *Class Act*, *House Party*, *House Party 2* and *House Party 3*. These movies kept the rap stars within familiar realms and featured them either rapping, beat boxing or involved in plots similar to the themes present in their rap lyrics.

In contrast, the materialistic rappers and knowledge rappers within the sample were least likely to appear in movies. In both categories, most rappers had two movie credits or less, with one actor in each category being credited with most of the movie appearances. Materialistic rappers only netted a total of seven movie appearances and appeared in mainly comedy, romance or action movies. Three of the four rappers only had one qualifying movie, and Lil Kim had three movie credits. In the knowledge category, Mos Def can be credited with thirteen of the twenty-three movie appearances by rappers in this category.

The Elite Rap Stars of Hollywood

There are several rappers who should be put in a category of elite rap actors. LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Ice T, Ice Cube, Mark "Marky Mark" Wahlberg, Snoop Dogg, Mos Def and Fresh Prince are elite rap actors who transcended from merely being rappers who happened to act to actors who happen or happened to rap. Each starred in at least a dozen qualifying films. Although seventy-four rappers were included in this sample, these eight rappers had a total of one hundred and forty-two of the two

hundred and eighty-one movie appearances, which was about 50% of the movie appearances included in this sample. Six of the eight rappers - Queen Latifah, LL Cool J, Ice T, Ice Cube, Mos Def and Fresh Prince - had their first qualifying movie in either 1991 or 1992, and three members of this group starred in their own television situation comedies in the 1990s, which were *Livin' Single* (Queen Latifah), *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (Fresh Prince) and *In the House* (LL Cool J). These television shows clearly provided additional acting experience and elevated their popularity to mass audiences. Further, within the overall sample, rappers were least likely to headline horror, romantic comedy and animated movies, but these elite rappers were main characters in over two dozen of these types of movies, including *Shark Tales*, *Ice Age*, *Brown Sugar*, *Bones*, *Racing Stripes*, *Hitch*, *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later*, *Just Wright* and *Valentine's Day*.

Queen Latifah's inclusion within this group is significant for three reasons. She is the only woman in this elite group, she had more than twenty qualifying films, and she received an Academy Award nomination for her role in *Chicago*. Her cinematic appearances span several genres from mystery, drama and science fiction to action, romance and family. However, comedy movies dominated her filmography. Queen Latifah's first role in *Jungle Fever* as LaShawn, a waitress, fit well within her rap persona, but overwhelmingly her roles depicted longstanding Black stereotypes. In her three roles in *Set It Off*, *Chicago* and *Bringing Down the House*, Queen Latifah played a criminal. While the role of a Black criminal is not new to Hollywood, it does not fit well within Queen Latifah's rap lyrics or style. In addition, her roles as the stern no-nonsense assistant Penny Escher in *Stranger Than Fiction* and as a rough prisoner and motherly figure, Matron Mama Morton, in *Chicago* portray her as the Mammie stereotype, as described by Donald Bogle.

With nineteen qualifying films to his credit, Fresh Prince is by far the highest grossing rap actor in the sample. Fresh Prince received top billing in all of his films, after the 1993 release *Made in America*. With the exception of 1994, he starred in at least one movie per year. Action movies dominated his filmography, and he was often seen in very physical roles either running, chasing, jumping or fighting, which, too, supports Bogle's buck stereotype. However, as his time in Hollywood progressed and his involvement in production increased, he played a variety of characters, including two very famous individuals: Christopher Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happyness* and Muhammad Ali in *Ali*. Both of these biographical movies earned him Academy Award nominations. With his categorization as a pop rapper, many of his roles played very well into his rap personality. Often, he was the hilarious, fun-loving, non-threatening good guy character, such as his roles in *Men in Black*, *Men in Black II*, *Shark Tales* and *Hitch*. What is contrary to his pop categorization is the fact that he was often seen carrying a gun, but his gun toting was usually in the name of fighting crime or protecting himself.

From 1991 to 2008, LL Cool J had a total of seventeen movies to qualify in this sample. In 1998, he starred in a remarkable four films - *Caught Up*, *Woo*, *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* and *Deep Blue Sea*. Crime, drama and action movies dominated his

filmography, and his physical appearance and moniker – Ladies Love Cool James – set him up well to play the brawny, buck type or love interest in many of his movies, including *S.W.A.T.*, *Any Given Sunday*, *Deliver Us from Eva* and *Last Holiday*. LL Cool J also earned top billing in many of his movies, including *Rollerball*, *Kingdom Come*, *S.W.A.T.* and *Deliver Us from Eva*.

While Markey Mark and the Funky Bunch only released one rap album, it was enough to get the attention of moviemakers. Markey Mark, the only White rapper in the elite group, starred in a Hollywood film every year since 1994. From crime dramas and action comedies to mystery thrillers and dramatic horror films, his twenty qualifying films spanned several genres and showcased how versatile he was in Hollywood.

At the beginning of Mos Def's movie career, he starred in *The Hard Way* with LL Cool J in 1991. It would be nearly a decade before Mos Def would star in a Hollywood film, again. In 2000, his performance as Big Blak Africa in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* exhibited Mos Def's acting skills, and after it, he starred in at least one movie each year. A total of ten movies qualified for this study from 2001 to 2008. In fact, in 2002, Mos Def was seen in three movies *Showtime*, *Civil Brand* and *Brown Sugar*. Coincidentally, he portrayed an aspiring rapper and the love interest of fellow rapper Queen Latifah in the movie *Brown Sugar*.

Three members of this elite group, Ice T, Ice Cube and Snoop Dogg were a part of the gangsta rap movement of the 1990s. Ice Cube had a total of twenty qualifying movies. He, too, had action, crime and drama films dominate his filmography in his early career, which fit quite well with his gangsta rap lyrics and persona. However, since 2000, comedies dominated Ice Cube's filmography. This could be attributed to the softening of his image and desire to reach a larger cinematic audience. What is notable about Ice Cube is his franchise success, such as the movies *Friday*, *Next Friday* and *Friday After Next*; *Are We There Yet?* and *Are We Done Yet?* as well as *Barbershop* and *Barbershop 2: Back in Business*.

Ice T's first true cinematic acting role came in the 1991 film *New Jack City*, in which he played a cop, which is a direct contrast to his rap persona. In total, Ice T had 12 qualifying movies. All were released from 1991 to 2001. Ice T's filmography was dominated by action movies, too. Seven of his twelve movies were in this genre. In several instances, his roles were rather violent characters, which are consistent with the gangsta rap category, including his roles in *3000 Miles to Graceland*, *Ticker* and *'R Xmas*.

Snoop Dogg's first qualifying cinematic debut was in the 1998 comedy *Half Baked*, which mirrored his signature marijuana smoking rap personality. In 1998, Snoop Dogg also starred in two other films, *Caught Up and Ride*, and notably, in 2001, Snoop Dogg starred in *Baby Boy*, *Training Day* and *Bones*. His roles in *Baby Boy* and *Training Day* kept Snoop Dogg true to his gangsta style. In both movies, he played a criminal. However, similar to Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg's cinematic career took a comedic turn. Since 2001, his six qualifying films were all in the comedy genre, including voicing animal characters in *Malibu's Most Wanted* and *Racing Stripes*.

The Group Effect

For rappers who were once or are a part of a group, there were two distinct patterns present in the data. First, a rapper whose rap group was named after him or whose name appeared as a main component of the group's name was more likely to be separated from other group members and cast in a movie. Three examples were Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince and Heavy D & the Boyz. While some would argue that DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince were not a rap group, but a rapper and deejay team, the pair were marketed and sold as a duo, like the way other rap groups featuring two or more artists were presented. All three of these group members – Marky Mark, Fresh Prince and Heavy D – had tremendous success in Hollywood compared to their partners; many of which had no Hollywood movie roles.

The second pattern was the lead rapper or rapper(s) within a group who possessed the strongest or most unique personalities were often cast more movies. For example, in the group N.W.A., Dr. Dre and Ice Cube seemed to eclipse the other group members. The same holds true for Fredro "Fredro Starr" Scruggs, Jr., and Kirk "Sticky Fingaz" Jones of the group Onyx; Richard "Buschwick Bill" Shaw and Brad "Scarface" Jordan of The Geto Boys; Luke of the 2 Live Crew; Anthony "Treach" Criss of Naughty by Nature, Robert "RZA" Diggs and Method Man of Wu Tang Clan and Busta Rhymes of Leaders of the New School. Again, these rappers appeared in Hollywood films, while their other members either did not appear or did not have their level of success.

Rappers Roles and their Personas in Hollywood Movies

Whether casting a rapper in one scene or several scenes, Hollywood moviemakers capitalized on rap personas and used them to their advantages. Rappers were seen donning their signature clothing, repeating their signature lines and portraying their rap personas in movies. For example, Snoop Dogg's utters his signature "fo' shizzle" slang language in *Soul Plane*. In the film Max Keeble's Big Move, Percy "Lil Romeo" Miller Jr. did not respond in the traditional "here" or "present," when his teacher called his name in class. Instead, he responded "Yo, what's up. I'm over here Wardy." In the film *3 Strikes*, E-40 used term "weeble" and "weeblization." 50 Cents stated "I'm a gangsta. I'm a rapper. I'm a gangsta rapper" in *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. Treach wears his signature black bandana around his face, neck and wrist in *Love and a Bullet*, and Fab 5 Freddy wore his staple wardrobe accessories, a hat and sunglasses, when he made his brief appearance in *She's Gotta Have It*.

In terms of behavior, gimmicks or unique personality or behavioral traits can play a key role in making a rapper standout in the music industry, and it is quite possible that those same gimmicks or traits caught the attention of moviemakers and found their way into movies. Snoop Dogg was perhaps the most pigeonholed rapper who did not easily break his rap persona's connection to his acting roles. With marijuana smoking playing a key role in his persona and lyrics, his roles in *Half Baked*, *The Wash* and *Soul Plane* were all well connected to Snoop Dogg's persona. In *Half Baked*,

Snoop Dogg was called a “scavenger smoker,” which was described as “someone who never has weed of their own, but as soon as you smoke it. Here they come.” In *Soul Plane*, Snoop Dogg was not only seen in the plane’s cockpit smoking marijuana, but he put in a compact disk and danced to a song with the lyrics “I get high.” In *The Wash*, Snoop Dogg was consistently seen smoking marijuana. In addition, he was seen buying and selling it.

Ja Rule and Fredro Starr are two others whose hardcore rap personas were consistently connected into their movie roles. Ja Rule’s bandana wearing, tough guy rap persona was seen in his roles in *Turn It Up*, *Half Past Dead* and *Assault on Precinct 13*. Perhaps, the most violent role was in *Turn It Up*, in which he played David “Cage” Williams who was seen disrespecting women, selling drugs, shooting a gun and assaulting a man during a home invasion. Fredro Starr’s brash, aggressive and high energy rap personality was seen in his roles in *Clockers*, *Torque* and *Ride*. In *Ride*, Fredro Starr’s character was involved in a robbery, in *Torque*, he promoted drug use and fought constantly, and in *Clockers*, he was a drug dealer.

Lil Kim’s portrayal of Tina Parker in *Juwanna Man* is another example of a rapper staying within her rap persona. Categorized as a materialistic rapper, her role as an ex-model and girlfriend of a professional basketball player was easily connected to her rap persona. However, it was her dialogue, clothing and actions that made Lil Kim’s role a true replica. When Lil Kim’s character was queried about why she accepted her boyfriend’s infidelity, she stated “All these tricks is dogs, but if you have to sleep in a dog house, it might as well look like this one.” This was a reference to her boyfriend’s mansion. When her professional basketball player boyfriend lost his job, Lil Kim’s character left the house and stated she only stayed because he was rich and famous.

While a rap artist tended to stay within his or her rap persona early in their movie careers, the more films a rapper appeared within, the more likely he or she would break out of the confines of their rap persona. However, it is important to note that while some of these roles do not match specifically to a rapper’s persona they often still reflected stereotypical characters present in Black, Hip Hop and urban cultures. For others, straying from their rap personas early in their rap careers was rare. Examples included the somewhat goofy, gun carrying, camouflage wearing, gangster character Da Bu that Andre 3000 played in *Be Cool*. It was nothing like his rap persona, which was smooth often quirky, free-spirited and friendly. While Lil Romeo’s biological father is a successful rap mogul, Percy “Master P” Miller, the rapper had no real personal connections to the “street life,” as portrayed in his role of Benny in *Honey*. In two movies, rapper Mos Def, a smooth, calm lyricist who often flashed a smile along with his socially conscious rhymes, played Sergeant Lucas in *The Woodsman*, and Eddie Bunker, a petty thief, in *16 Blocks*. Neither are like his persona.

Connections between Rap Trends and Hollywood Movie Roles

Despite the more than twenty-five years in this sample, the only connections to rap styles were seen in the late 1990s and early 2000. In the late 1990s, there were three

main shifts in rap, which were a renewed interest in New York rappers, increased emphasis on materialism and an emergence of regional rappers, more specifically “Dirty South” rappers. With these shifts, several key rappers obtained Hollywood roles. According to the data, a distinct connection was evident between the increased presence of materialistic rappers as well as rappers from New York and the “Dirty South” in movies beginning in the late 1990s. This timeframe is important, as the moviemaking process is long, as one must take into consideration the development, preproduction, production, postproduction and distribution. Therefore, having a movie in theaters would come long after a hit song is charted or frequently played on the radio.

In total, the following nine rappers were placed in the regional category: Andre 3000, Big Boi, Da Brat, Ludacris, Master P, Clifford “T.I.” Harris Jr., Nelly, Malik “Phife Dawg” Taylor and Jonathan “Q-Tip” Davis. Except for the latter three rappers, all represent the “Dirty South.” Rappers from this region exploded onto the rap scene in the late 1990s. Except for one appearance by Q-Tip in *Poetic Justice* in 1993, the increased involvement of rappers in Hollywood coincides with their increased recognition and participation in the rap music industry. They had more than twenty-five film appearances and more than 95% were after 1998.

The same parallels between the increased number of rappers touting materialism and an increased presence in Hollywood were seen in the materialistic category. There were only four rappers in this category, including Inga “Foxy Brown” Marchand and Kimberly “Lil Kim” Jones. The eight film appearances by these four rappers were between 1998 and 2005. More than 60% of the roles were after 2002.

The rebirth of the New York rapper that dominated the rap music industry occurred in the late 1990s. If answering the question whether moviemakers noticed the trend and used it to their advantage, the answer would have to be yes. In total, thirty-one rappers in the study hailed from or claimed New York in their rap lyrics. Although this group includes many rappers who were a part of Rap music’s beginning stages, such as LL Cool J, Fab 5 Freddy, Run and the Fat Boys, the data concerning the film appearances of New York rappers still showed an increase in their presence in the late 1990s. In total, New York rappers had eighty-five film appearances.

Similarities between Plots and Rap Music Trends

Hip Hop culture helped develop an explosion of “ghetto” or “ghettocentric” films in the 1990s, including *Straight out of Brooklyn* (1991), *New Jack City* (1991), *Boyz ‘n the Hood* (1991), *Menace II Society* (1993) and *Juice* (1992). What is critical to note from the data is how often rappers were used to vivify the characters in these types of films as well as bring credibility to the plots. More specifically, Ice Cube’s role of Darin “Doughboy” Baker in *Boyz in the Hood* and 2Pac’s role of Bishop in *Juice* brought life to the characters. Other films in this sample that could easily be in the “ghetto” films category were *New Jersey Drive* (1995), *Belly* (1998), *Paid in Full* (2002), *ATL* (2006) and *Waist Deep* (2006). Similar to past “ghetto” films, rappers were casting staples,

including T.I. and Big Boi starred in *ATL*, *The Game* in *Waist Deep*, DMX and Nas in *Belly*.

Film plots in Hollywood do not always depict the harsh themes expressed in rap music. The late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by the emergence of the Fat Boys, Kid N' Play, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince and others who showcased the lighthearted side of rap music. Moviemakers took notice of this trend, too. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an emergence of what this researcher labeled "fun-time rap" movies, which is a combination of funny and good time movies centered upon the exploits of characters played by rappers or Hip Hop playmakers and often employ other rappers in supportive or cameo roles. Movies in this category would include *Disorderlies* featuring The Fat Boys; *House Party*, *House Party 2*, *House Party 3* and *Class Act* featuring Kid N' Play; and *Who's the Man* (1993), which featured more than twenty rappers or rap groups, including House of Pain, Leaders of the New School, Ice T, Run DMC and Kris Kross.

Conclusion

Race and gender play critical roles in America's movie and music industry. After completing this work, it is important to note that this study really chronicles the presence of a select group of African-American men (i.e., rappers) who moved from the music industry to the movie industry. During the timeframe under study, moviemakers and rappers collaborated in hundreds of movies, which netted billions in ticket sales. Ultimately, findings indicated gangsta, hardcore and party rappers were cast in movies the most, and rap artists with popular gimmicks or the strongest or most unique personalities within rap groups were more likely to be cast in movies. However, while most films did have rap artists speaking, acting and looking similar to their rap personas, there were opportunities for rappers to break away from their rap personas. Most notably, the elite rap actors discussed in this research – LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Ice T, Ice Cube, Marky Mark, Snoop Dog, Fresh Prince and Mos Def showed rappers can progress in the Hollywood movie system, transcend their rap personas and become successful actors.

Just as there are demarcations in film studies to chronicle Blaxploitation, race films and hood films, there should be a categorization of the 1990s as the Golden Age of Rappers in Movies, as this acknowledges the breakthrough period where there was an influx of films within Hollywood featuring rappers as well as the period when the elite rappers broke into the movie industry. This, too, was a period that began to develop many of the rap artists who influenced rap trends and key movements in Hip Hop, which, in turn, influenced the casting of rappers in Hollywood movies.

As a result of this study, there are several future studies that could be completed to either build on the findings or answer questions not addressed in this work. First, what can be identified in the careers of rap artists who changed rap genres after their commercially-successful Hollywood movie careers? Could there be a specific model or career trajectory identified that explains how some rappers like the elite rappers

garnered success? Second, a study investigating the roles of rappers in movies produced, written or directed by African Americans could be completed. It would benefit film and Black studies to glean any differences that might exist in stereotypical representations or negative portrayals of the Hip Hop and Black communities as well as how rappers might challenge the longstanding racism within the movie industry. Finally, an investigation of how maturation plays a role in rappers' movie careers would be beneficial. For example, how does career maturation play a role in rappers' acceptance of certain types of movie roles, and how do their roles as mothers, fathers, husbands and wives influence the types of movie roles they accept?

In conclusion, this research proved rappers were not anomalies in Hollywood, but instead were casting staples for more than two decades. Hollywood moviemakers increasingly utilized rappers in movies since the late 1980s. Commonalities between rap artists' personas and film characters were easily seen, and the content of many scenes starring rappers not only paralleled their life stories and lyrics, but even reflected the trends and themes present in rap music. Ultimately, the Hollywood film industry successfully capitalized on the commercialism of rap music as well as the popularity of rappers to transform them into actors for the benefit of their movies.

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Appendix A

List of Rappers in the Sample

Rapper – Stage Name Only

1. 2Pac
2. 50 Cent
3. Andre 3000
4. Big Boi
5. Big Pun
6. Biz Mark
7. Bow Wow
8. Buffy (Human Beat Box)
9. Bushwick Bill
10. Busta Rhymes
11. Chuck D
12. Coolio
13. Da Brat
14. DJ Pooh
15. DMX
16. Dr Dre
17. E-40
18. Eminem
19. Eve
20. Fab 5 Freddy
21. Fat Joe
22. Flavor Flav
23. Fredro Starr
24. Fresh Prince
25. Foxy Brown
26. Game (The)
27. Heavy D
28. Ice Cube
29. Ice T
30. Ja Rule
31. Kid
32. Kool Rock-Ski
33. Kurupt
34. Lauryn Hill
35. Lil Kim
36. Lil Romeo
37. LL Cool J
38. Ludacris

39. Luke
40. Mack 10
41. Markey Mark
42. Master P
43. MC Eiht
44. MC Hammer
45. MC Lyte
46. Method Man
47. Missy Elliott
48. Monie Love
49. Mos Def
50. Nas
51. Nelly
52. Nick Cannon
53. Pepa
54. Phife Dawg
55. Play
56. Pras
57. Prince Markie Dee
58. Puff Daddy
59. Q-Tip
60. Queen Latifah
61. Redman
62. Run
63. RZA
64. Salt
65. Scarface
66. Snoop Dogg
67. Sticky Fingazs
68. T.I.
69. Tone Loc
70. Treach
71. Vanilla Ice
72. Wyclef
73. Xzibit
74. Yo Yo

Book Reviews

Hip Hop DJs and the Evolution of Technology: Cultural Exchange, Innovation, and Democratization

By Sirois, André. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2016. Pp. xxi, 221. Paperback \$33.99

Long before Hip Hop went digital, mixtapes, those floppy discs of the boom box and car stereo, facilitated the spread of choice beats and rhymes. But the rhythms encoded in those messages started as grooves in records. Manually manipulating sampled sounds, DJs hacked the whole of recorded music, datamining dusty crates of vinyl for just the right beats, breaks, and blasts. As Kodwo Eshun puts it in *More Brilliant than the Sun*, “the science of the scratch is massively difficult, demanding intense rehearsal. Far from being something anyone can do, scratching is intimidatingly elitist... As it currently exists, 20th C[entury] art can barely grasp the tonal history of turntablization.”¹

André Sirois, a.k.a. DJ Food Stamp, the man behind the turntables on mixtapes by some of my favorite emcees, including Sean Price, Planet Asia, Common, M.F. Doom, and Atmosphere, grasps that tonal history. In his book *Hip Hop DJs and the Evolution of Technology: Cultural Exchange, Innovation, and Democratization*, Sirois argues that in its complexity, Hip Hop culture is itself a new media culture. Current so-called “new media” can be traced back from smartphones and the internet to landlines and the telegraph. Following Hip Hop DJs’ hacking of recording technology and playback from Grandmaster Flash’s mixer toggle-switch and Grand Wizard Theodore’s manual scratch to digital sampling and Serato, Sirois historicizes the technical evolution and cultural practices of Hip Hop DJs as new media. Emphasizing the network mentality present from the beginning of Hip Hop, he employs an open source metaphor to characterize the culture. “From my perspective,” Sirois writes, “what these South Bronx DJs started was the foundation of the new media ideology present in popular culture today: sample, mix, burn, share, and repeat” (XVII).

Through free exchange and cooperation, the open source software movement has given us the Linux operating system and free software of all sorts, as well as many aspects of the Internet. While Hip Hop is largely a battle-borne culture, the competition has always been tempered by cooperation and collaboration. Where emcees, DJs, breakers, or graffiti writers compete for dominance and braggin’ rights, they also share techniques, tools, and work together in crews and teams. Competition fuels creativity, but collaboration fosters and forges it. Writing on innovation, authorship, and intellectual property, Sirois warns against romanticizing this collaboration. “From what I have seen,” he writes, “when culture and industry converge, money and credit are given to some and not others, which compromises individual legacies, and then ‘viruses’

¹ Eshun, Kodwo. *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet, 1998, 35.

enter the network and undermine the open source logic that is at the heart of the culture” (78). The industry operates from the top down, manipulating the DJs’ “subcultural capital” as brands as intellectual properties. To that end, Sirois also covers how DJs perform sometimes unpaid and unrecognized research and development, from Flash’s self-styled innovations to signature models of more modern turntablists, through the “dialectic between Hip Hop DJs and the DJ product industry” (120). His examples offer interesting case studies of bottom-up innovation but also illustrate how branding operates in the larger culture.

“By nature we want to share information,” Sirois concludes, “and because of that same nature we are open source... The Hip Hop DJ is an important case study on how we innovate and how we are the technology. We are the story that is designed from scratch” (171). There are lots of excellent books about Hip Hop and DJing (e.g., *Making Beats* by Joseph Schloss, *Groove Music* by Mark Katz, and *Hip Hop Turntablism, Creativity and Collaboration* by Sophy Smith), but none analyze turntablism as a cultural and technical practice from such a fresh and nuanced angle within and without as this book. It might be the only text you need on the subject.

Roy Christopher marshals the middle between Mathers and McLuhan. His research interests include figurative language use and the evolution of technology. He is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois-Chicago.