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## Now I Speak: The African American Males' Perspective as to Whether His Identification with Hip-Hop Culture Affects His Academic Achievement

Chiquetta O. Mitchell

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NOW I SPEAK: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERSPECTIVE AS TO  
WHETHER HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH HIP-HOP CULTURE AFFECTS HIS  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by

CHIQUETTA O. MITCHELL

(Under the Direction of John Weaver)

ABSRTACT

This study explores the African-American males' perspectives of whether his identification with the hip-hop culture affects his academic achievement. Many Black males have embraced the popular culture of hip-hop with its glamour and style, but many also continue to fall behind in school or dropout. The use of qualitative analysis allows the participants in this study to speak of their experiences with hip-hop and education. Glesne (1999) writes, "Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework allows the ability to listen well to others stories and to interpret and retell the accounts [which is] is part of the qualitative researcher's trade" (p.1). It also permits the counter narratives of these Black males' perspectives of the quandary of his educational experience to be heard. Sixteen Black males from age 14 to 21 participated in a random questionnaire that measured their level of their identification with hip-hop. Six of the participants also

participated in a focus group and individual interviews to discuss in depth their experiences with school and hip-hop. The following themes were prevalent in this study: hip-hop culture is a lifestyle but there are those who try to emulate the style; Their definition of hip-hop consists of rap music and style of dress, along with speech or how they talk; hip-hop is not a passing fad; hip-hop is viewed as a mood regulator; hip-hop culture means money or making money; the hip-hop image affects educator's perceptions; Hip-hop is all they know. The study will enlighten educators as to African American male's perception that how they look affects the treatment they receive in school.

INDEX WORDS: Hip-hop culture, Popular culture  
Critical race theory, Critical narrative, Experiences of African American males

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

To my children Torus, Akeem, and Yasha, I have always taught you to persevere and finish what you start. You never hesitated to remind me of this lesson when I lacked motivation to finish this project, thank you, I LOVE YOU.

To my sisters and sister-friends who provided encouragement by simply asking, "have you finished your paper" these words provoked me to write, thanks.

To my BFF, your intellect, editing skills and friendship were monumental in my finishing this paper. Love you girl!

To the love of my life, you came along at the perfect time. Your care, concern and love give me motivation to succeed daily. I love you.

In the middle of this research in 2008, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The news was devastating and the physical complications set me back as far as research for this project. I suffered many losses as well as energy, enthusiasm and interest in a task once dear to my heart. However, God's grace and mercy kept me through it all. HE IS FAITHFUL.

Thanks to my Church Family, Overcoming by Faith, Pastor Rick and Lady Diane for being there during my illness. Finally, I dedicate this to the memory of my Mother, Annie Ruth Outland-Jackson.

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Now I Speak: The African American Males' Perspective of Whether  
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Achievement

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*His shoulders straight and his chin raised high he exhibits a powerful presence. His head is covered in small braids separated into two ponytails. Two diamond studs shine from his earlobes. His white tee shirt is crisp, creased, and too large. His freshly ironed Roc-a-Wear designer's jeans are three sizes too big and sag below his hips, revealing his underwear; he is constantly pulling his jeans up as he walks. His temper is as big as his clothing and is quick to flair if someone steps on his new white Air Jordan.*

*Getting to class on time is not a priority for him or his friends. They stroll down the crowded halls, laughing and joking about which of them actually completed the economics assignment given as homework. Although he intended to complete the assignment, many things happened to distract him. His mother had to work late again, leaving him to prepare dinner for his younger siblings. More importantly however, he had to go to the basketball court with his 'boys' to get in on that B-ball game. The last time he missed a game his homeboys checked him for days calling him "a punk" and "a sell out."*

*This is one reason he could not tell them that he actually enjoyed the economics class and really wanted to complete the assignment.*

*The class is not hard for him despite the fact that his teacher often talks to him as if he were dumb or in elementary school. The level of work in this class is far below his ability, but like his boys, he does just enough to barely pass.*

*The teacher does not seem to expect anything more. She has an eye for disruption and anticipates his misbehavior, constantly accusing him and the other African-American boys of talking when other groups are talking as well. It seems she always singles out the African American males. These are the boys written up and sent to the principal's office; and the consequences range from in school suspension or worse.*

It is not unusual to see teenage African-American males dressed in the latest hip-hop fashion. Even their younger counterparts emulate the style, swagger, and the language of this global phenomenon known as hip-hop. I believe that youth this age have no authentic knowledge of why they follow this culture. Plato's correspondence theory of reality says they are actually imitating images they are exposed to through the television and music media. (Weaver and Daspit in Dimitriadis and Carlson, 2003).

Some genres of hip-hop music negatively influence youth. For example, gangsta rap, which emerged in the 1980's in Los Angeles, introduced a message of resistance laced with profanity and contempt for authority, especially for, the police. "Cop killer" by Ice T and Body Count sold millions of records and at the same time made waves with politicians and mainstream Americans who perceived it as "obscene, and sick".

(Johnson as cited in Light, 1999, p.289) Pattillo-McCoy

(1999) writes about the experiences of middle-class Black youth who embraced gangsta rap music and its style:

The appropriation and unique rendering of gangsta styles by... youth for sheer entertainment would not be problematic if the stylistic realm existed separately from and had no repercussions in the material realm. Instead, symbols feedback into the material world. (p.123)

In this material world, embracing this image allows others to misinterpret the identity of Black youth. Pattillo-McCoy (1999) further stated, "Sometimes when you dress like a gangsta talk like a gangsta, and [behave] like a gangsta, soon enough you are a gangsta" (p.123). The emulation of this style can cause problems with those in authority who discern such behavior as deviant. Consequently, schools and various other public facilities institute rules and policies regarding dress.

The “gangsta thug” image presented in hip-hop music and video have been accused of the disruption of the academic achievement of African-American males (Kane, 2005; Reese, 2004; Tucker, 2006). Ronald Ferguson ( as cited in Gray-Kontar, 2005), senior research associate at Harvard University’s Weiner Center for Social Policy contended that the drop in reading scores of African-Americans in 1989 correlates directly with the rise of rap music in popular culture. Hip-hop emerged in the 1970’s, but Ferguson maintained that hip-hop record sales began to increase in 1988, the same time as the decline in reading achievement. Ferguson further states,

I want to make it clear that I don’t know for sure if there’s any connection between hip-hop and achievement, but there is a coincidence in time where the turn down in academic gains for Black teens happens at the same time that hip-hop took off commercially ( as cited in Kontar, 2005, ¶6 ) .

Many African-American youths can quickly recite the lyrics to rap songs, such as Lil Wayne’s “I ain’t never ran from a nig... and I dam... sho ain’t bout to start running...”, but they are slow to respond to such academic questions as “What is the title of introduction to the Constitution called?” The answer is “The Preamble”.

Opinions vary over the extent to which hip-hop influences youth. Studies have explored the relationship between hip-hop music and identity formation of adolescent youth (Wood, 2004), and hip-hop as an oppositional culture (Gosa & Young, 2006). Other literature has addressed the misogynistic treatment of females and the profanity-laced lyrics present in many hip-hop songs (Quinn, 1971; Watkins, 2005; Rose, 1994; Haugen, 2003; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). Raymond Anderson's (2003) research on the causes and effects of identifying with hip-hop culture relates more to the questions posed in this study. Anderson sought to determine, among other things, the extent to which youth of various ethnicities perceive hip-hop as a part of who they are and the importance of hip-hop to their sense of identity. However, there was no mention or focus on the academic achievement of African-American males. More attention is given to the results of this study in the following chapter.

The voices of those articulating experiences associated with hip-hop culture have been unwelcome in education settings. Identifying with this alternative culture, while facing challenges of education in mainstream settings, has been problematic for many African-American males. In addition, discriminatory policies and practices may have complicated matters even more.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The education of the African-American male has been under scrutiny for decades. Researchers have thoroughly documented this population's low academic achievement (Ogbu, 2003), poor school attendance (Voelkle, Welte, & Wieczorek, 1999, and high suspension rates (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Research also suggests that suspensions for African-American males are "more frequent and run for longer periods of time than other student groups" (Lee, 1991, p. 1).

Some scholars (Graybill, 1997) have argued that the traditional school setting, with its rigid structure and rules, is unsuitable for African-American males. The suspension, expulsion, and grade retention of African-American males often results in their placement in alternative programs where many struggle to earn a GED. Even more disheartening is the research that reveals many more fail to complete even the remedial programs (Roderick, 2003).

Researchers and scholars have persistently sought answers to the problems that place the African-American male population at risk. The policies and practices implemented, however, have been less than successful in decreasing those chronic and inappropriate behaviors that parallel poor academic and educational outcomes. Programs implemented in reaction to these outcomes have also done little to decrease the consistently high

dropout and unemployment rates in this population (Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

Giroux (2000) surmises that that elements of popular culture such as hip -hop have been transformed into to “educational sites where youth learn about themselves and their relationships to others in this world” (p.8). The identities that our youth embrace are actually created by symbols of popular culture in hip-hop. Therefore, the question is low achievement among African-American males a manifestation of these males’ identification with the cultural phenomena called hip-hop. This study will examine whether the African American male perceives his identification with hip-hop as affecting his academic success, and if this identification contributes to a resistance toward education.

### **Emergence of Alternative Culture(s)**

Youth culture has changed significantly over the past decade, with fewer adolescents acquiring their values and identity from family, church, and school. According to Rose (1994), “[t]hese older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built environment and hip-hop culture has emerged as a source of alternative identity and social status for youth” (p. 34). This embrace of an alternative cultural identity might be viewed as a trait of resilience, or resistance to an imposed ideology. Resilience

meaning that hip-hop is used as a defense mechanism to survive the violence and everyday experiences of poverty, and resistance as opposition to the hegemonic systems of society. With the emergence of this contemporary culture comes a new “verbal language, body language, and attitude” (Kitwana 2002, p. 8).

It is conveyed by way of rap and hip-hop music, videos, movies, and designer fashions also (Kitwana, 2002; Dimitriadis, 2001).

African-American males, in particular who choose to identify with this culture described by some as an “oppositional culture” (Ogbu, 1991) seem to **exemplify** negative aspects such as a hyper-masculine walk, and a toughness. These are some of the same characteristics that they admire in many of the rap hip-hop artists who boast of criminal activity, gang involvement, and womanizing ways. The question raised is whether the message promoted by hip-hop regarding what it means to be an African-American man interferes with the academic achievement of African-American youth (Diamond, 2006; Gosa & Young, 2006). The African-American male who is conscientious of his studies and follows the rules and mandates of the school must contend with peer pressure to reject instruction because to excel academically is perceived by many as “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In an effort to dispel this perception and maintain status with peers, some youth may develop an attitude of defiance or resistance toward learning.

Literature with perspectives and recommendations submitted by scholars who profess to know the problems and the solutions for what afflicts the African-American male is overwhelming. There remains little research; however, that explores the African-American male's perspective on these problems and possible solutions. Their silence in the matters affecting them could account for their lack of motivation or enthusiasm for the various innovative initiatives that seek to enhance their chances for achieving academic success. Rose (1994) believes that the appeal of hip-hop music is in the expression of cultural identity through "the pleasures and problems of African-American urban life in contemporary America" (p. 2). Hip-hop allows those who embrace it to talk about experiences of daily living, harsh or otherwise. Therefore, when allowed, the African-American male can articulate information necessary for engaging them in the learning process in that way increasing their success.

### **Personal Rationale for Research**

As a parent of two African-American males who have graduated from Savannah Chatham County Public Schools, I have often had to speak up for them in situations with teachers. I have always allowed my children to express themselves verbally. I often tell them, "it is not always what you say, but how you say it". Even when trying to challenge respectfully a statement

or an action by the teacher, my sons have been shut down and silenced. After hearing both sides of the story, my sons and the teachers, I have had to address the injustices against them. On one particular occasion, a high school principal became involved and had to move my son out one class to another. This was unfortunate in that the class in which he was removed was the only advance class in that subject.

My boys do not fully embrace the hip-hop culture. While their pants may be larger than their actual size, they do not "sag". They also enjoy hip-hop and rap music, and designer clothing. One of my sons speaks using the vernacular, slang and he walks with a swagger. The other speaks more grammatically correct. Those that know them may say that they represent mainstream Black youth, yet both still experienced the discrimination and injustices most often experienced by Black males who fully embrace and imitate hip-hop culture. Their experiences and my work as a School Social Worker have heightened my passion for the education of the African American male. Their voices must be heard. Their perspective and experiences matter and are significant if we as a society are to save them from educational demise.

### **Statement of Research Question(s)**

Does the African-American male view his identification with the hip-hop culture as affecting his academic achievement? The voice of the African-American male can express historical and culturally relevant experiences that generate discourse about the best possible solutions to the problem of his disintegrating academic success. The goal of this research is to answer the following questions based on the personal life experiences of the African-American male:

- Does identification with hip-hop culture contribute to an attitude of resistance to education?
- Does the hip-hop image negatively affect the academic achievement of African-American males?
- Does hip-hop culture promote an oppositional culture that affects the academic achievement of African-American males?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT) is often used when conducting research regarding the inequality of education in America (Lynn, 2001, Berry 2003, Conner 2004). Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) introduced CRT into field of education to provide for inquiry into the policies, practices and structures that continue to oppress children of color. Critical race theory's intercentricity of

race positions it as a permanent, prevalent functioning element of society. Race has a significant impact on the daily experiences of all African-Americans. Disparities often found in education may be attributed to race, class or gender. Race traverses offer forms of domination such as class oppression to create unique life experiences for African American males. Therefore, the use of Critical Race theory as a lens to explore the education experiences of the African-American male is relevant. This, despite the major criticism by scholars that critical race theory relies too much on storytelling and narrative data (Farber and Sherry, 1995, 1997) This study will use critical race theory (CRT) as a major lens to view and discuss race in the context of school experiences. The African-American male is offered few opportunities to be heard in today's society and he is most likely the first to receive negative treatment from mainstream society, whether consciously or unconsciously. Critical race theory liberates the voices of those silenced and ignored based on their minority station in society, and it allows for inquiry into the inequities in education based on race, gender, and class. In the education setting, there are practices and policies that require attention if African-Americans are to become empowered to control their destinies. Critical race theory does all of the above by placing race and racism at the center of analysis while challenging

unfair and inequitable educational practices (DeCuir & Dixon 2004).

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970's from the work of legal theorists, Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory was a response to what these theorists believed to be a flawed legal system unable to administer justice objectively to people of color because of their own personal biases. Bell, Freeman, and Delgado established critical legal studies and surmised that race held a more significant position than class in society, and sought to elevate the lived experiences based on race. The previous actions of the legal system negated the "lived experiences and histories of those oppressed by institutional racism" (Yosso, 2006, p.169). Although critical race theory's influence was largely recognized in the area of law, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) recognized a place for it in education due to the inequalities that preserve oppression. Critical race theory specifically involves five major tenets that may be utilized in garnering an understanding of issues related to curriculum, pedagogy, research, and theory. These tenets include the following: (1) intercentricity of race and racism; (2) challenge to dominant ideology; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) utilization of interdisciplinary approaches.

The intercentricity of race and racism considers how race intersects with other subordinations based class, gender, sexuality, etc. (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001, 2002). I have observed examples of this numerous times in my schools, when Black males are suspended for what seems like minor infractions like talking in class when Black females talk far more often than Black males. This coincides with the high suspensions/expulsion rates of Black males compared to Whites and females.

Critical race theory recognizes a conscious or unconscious hierarchical structure that privileges Whites and subordinates people of color. An example of this may be a server who unconsciously seats a White couple and overlooks an African-American couple awaiting a seat even when both arrived simultaneously.

Critical race theory challenges dominant ideologies such as colorblindness. White educators' claims to colorblindness and objectivity as well as declarations of equal opportunities, are challenged as self-serving practices that perpetuate racial inequities and political powerlessness in American schools. Such ideologies actually ignore, silence, or distort epistemologies of people of color (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Social justice *is* paramount in critical race theory and uncovers the concept of interest-convergence which suggests that some civil- rights legislation enacted on behalf of African-

Americans was actually in the interest of whites. Therefore, such legislation may not have significantly affected the lives of the African-Americans. Bell (as cited in DeCuir and Dixson, 2004) pointed to the "limited and precarious gains of Brown," the loss of African-American teachers, and administrators, and the loss of neighborhood schools through desegregation to support of this argument (p. 28).

The centrality of experiential knowledge in the form of *narratives* and storytelling are significant vehicles through which African-American males can voice experiences. In Critical race theory, storytelling is used to dispute the stereotypes and images presented by the mainstream. It allows these African-Americans to challenge privileged legal or political discourse, and it assists others in understanding the experiences of the marginalized. Delgado Bernal (as cited in Yosso, 2006) credited Critical race theory with recognizing the experiential knowledge of marginalized individuals and affirming it as legitimate and appropriate for discourse, and for understanding, and examining of racial injustice. Also known as counter-narratives, (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) lived experiences are also used as an aesthetic form of storytelling; sharing lived experiences is effective in fostering the processing and critique of possible racist situations by offering diverse positions, and perspectives while placing race at the center of resolutions that deconstruct the

dominant power base (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999). The use of critical race theory narratives allows the voice of the African-American male to be heard and his stories analyzed for injustices that may contribute to academic difficulties.

*From an interdisciplinary perspective critical race theory* intersects with other disciplines to examine race and issues of racism from a present as well as historical position. Contemporary themes such those offered through film, theater, and psychology add to the challenge of existing discourse of race and racism. Critical race theory uses interdisciplinary approaches to connect the practices of pedagogy and theory in schools and society keeping race as a focal point (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

In the field of education, critical race theory presents a firm theoretical framework for analyzing the policies, practices and structures that continue to oppress and disenfranchise people of color. Additionally, it unmask the deceptive faces of those ideologies that are perceived as normal, everyday rules and guidelines set forth for the good of everyone.

The role that race plays in shaping the attitudes towards hip-hop as well as educators perceptions is of importance to the academic achievement of African American males. A significantly large number of African-American males embrace this culture compared with those of other races and genders. A poll

conducted by *Newsweek* revealed that 75% of all voters under the age of 30 in the United States listen to rap (Samuels, Croal, & Gates, 2000). Nevertheless, in spite of its growing attractiveness to Whites, hip-hop remains a dominate influence on the behaviors and identities of African-American youth (Anderson, 2003; Gosa & Young, 2006).

In pedagogy, the use of race as a theme for understanding life experiences is even more possible with the reconceptualization of curriculum studies and cultural studies, the latter, allows for the use of popular culture in exploring identity as defined by youth. McCarthy, Hudak, Allegretto, Miklaucic and Saukko (1999) argue, "It is in popular culture and popular music that the differential identities and interest of school youth are constructed..." (p. 3).

Curriculum studies allow life experiences of students and teachers to serve as a base of knowledge. All knowledge is significant to learning and race as a focal point of the Black experience acknowledges unconscious behaviors and attitudes that contribute to the educational inequalities in schools. A growing interest in hip-hop culture as an occurrence worthy of critical academic analysis presents space for exploring of African-American cultural expression as "its insistence on lived experiences as a requisite for authority to speak in and about culture " (Hamilton, 2004, p.2). Hip-hop can also serve as an

innovative method to motivate and organize African-American males to focus on quality education, employment, economic stability, and such issues that are essential to the survival of these males'.

For many people race might seem obvious, and there was a time when race could easily be determined by skin color. Racial mixing, however, has complicated the matter so that skin color and facial features alone are not enough to distinguish a person's race.

Omi and Winant (2005) support the argument that race is a biological illusion created to categorize groups of people. Historically, these categories resulted in the construction of an African-American race whose sole purpose was to serve. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubam, (2002) wrote, "In the United States the grouping of individuals into African-American and White has been and continues to be central in shaping American society and the curriculum as well" (p. 317). Race delineates America and has a place in defining what knowledge is of importance.

As knowledge in schools has become more diverse, more attention is given to issues of gender and class, and race is more or less excluded. The issue of race has been and continues to be marginalized in educational settings. Racial inequities

exist, as does the lack of discourse to articulate the problems that arise because of racial imbalance.

Omi and Winant's (2005) theory of race is based on racial formation theory that considers the historical context of race, how race is socially constructed and one's lived experiences. The theory must also consider political and global contexts. Both consist of new ways of examining race, which is essential to the understanding of curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubam, 2002). The political context investigates racial power and dominance in daily experiences that take place without direct reference to race; for example, the ratio of White teachers to African-American students in an urban school setting perpetuates a power structure that results in resistance and the shaping of new identities that counter the political power structure.

There remain those who feel that race should not be given its own space or category simply because of its prevalence in society and its subtle affects. To do so would exemplify continued segregation (Pinar et al, 2002). All ethnicities should be examined which brings us to the first major tenet of racial theory: multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism has furthered the discourse of race as a theory in the field of curriculum studies, and it marks an attempt by contemporary educators to include diverse cultures in

the curriculum. Implementing multiculturalism has been problematic, as methods used by many schools consisted of serving meals with foods from other countries, or conducting show-and-tell sessions using artifacts depicting cultural values (Banks and Banks, 2004). Several curricula neglect the opportunity to embrace the concept of structuring academic work that would include cultural understanding and competences as well as the affirmation of cultural identity. Also pertinent to effective implementation of a multicultural curriculum is the cultivation of an understanding of the diverse languages and practices of another culture.

Another major tenet of racial theory is the concept of identity. Historically, the African-American has been stripped of a true identity as a result of slavery, and modern-day "mis-education". Slaveholders instituted policies to eradicate the African of cultural norms and values. This practice has continued in education through the omission of African-American history in American textbooks. Pinar's (2002) position concerning knowledge and identity is that we are what we know, but we are also that which we do not know. An American is a "fragmented self" who possesses deficits in information about his or her own history, culture, and identity (Pinar et al., 2002 p. 328). This is truer for the African American male who has embraced hip-hop identity as a substitute.

Hilliard, Payton-Stewart and Williams (1990) suggested that African-American youths' identification with hip-hop is possibly due to a lack of cultural identity with their African heritage, as groups with a firm cultural foundation demonstrate strong academic achievement. The identity constructed by the media results in an identification lacking in substance and authentic African culture, while also creating negative stereotypes that add to the demise of the race.

Understanding curriculum as a racial text bridges the miseducation that exists; it does so by informing dominant cultures of their continued fragmentation as long as those marginalized are denied information on their history and culture. The omitted history of racial violence and other pertinent events reveals a profound connection between the African- American and White races; one cannot exist without the other. As Fanon (as cited in Pinar, 2002) stated, "There can be no Black without White and vice versa" (p. 330). We are our history including the good, the bad, and the ugly and all history must be taught.

Marginalized and long overlooked, multiculturalism has assisted in heightening the position of race (Pinar, 2002). Race no longer resides on the outer borders of discourse within the field of curriculum studies. The inclusion of the analysis of fields such as popular culture, of which hip-hop culture is a

component, presents the opportunity to interrogate oppressive pedagogies, policies, and practices. Many African-American youth identify with hip-hop culture in an attempt to become visible to those who deny their presence and their daily experiences.

#### Oppositional Culture Theory

John Ogbu(1978) introduced Oppositional culture theory in an attempt to explain the persistent achievement gap that exists between African-American and White students. Oppositional culture theory, also known as the resistance model, proposes that African-Americans lack faith in the educational system's ability to promote success. African-American students observe fewer occupational opportunities and earnings as a result of economic inequity and discrimination. This lack of faith and opportunity leads to a devaluing and hopelessness, ultimately resulting in dislike for and resistance to school. This defiance can be manifested in the form of truancy, delinquency, and a lack of effort toward academic achievement.

For some African-American males, to accept values associated with mainstream society is to "sell out." To speak using correct grammar, follow school rules, complete homework assignments, and do other things that might add to gains in academic achievement is not associated with African-Americans, but is considered "acting White." Many African-American males

want to be perceived as “cool” and therefore tend to embrace the identity of male masculinity prevalent in hip-hop culture.

In their qualitative study, Gosa and Young (2006) examined the construction of oppositional culture in hip-hop music, in part by reviewing the lyrics of two rap artists, Kanye West and Tupac Shakur, for the presence of oppositional culture reflected as antischool messages that transmit into attitudes of school resistance. Others have argued that such resistance to school is not race specific (Harris, 2006). Gosa and Young’s study was heterogeneous and included diverse ethnic groups. The study determined that oppositional culture was represented in lyrics of both artists; However, Shakur’s music contained more proschool values and beliefs, thus demonstrating the ability of oppositional culture to function as a positive mechanism for academic achievement (2006).

For West, education was viewed as secondary to material gains, and the “anti-education attitude” was actually an opposing force aimed at the dominant culture. According to Gosa and Young (2006), “Kanye’s redefinition of black masculinity ...eschews school success and intellectualism, and promotes material wealth as a way to achieve a valid black identity” (p. 16). These findings are of particular interest because of Kanye West mother’s position within the field of academia. As a single

parent, she believed in education, earned her doctoral degree, and began teaching at the collegiate level.

The study was not representative of all hip-hop music, and the researchers suggested further study into the message presented by rappers regarding African-American identity and education. Clearly, this study was the beginning of a dialogue that should include the voices of African-American youth.

### **Significance of the Study**

Education is often viewed as a mechanism for balancing inequities in society. Despite many innovative programs however, there remains a disparity between the academic achievements of African-American males, and their counter parts of other races (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Singham, 1998). What is inconspicuously limited in the research is the voice of the African-American male articulating *his* perceptions of this problem and views on possible solutions. Too often, the experiences voiced by these young men, fall on deaf ears and are seen as ineffective in aiding the creation of a method for critical review for their own academic achievement. On the contrary, allowing the words and experiences of the Black male to become a component has its benefits. His contributions could lead to self-motivation through his participation in the process. His voice could create a venue for discussions that lead to questions, then answers, and finally, an understanding of the pedagogical oppression

experienced by African-American males that result in academic failure.

This study of African American males and the cultural influences that impact learning is significant because it examines the widening of the achievement gap as well as the economic gap so many African American males experience.

This study has the potential to provide an intellectual platform for the African-American male experience to be considered from *his* perspective. The results may allow a select group of African-American males (and others) to begin contemplating the image they present. More significantly, the results may determine if and how that image might serve as a barrier to academic achievement. The African-American male may become aware of the potential for the image he projects to augment the negative treatment frequently experienced in the school setting.

The significance of this study for pedagogical practice is in the possibility for further examination of the interactions between African-American males and teachers. Teachers might recognize their underlying biases as they react to the hip-hop image and fail to provide quality instruction because of what they perceive, misunderstand and often times fear (Delpit, 1995; Gibbs, 1988; Polite & Davis, 1999). This examination may also enhance the pedagogical practices of those teachers who lack

knowledge of racial, gender, and cultural perspective, which results in feelings of frustration with the performance of the African-American male in the classroom.

These efforts may be of particular value to those scholars interested in restricting the negative influences of hip-hop culture while identifying those elements that motivate and invite academic success. Additional research in this area may have the potential to add to a better understanding of other social issues confronting the African-American male, such as high dropout rates and unemployment.

#### **Definition of Key Terms**

In an effort to create a comprehensible discourse and understanding of the issues for examination, certain terms as they pertain to this study are defined as follows:

1. African-American: used interchangeably with the term *Black* to describe Black Americans of African heritage (Abate, 1999).
2. Hip-hop culture: a broad term that encompasses the musical forms of rap, break dancing (most recently known as street dancing), graffiti art, language formations, and fashions that originated in Bronx, New York in the early 1970s. (Weaver, 2005)

3. Hip-hop music: a rhymed form of storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music (Rose, 1994).
4. Culture: a way of life that expresses certain meanings and values through arts, learning, institutions and behavior (Williams, 1961).
5. Oppositional culture theory, a resistance model which contends that the achievement gaps occur because African American youth perceive lower returns on education and fewer job opportunities than whites, thus resulting in resistant attitudes toward academics (Ogbu, 2003).
6. Curriulum theory: a branch of curriculum fostered by William Pinar, Madeleine Grumet, Dwayne Hubner, and James MacDoanld that stresses the need to abandon the Tylerian design approach to curriculum development (Weaver, 2005).
7. Critical pedagogy: "an alternative approach to learning that centers the curriculum around the experiences and history of students and teachers" (Weaver, 2005, p. 101).
8. Critical race theory: a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods and pedagogy that seeks to identify; analyze and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that allow for the marginal positions and subordination of African-Americans

and Latino students. CRT ask questions about the roles schools, school processes and school structures play in maintaining of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination? (Solórzano & Tate as cited in Jay, 2003, pp. 4-5).

9. Racial theory: a concept influenced by poststructuralist that analyzes race and curriculum as a major contemporary curriculum discourse (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2002, p. 315).

10. Narrative inquiry: A qualitative research method often found in the humanities but now also used in social sciences and other fields "because of its power to elicit voice" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 123).

### **Summary**

Hip-hop is an ever-evolving cultural phenomenon that crosses ethnic and economic boundaries. In this study, cultural studies serve as a reference for the exploration of hip-hop's influence on African-American males' academic achievement. Hip-hop, as an oppositional culture, has been accused of negatively influencing youth with its profanity-laced lyrics, and its materialistic and misogynistic messages. The gangsta thug image presented by the sub-genre, gangsta rap offers an unrealistic portrayal of life where violence and crime are necessary elements for prosperity and manhood. Research suggests that this image has disrupted the academic achievement of the African-

American male. This study will investigate whether the African-American male perceives his identification with hip-hop as affecting his education.

Theoretical frameworks that consider race and oppositional culture theory are essential to a narrative inquiry that allows the participants to articulate their views. The following chapter will examine literature related to the historical context of African-American male in education and the role of identity formation as a means of constructing identity.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

*Rap music is an African-American cultural expression that prioritizes*

*African-American voices from the margins of urban America...*

*Rappers speak with the voice of personal experience,*

*taking on the identity of the observer or narrator. (Rose, 1994, p. 2)*

Substantial literature exists concerning the African-American adolescent male as the segment of the population most at risk for academic failure (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Ogbu, 2003; Voelkl et al., 1999). Research findings are consistent that there are disproportionate numbers of African-American males in special education classes, remedial classes, and vocational programs (Gibbs, 1988; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). The factors contributing to this situation are

hypothesized and theorized; however, there is agreement as to the historical ramifications of segregation and racial discrimination experienced by African-American males (Ogbu, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999).

This literature review examines research pertinent to the African-American male's education both past and present. Although in no way an exhaustive authority on the African-American male, this review will also examine his identity formation in an attempt to understand, theoretically, the ways in which his identity is constructed. The chapter will conclude with an inquiry into the genesis of hip-hop culture and its evolution as a global phenomenon.

Since the days of slavery, many European Americans have gone to great measures to alienate, denigrate, and segregate the African-American male from the dominant culture (Hogue, 2003). Sociocultural, economic, and political structures have changed, as has the educational structure, which now include special classes that serve as modern-day structures of segregation. Norms and values once prevalent in the African-American community are becoming obsolete because structural changes to such traditional institutions such as family, church, and community. Education is no longer valued as a means of social mobility. Economic restructuring has also created unemployment and fewer jobs, while political restructuring of programs has

shifted the emphasis away from disadvantaged families and children, thus making education more difficult to attain (Gibbs, 1988).

Resolutions and recommendations are as numerous as the problems that afflict the African-American male (Fashola, 2005; Roderick, 2003). Scholars such as Polite and Davis (1999) have advocated for the recruitment of more minority teachers - especially males- to compensate for the absence of the African-American father or dominant male figures. Others, such as Roderick (2003) and Fashola (2005), advocate for an equal and relevant curriculum. The history of the education of the African-American male is a significant point to begin to explore the inception of treatment experienced to date.

### ***The Education of the African-American Male: Past...***

In order to consider the current educational experiences of the Black male, we should visit the historical beginnings of their education.

The education of African Americans has been restrained strategically and systemically for centuries. This has especially been the case for the African-American male. Since his arrival to America, he has been perceived as a threat to the political, economic, and physical well-being of the dominant culture. The African-American male slave was thought to be crafty, immoral, beastly, and of abnormal strength. He

needed to be tamed and civilized, more so than his female counterpart. The African-American female was not viewed as a threat because women were not allowed to vote; therefore, it was believed that she would not seek positions of political power. Once the African-American male became literate, given the opportunity, he would aspire to have political power. Eventually African Americans, particularly African-American males, would be offered education strategically structured by those who once functioned as their oppressors (Watkins, 2001; Anderson, 1988; Woodson, 1990).

A slave's knowledge was restricted by limited contact beyond the plantation. An ignorant slave was a good slave, and the slave revolts of Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey were viewed as confirmation of the white slave holders' belief that literacy would inspire defiance and rebellion. Both Turner and Vesey learned to read and write under the guise of religious instruction but used this ability to encourage fellow slaves to challenge the practices of slavery (Cornelius, 1991).

Slaveholders quickly discovered, however, that adequate productivity could not be achieved from slaves unless they received training that was prohibited and unlawful. Many of these slaveholders personally trained their slaves in areas such as carpentry and sewing. Still other plantation owners sent the brightest of their slaves off to serve as apprentices

in areas of the greatest need (Bullock, 1967). The slaves would soon come to learn, master, and improve methods of agriculture, masonry, and domestics. The acquisition of these skills resulted in an increase in the slave value, as those with skills demanded higher prices at auction. The increase in proficiency also resulted in an increase in profits, with slaves hired out for employment (Bullock, 1967, p. 6).

This informal training of slaves on the plantation evolved into Booker T. Washington's advocacy of the concept of the "industrial schools" (Bullock, p. 6), and these schools which were monumental in providing slaves with formal education after emancipation. The freedom of emancipation brought a void of opportunities that would allow African Americans to prosper. The commitment to education remained, however, and philanthropic ventures developed under the dark cloak of education.

The formal education taught at Hampton Institute (currently Hampton University), designed Samuel Armstrong (Anderson, 1988), continued hegemonic structures based on the manual labor of slaves. Armstrong surmised that schools should "civilize" slaves who were to set the example for others to come, not as scholars and leaders, but as hardworking laborers trained to sustain the Southern economy (1988). Thus began the philosophical debate made famous by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois as to the

best form of education suitable for African-Americans: practical industrial or classical liberal. Washington sanctioned Armstrong's ideology of a curriculum fundamentally based on manual labor, with an emphasis on "work habits, practical knowledge and Christian morals" (Anderson, p. 35). Dubois rejected this curriculum of skilled labor and proposed a liberal arts curriculum consisting of reading, writing, grammar, geography, math, and music, as he believed that these subjects, along with traditional African and American culture, should be taught to a select 10% of African Americans (the "talented tenth") who would then teach others (Dubois, 1996; Anderson, 1988, p. 104).

Graybill (1997) has suggested that, "Schools were designed for white education" (p. 5); however, history reveals that certain types of schools were in fact designed for African-Americans. In addition, as suggested by Foucault (1995), it seems that these structures were designed to produce "docile bodies" (p. 138) stripped of power and more susceptible to the demands of authority figures.

### **... and Present**

Historically, the education (or lack of education) of African Americans has been a concern of the dominant culture, which has asked, whether African Americans should be allowed to learn and if so, what learning would be of significance to

those concerned. Still, a great deal of time and thought was spent on devising methods for getting more work out of and controlling the African-American male. Today, traditional pedagogy seems concerned with controlling students and results in a type of discipline that actually produces "docile bodies" and routine ways of behaving (Foucault in John Fiske 1993). In the classroom, the student is pliable to the orders and demands of the authority figure, the teacher. For most African-American males, subjection to such pedagogy can be problematic.

Although most schools may have been structured to educate whites (Graybill, 1997), the literature suggests that education for African Americans was designed to control and maintain economic prosperity (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). For African Americans, knowledge selected was for the development of compliant, obedient individuals or civilized ex-slaves. The control of information assisted in the control of a man's thinking, thereby, restricting his actions (Woodson, 1990). Today, the regulation of information taught to the African-American male via tracking curriculum, along with limitation of his access to significant educational resources, contributes to his feelings of inferiority. These feelings manifest in the form of anger and resistance towards those in authority.

Unlike in the past, the perception that education is the key to changing the situation for African Americans seems to

have diminished in hearts and minds of many, most specifically, African-American males. As long as the knowledge disseminated remains in the control of the dominant culture, with marginal input from African-American scholars and other ethnic groups, the African-American male will continue to suffer increasingly invasive methods of oppression. Far too many African-American males possess feelings of hopelessness with regard to equitable treatment, inside and outside the educational system, and they resort to "income oriented crimes" (Polite & Davis, 2000, p. 163).

It appears as if desegregated education has become an unpleasant experience for many African-American youth. This is particularly true for the males, because of inequities based on race, gender, and personal resistance to the existing hegemonic pedagogy. To enable empowerment, a liberating pedagogy is needed that allows freedom of discourse to reconceptualize knowledge and clarify the African-American reality.

Today's African-American male finds the knowledge of traditional pedagogy irrelevant to his life experiences and thus has difficulty incorporating this knowledge into his world. Lee (1991) asserted that the African-American male needs "to perceive that he and his unique view of the world is appreciated" (p. 4). He must see positive images of himself in

the text while learning of the vast accomplishments and contributions his ancestors have made to society.

Knowledge disseminated via textbooks seems to have little relevance to the lived experiences of the African-American male, and frequently reiterates his inferiority in subtle ways. It often seems as if the mainstream ideology of education reinforces rules and ways of learning that then produce a mentality that does not question those in authority. The response of the African-American male is often to rebel and resist. During slavery, lynching and maiming were once the consequences of such opposition. Today, a mental lynching and maiming contribute to African-American males' decision to drop out of school. It is important to review and analyze the philosophical positions of education's white architects and to reconstruct a system that reinforces the value and worth of African-American males. The literature expounds upon various social, systematic, and economic barriers to the academic success of the African-American male, but the voice of those long silenced in the literature- the voice of the African-American male- concerning his perspective on his position in society, is absent.

The 1970s witnessed the rise of an alternative identity for youth in the form of hip-hop culture. Through hip-hop, those African-American males once silenced and invisible to society

were now granted a source of identity and affiliation. When one's identification with a particular person or group is great, it is more likely that the object or subject of that identification becomes a part of one's identity (Anderson, 2003). Hip-hop provided positions of status to replace the unattainable and long-established possibilities for social status (Rose, 1994). To that end, an examination of identity formation is necessary to gain a better understanding of the African-American male's identification with hip-hop culture.

### ***Identity Formation***

Who we are and how we see ourselves is the essence of identity. How others view us is also a significant component that shapes our definition of who we are.

Noted psychologist Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of identity and identity formation in the early 1900s. For Freud, identity comprised both social and historical experiences of individuals and as members of a group (Erickson, 1959). Erik Erikson's research expanded the concept of identity, and ego identity became a major process in childhood development. As Erikson contended, "a healthy personality actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly" (p. 51). The term *correctly* is subjective and differs based on individual perceptions, however; for Erikson, identity was firmly

established in the completion of stages progressing from birth to adulthood. With each stage, the individual has a series of cognitive and social experiences that assist in shaping his or her identity. Stereotypes and media derived images provide a negative or obscure identification of the Black male. These images prevent him from attaining this "correct" perception of himself.

James Marcia's (1980) examination of identity formation recognizes its fluidity; he argues that identity is not attainable but rather a continuous process in which interactions or crises stimulate developments that pave the way to adulthood. George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis (as cited in McCarthy, et.al, and 1999) suggested that, "identities then are always tentative and partially unstable because they are continually constructed" (p. 121). Politics, history, and various other factors help reconstruct identities.

Other proponents of identity formation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hauser & Kasendorf, 1983) tend to agree that not only is cognitive growth important to identity formation, but social expectation also occupies a pivotal role in how individuals define themselves. Positive affirmations or feedback from significant others can create an image of acceptance that strengthens self-esteem and produces a healthy identity. Verbally affirming that one is smart and good-looking can

reinforce internal perceptions, thus enhancing a healthy identity. How we view ourselves relates directly to how we feel others perceive us. When we receive negative messages, especially from those who hold significant positions in our lives, positive identity formation is hindered.

Relationships that validate positive attributes are crucial to healthy identity formation, the most crucial stage of which is adolescence. It is during this period that an individual struggles with issues pertaining to physical and emotional discrepancies, leading to the means necessary to function as an adult (Erikson, 1968).

In most cases, the African-American male is viewed by dominant culture as criminal, violent, or deviant, thus adding to the complexity of his ability to develop a healthy identity; such complexity is compounded by racial discrimination, negative external messages, and the reality of true identity becoming ambiguous.

Models specific to the identity formation of African Americans and other ethnic minorities emerged in the 1970s (Helms, 1990). Previous models had examined the African-American's identity development from a position of pathology (Helms, 1990; Cross, 1991). Erikson (1959) believed that a positive Negro identity was docile, submissive, and indicative of the perfect slave; he further believed that any disruption of

the early development of the Negro would result in an immoral personality. Erikson reconsidered this position when he examined the writings of W.E. B. DuBois, and he came to believe that African Americans' history and experience influenced identity. According to Erikson, DuBois's experiences connecting with the dominant culture, and his personal racial experiences enhanced his development of a healthy identity (Erikson, 1968).

William Cross's (1971) theory of African-American identity formation is probably the best known among researchers. The nigrescence model of Black identity consists of four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion and, lastly, internalization/commitment. It is during the initial stage of pre-encounter that an individual embraces the values and ideologies of the dominant culture. For instance, the small African-American girls who select the White dolls over Black ones would be considered as being in this stage because they perceive White image as more beautiful and better. This may be in part due to the negative messages disseminated by the media and society about Blacks.

The immersion/emersion stage describes an obsession with the Black identity while being internally void of commitment to the values and traditions associated with the Black race (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). The African-American male might be described as struggling in this stage if he radically embraces

hip-hop culture, and his angst is derived from the tensions between militant tendencies regarding race, market potential, and being cool and looking good. It is at this point that, hip-hop, according to Dimitradis and Carlson (2003), "offers an image of identity without much substance beneath the image" (p. 21). This missing substance can be derived from knowledge of a racial identity rich in history and free of oppressive influences.

Jean Phinney (1992) developed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) as a means of assessing ethnic identity across cultures. The measure includes four stages: self-identification and ethnicity, ethnic behaviors and practices, affirmation and belonging, and ethnic identity achievement. An achieved state of identity occurs when there is a sense of ethnic pride resulting from an understanding of the meaning of one's membership in an ethnic group. The ability to reach this stage is often combated by a lack of historical knowledge. Unless there is an individual attempt to become knowledgeable of black history, such knowledge remains absent or is replaced with messages constructed and disseminated by mainstream culture.

Stuart Hauser and Eydie Kasendorf's (1983) theory of identity formation for African Americans consists of the following five stages (with an acceleration of ego development during adolescence): progressive identity, identity diffusion,

identity foreclosure, negative identity and psychosocial moratorium. Each stage reveals a progression toward identity formation, but "integration is achieved as a result of avoidance of alternative" (p. 16).

Janeula Burt and Glennelle Halpin's (1998) research into African-American identity development revealed several consistent themes. Regardless of which theory is preferred, assessment of African-American identity formation must consider "impact and influence of family socialization, racial consciousness, cultural connectedness, collective thought and self concept" (Burt, 1998, p. 14).

Numerous other studies address the significance of identity formation (Bryant, Settles, Cooke, & Morgan, 2004; Tatum, 1997; Allen, Dawson, & Brown, 1989; Azibo 1991; Banks, 1988; Phinney, 1992); however, research literature exploring how identity affects academic achievement seems scarce. Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) research into the impact of racial identity on the experiences of African-American students in the school settings revealed that in order to achieve academic success, the students had to develop a sense of "racelessness," thereby distancing themselves from the black community (p. 235). This shift in identity was particularly problematic for the African-American male who seemed uninterested in socialization to enhance success.

In her study, Beverly Tatum (1992) explored the relationship between African American identity formation, academics achievement, and the absence of history. Operating from the theory that distorted images of African Americans on television, in books, and in school leads to negative results in academic and economic achievement, Tatum cited Ogbu's (1986) oppositional social identity as prevalent among youth whom she observed as angry and resentful of their treatment in the educational system. For these black youth, oppositional identity serves as a defense mechanism against racism and "keeps Whites at a distance" (p. 332). As Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explained:

Subordinate minorities regard certain forms of behavior and certain activities or events, symbols and meanings as not appropriate for them because those behaviors are characteristic of White Americans. To behave in the manner defined as falling within a White cultural frame of reference is to "act White" and is negatively sanctioned. (p.181).

There may be some truth to Ogbu's theory; however, research reveals that this frame of reference is not common among all African-American youth (Zweigenhaft & Dom Hoff, 1991).

Tatum (1992) purposes a reconstruction of curricula to aide in changing oppositional identity, along with a redefining of

education so that achievement is not perceived as exclusively White. Tatum (1997) continued her investigation of racial identity development in African-American individuals (especially youth) and examined the "self-segregation" that often takes place in school cafeterias. For example, it is common to see racially separated groups of students during recreational and leisure activities at school. This separation takes place because youth look to their peers to re-enforce their identities, as well as to the norm for appropriate behaviors. As Tatum noted, "It is the [peer group], the kids in the cafeteria... they know how to be Black," (p. 60). When discussing white privilege and identity development, Tatum (1997) noted that the concept of identifying with a race is lost to white individuals because they are a part of the dominant culture; as part of this culture, whites do not view themselves as a race or as an ethnic group.

Appiah (2005) examined the concept of identity from the perspective of how one thinks of oneself and negotiates treatment by others. Identities and representation are influenced by factors that allow for new interpretations of identity. Lives are constructed, and social identities bring certain moral and ethical obligations. Appiah argued that we can reshape those identities that we have no control over, such as negative stereotypes associated with being African-American. The

development of a healthy identity is complex and subjective. The black male's unconscious decision to identify with hip-hop culture includes many of the elements viewed by scholars as necessary. Still other elements are absent perhaps resulting into the embrace of this alternative culture. Search of the literature uncovered few studies associated with racial identification and hip-hop.

Raymond Anderson (2003) investigated the causes and effects of identification with hip-hop culture on youth. Over a 7-month period and using a questionnaire methodology, a focus group was interviewed to get a thorough understanding of the use of hip-hop, and identification with the hip-hop culture. Consequently, a questionnaire instrument was administered to African-American (54%), Caucasian (33%) high school, and college students from both urban and suburban communities of the Hampton road area of Virginia. Anderson wanted to determine, " [to]what extent... young people identify with hip-hop culture as embodied in rap/hip-hop music and its aural/visual presentation in popular culture" as well as whether "greater identification with hip-hop culture relate to greater use of rap/hip-hop music and its visual/aural presentation in popular culture" (p. 110)

Four hypotheses were tested; among those that were supported was the hypothesis that African Americans who reside in urban communities are more likely to identify with hip-hop

culture. In addition, greater media use and various other forms of engaging hip-hop culture correlate with the identification of this culture. Finally, Anderson concluded that, "identification is an important mediator between social influences and hip-hop media-oriented behaviors" (p. V).

Anderson's research ultimately established that the use of and relationship to hip-hop culture is different between African Americans and whites. Although both groups agree on the components that comprise hip-hop culture, fashion, music etc, their reasons for engaging in hip-hop vary. African Americans cited reasons ranging from entertainment to mood management.

Anderson's study is significant because of findings regarding identification; of particular interest is the instrument used to measure the level of identification. He used adapted rendition of the organizational identification questionnaire (Cheney, 1982). With adjustments, I believe that this instrument may prove beneficial. Gaps in this research consist of the absence of information about the effects of hip-hop on academic achievement. It was established, as in other studies, that hip-hop is a major influences in the lives of youth. As Kitwana (2002) noted, "Rap music has become the primary vehicle for the transmitting culture and values" (p.202).

Also missing from this study was the inclusion of other ethnic groups. With increases in the Latino population in America has come an increase in the number of Latino youth interested in hip-hop. "B-boying," an early form of hip-hop dance, "was largely associated with Latinos" (Veran as cited in Light, 1999, p.54). Hip-hop is also a venue for them to express the complexity of their cultural identity in the United States. Rappers such as Fat Joe, Daddy Yankee, and Pit Bull have sold unprecedented numbers of CDs in both English and Spanish (Castillo-Garstow, 2005). Latinos have been involved in hip-hop since its inception including the music, graffiti art, to dance and style. According to DMC of Run DMC (as cited in Perkins, 1984, "Basically it was the blacks and the Latinos out there... it was who was in the ghetto, the inner city" (p. 67). But, like most minorities, the struggle for Latino hip-hop artists is was being allowed the space from the margins to be heard.

Cultural studies are a great conduit from which to explore the complexity of the hip-hop style. Weaver (2005) reflected that, "since the advent of the term Western Civilization, there has been an attempt to distinguish between the Culture of those with power and those without" (p. 1). It is the beliefs, values, and tastes of those with power that set the standard for what is considered right and proper. For those in power, culture,

"signified as Culture with a Capital C" also dictates the proper forms of dress (p. 1). Anything or anyone that goes against the standard set by what Pierre Bourdieu (as cited in Weaver, 2005) refers to as "Cultural capital" is less powerful, less influential, and far less privileged. Cultural study opens the door for discourse about popular culture's role in defining the identities and realities of a contemporary generation of youth.

Fashion is as much a part of the hip-hop image as the music lyrics. The African-American male's identification with hip-hop seems closely related to the manner of dress and style of clothing. In the early day, there was no consistent fashion that connected youth from different regions with hip-hop. Conrad Muhammed (as cited in Kitwana, 2002) reminisced that, "MTV and BET had not yet played a role in standardizing Black culture the way it is today. Young people from different cities weren't all dressing the same way" (p.198). The commercialization of hip-hop, however, brought together youth of all nationalities under a uniform standard of fashion. Hip-hop created its own urban street style, but not before sampling brand names like Gucci and Hilfiger. It was common to see rappers dress in mainstream designer clothing, "donning gold or platinum pendants, watches and rings" (Wilbekin as cited in Light, 1999, p. 278). The youth of America followed suite, burdening parents earning meager wages to purchase designer clothing or shoes. Some youths have

even lost their lives, as the desire to imitate hip-hop has resulted in youths taking items from others, sometimes at the expense of a life.

As hip-hop evolved, so did the fashion trends with hip-hop artists developing their own clothing lines. FUBU initiated the fashion rage and became hip-hop's first mainstream brand, generating revenues of over 200 millions dollars (Watkins, 2005). Others quickly took note of the capital being made from urban wear and established lines such as Sean John, Roc- a- wear and Phat Farm. These designer brands, worn large and loose, represented the attitudes of the music and "defined the man" (Wilbekin as cited in Light, p.279).

Sexuality, language, style, and physical ability are aspects of identity that play a pivotal role in how the African-American male constructs his identity (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). Social, political, and economic forces also shape the identity of African-American males, and part of their daily struggle that consists of attempts to remain free from the control of these forces. This struggle for freedom is demonstrated in the production of resistant identities exhibited in hip-hop culture (Ginwright, 2004).

Fear of African-American youth because of negative and criminal media images has placed all African-American youths under suspicion, but particularly the African-American male.

Drug wars and crime associated with African-American youths have led to hostile public policies (Ferguson, 2000; Ginwright, 2004). Many cities' shopping malls have established policies that prohibit teens under the age of 18 from entering unless accompanied by an adult. These negative perceptions and stereotypes have further incriminated even the innocent based on race. One manner in which the African-American male has responded to such treatment is to subscribe to an identity associated with resistance and with the rejection of mainstream values. Many African-American males have found this identity in hip-hop culture (Kelly, 1996; Kitwana, 2002).

Further more, Greg Dimitriadis (2001) conducted an ethnographic study of African American males who used rap as a mechanism for expressing their thoughts and feelings about being Black, which revealed that hip-hop helps youth to understand their identities.

Personal experience teaches that appearance is one of the major factors in society's perception of an individual. My daily interaction with teachers, who readily share their opinions of students based on what they perceive, and my subsequent personal interaction with those same students, has been revealing and often contradictory. The student who appears angry or detached may be burdened with the problems at home only to find these problems intensified at school.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed that the day would come when African-Americans would be judged based on their character and not on the color of their skin; however, many African-American males now find themselves being judged based on their appearance as they identify with hip-hop culture. In a measure of resistance, urban culture has embraced hip-hop as a counter to the identities seen as essential in mainstream society, and hip-hop as an alternative culture continues to evolved.

### **Evolution of Hip-Hop**

Hip-hop began as a subculture of African-American urban youth in the 1970s. Many scholars agree that it had its evolution in the Bronx (Rose, 1994; Light, 1999; Kitwana, 2002; Cheng, 2005), but others believe that its foundation is in the Caribbean and Jamaican cultures (Hebdige, 1987). The Jamaican style of music that influences a form of hip-hop called Dub emerged in the 1960s. Dub consisted of the isolation of percussion breaks to energize the dancer (AWOL, 2007). Hip-hop's influences, however, actually go as far back as 8<sup>th</sup> century Africa. In traditional West African societies, a social class known as Griots (pronounced Gree-oh), comprised of storytellers and dispute mediators of traditional West African societies, formed an important part of the opposition to European colonization. Griots passed down to other generations the music and dance of traditional religious ceremonies, and they were

interested in establishing an identity free of European influences; therefore, their music usually focused on African-American pride and identity (Hebdige, 1987).

Many West Indian immigrants settled in the South Bronx of New York. The influence of African music arrived in the form of DJ Kool Herc, who was originally from Jamaica (Light, 1999; Mitchell, 2001; Rose, 1994). Although some credit Herc as the father of hip-hop, others give that honor to Afrika Bambaata (Perkins, 1996). Both were instrumental in creating a cultural form that has influenced youth globally. Youth all over the world identify with hip-hop, making it a global subculture that, according to Pennycook (2007), modifies local identities.

Hip-hop consists of djing, break dancing, and graffiti. It has also expanded to encompass language, fashion, and attitude (Kitwana, 2002). As part of its evolution, hip-hop has gone from being a performance or entertainment medium to becoming a way of being, a lifestyle that continues to develop. Initially known as an "event driven activity" for parties and competitions, it quickly became a "production-driven one" based on its overwhelming commercial success with the release of hits such as "Rapper's Delight" by Sugar Hill Gang in 1979 (Dimitriadis, 1999, p.355)

Today, hip-hop as a lifestyle is a multibillion-dollar industry that includes clothing, jewelry, hats, shoes,

hairstyles, vehicles, and, of course, music and videos. Research on hip-hop has explored its commercialization, from fashion to artist endorsements. In the 1990s, corporate America noticed the economic potential of hip-hop and gradually took control of the movement (Rose, 1994; Watkins, 2005). The pendulum, however, has since shifted in the direction of hip-hop moguls such as Jay-Z and Russell Simmons, whose names are synonymous with the hip-hop fashion labels, Roc-A-Wear and Phat Farm. Hip-hop artists are becoming empowered to purchase their own record labels and produce their own music. This refreshing display of power further enhances the desire of many African-American youth to embrace and emulate hip-hop.

All that being said, few pieces of literature address the construction of the hip-hop image and the impact of this image on African-American male's academic achievement. Treat (1997) investigated the academic experiences of African-American males when student developmental theories are applied to teaching, and concluded that the application of such developmental theories can lead to enhanced academic success by, "addressing students' cognitive intellectual needs and facilitating growth and development as individuals proceed through life transitions" (p. 40).

Another study by Oyserman, Harrison and Bybee (2001) addressed whether racial identity can promote academic efficacy.

The investigation explored the relationship between racial identity and gender for youth entering inner city high schools. Using a developmental approach, the researchers concluded that the connectedness component of racial identity was particularly helpful for African-American boys, where as the achievement component of identity was positive for girls. In other words, for girls who feel connected to or part of the African American race, academic efficacy is hindered when this connection is viewed negatively by others, especially when academic achievement is not viewed as significant to one's identity as part of the African American race. If racial identification was revealed as influential to academic efficacy for African-American males, then it is possible that identification with hip-hop could also affect academic achievement.

Rap and hip-hop as sites of inquiry for theory and practice are increasingly common (Baker, 1993; Potter, 1995). The implications of this for cultural and curriculum studies is immense, because of hip-hop's ability to influence on a global scale. African-American males and youths worldwide identify with hip-hop culture. More specifically, African-American youth culture has changed significantly over the past decade and no longer acquires its values and identity from the institutions of the family and church. These traditional institutions have given way to the advanced technology of mass media. Identity and

culture are now conveyed by means of hip-hop, rap videos, and designer fashions. Hip-hop is no longer perceived as a fad because so many youths identify with it to such a great extent.

Additionally, hip-hop's influence has spread from the United States to Europe to Japan and beyond (Mitchell, 2001). Many youths embrace hip-hop fashion, speak using the hip-hop vernacular, listen to hip-hop/rap music, and aspire to become hip-hop artists. Hip-hop is so prevalent that scholars have researched ways to include it in curriculum in an effort to increase youths' interest in school. Many youth define themselves according to the hip-hop image, but how does the image affect their daily lives in a society that often judges based on appearance?

The literature on hip-hop culture has expanded since its inception in the 1970s. Several books expound upon the following four elements that formed hip-hop's foundation of rap, graffiti, break dancing, and, most recently, style (Rose, 1994; Kiwana, 2002;). Information on the historical origin, performativity, and commoditization, of the culture continues to expand along with the growing interest in this sensation. With the prevalence of hip-hop comes an increase in scholarly articles that investigate hip-hop music's influence on youth (Gosa & Young, 2006; Mayberry, 2004; Roach, 2004; Anderson, 2003).

Absent from the literature on hip-hop culture, however, is research into the impact of identification with hip-hop on the academic achievement of the African-American male.

Kitwana (2002) defined the hip-hop generation as those born between 1965 and 1984; they have their own set of values, beliefs, and attitudes. In spite of this, they also possess attributes similar to the previous generations of African-Americans, such as a desire for wealth. Kitwana further explored the crisis facing African-American youths who identify with hip-hop culture, including the disproportionate number of African-American males in the prison system. Like Cornell West (1993), Kitwana addressed the issue of failed leadership in the African-American community and offered solutions for confronting the crisis.

A fairly large body of literature exists that explores the issue of identity as it relates to race. Some scholars have argued for the significance of positive racial development (Allen et al., 1989; Azibo, 1991); in particular, they note how one sees oneself and how others relate as a result of what they see has a tremendous impact on one's station in life.

What is the hip-hop culture? Because many African-American males identify with hip-hop culture, research on this particular culture has proven to be most appropriate for the current study.

### **Summary**

The education of African-Americans has been of concern for centuries. Historically, the oppressors of slavery have, for their benefit, strategically structured education, and literacy was viewed as a threat to the economic and political existence of the South. Formal education for African Americans was designed to continue the hegemonic structures of American based on manual labor.

The current educational structure has fallen short in meeting the educational challenges of the African-American male. Policies and rules seem to maintain compliant and docile individuals who do not question the ideology of those in authority.

The literature is inundated with studies of innovative methods to assist the African-American male in succeeding; however, little has been done to ensure that the voices of the actual participants can be heard. Few studies take the time to acquire input from the major recipients of our failed educational systems. The next chapter explores the methodology applied in this study.

## Chapter 3

### Design and Methodology

***"Identity is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are" (Stuart Hall, 1991, p. 16)***

The purpose of this study is to explore the African-American males' perspective of whether his identification with hip-hop affects his academic achievement. William Reynolds (2004) surmises that information presented in the classroom is insignificant to youth because of their increased interest in brands of popular culture such as hip-hop. Historically, African American males have not done well in American education system. The number of those who do not graduate from high school far exceed those of their peers in this same category. Studies have revealed that a resistance to education could be a contributing factor. Fear of being perceived as "acting white" is one theory used in education to understand academic difficulties of African American students. Other research suggests that hip-hop culture, with its coolness and bravado present an image many African American males try to emulate. This image is seen as anti-education, and hence, contributes to lower academic achievement.

This chapter will present the methodology and procedures used to collect data that answer the following research questions:

- Does identification with hip-hop culture contribute to an attitude of resistance to education?
- Does the hip-hop image negatively affect the academic achievement of African-American males?
- Does hip-hop culture promote an oppositional culture that affects the academic achievement of African-American males?

I describe the target population and site selected for the study. I will also discuss how the data were analyzed. I chose to conduct a qualitative study using critical narrative inquiry as a methodology. This methodology explores social interactions in the daily experiences of individuals and their perceptions of these experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It also utilizes the communication process of speaking, listening, and observing in order to extract the voices of those often unsolicited in traditional research. Of particular importance is the premise that critical inquiry offers a mechanism for critique of issues such as power, justice, race, class, etc. (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003). This is significant in situations with Black males because of the power relationships with teachers, the part that race plays in these relationships and the inequity in education. Other secondary methodologies used in this study include in-depth interviewing, focus group, questionnaire, and observation.

I used the pronoun "I" in my writings and I found that it created a challenge for my editors. The use of the first-person pronoun "I" is often discouraged in academic writing. Despite this, many scholars of qualitative research use of first-person pronoun because it complements the intention of giving voice to the participant's perspectives (Givens, 2008). With this in mind, I write in the first-person singular in this and following chapters to avoid third person pronouns such as the researcher, one, etc. that are often ambiguous, and evasive. The pronoun "I" is used to express and preserve my personal life experiences and perspectives. "I" also reminds the reader of a more personal presence during the study (Glesne, 1999).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I relied heavily upon the micro-practice skills I acquired as a school social worker in conducting in-depth interviews and the facilitation of a focus group. These skills enabled me to relate to the participants through effective communication. Eye contact, attentive listening, warmth, empathy, and genuineness are all essential in getting the young men to trust enough to share their personal experiences (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002). Through the development of grounded theory, the data analysis consists of organizing data, coding the data, identifying themes and patterns, interpreting the data, and reporting. The irrelevant data were disregarded as the data reduction process took place.

### **Site/Participant Selection**

Before the data collection process took place, I participated in the online training mandated by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia Southern University. After securing permission to conduct human subject research, I submitted a copy of my prospectus to the Savannah Chatham County Public School's research department. I was granted permission to conduct my research inside the schools from this department so I personally met with the principals of the two schools in question to begin the study. Windsor Forest High School one site

chosen. Windsor Forest is one of ten high schools in the Savannah Chatham County Public School System. It has an enrollment of over 1200 student with over 800 being African American. This site was chosen because it is the most accessible. My office is located at this school and I have a good rapport with the administrators. I also meet with students at various times for a variety of social reasons. As a school social worker, I receive referrals on students from teachers and administers when students violate the compulsory school attendance law, reports of child abuse, and many other social issues that create barriers to education. Marshall and Ross (1999) view accessible sites and samples (convenience sampling) as a beginning place for early data collection. The Corporate Academy Alternative Learning Center is my second chosen site. Corporate Academy is one of five alternative schools in the Chatham County School System. It is a voluntary education program designed to help students who are at-risk of dropping out or have recently dropped out stay in school and earn their high school diploma. Total enrollment is approximately 200 students with over 50% being African American. Many African-American males enrolled there come from traditional high schools and have experienced academic and/or behavioral difficulties. In order for acceptance into this program, students must be behind grade level, and have successfully attained a number of Carnegie

credits. These credits are counted as hours towards graduation. Due to time constraints, I decided to limit my sample size in order to accommodate focus groups numbers of 10 or fewer. Quantitative researchers typically select enough participants from which to draw a generalization. Not usually concerned with generalization but purposefully sampling, selecting a group from which one can get a depth of information on issues pertinent to the study. (Glesne, 1999)

The participants were randomly selected from a list of currently enrolled African American males at each school. After obtaining a list of all African American males at each site, I selected every twentieth name on the list to receive a parental consent letter. The twentieth is an arbitrary number selected to assist in randomization of participant selection. Since there were only student names and no other recognizable data, the number twenty was just a randomly chosen number.

My final target population consisted of 24 African-American males between the ages of 14 and 18. Of the twenty-four, twelve were selected from Corporate Academy Alternative school and twelve from Windsor Forest High.

To gain some insight into the level of the participant's identification with hip-hop culture, I administered a twenty-five item questionnaire adapted from the research of Raymond Anderson (2003). The Organizational Identification Questionnaire

(OIG) was developed by Cheney (1982) and modified by Anderson (2003) to measure uses and gratification of hip-hop music. It was also useful for determining the level at which youth identified with hip-hop culture. Though originally designed to measure organizational identification, Anderson viewed organizations as not critically distinctive from individual cultural groups. With this in mind, the OIC was considered suitable for this project. The significant concepts of focus were similarity, loyalty and membership. Miller, Allen, Casey and Johnson (2000) argue against the validity of this instrument to measure identification. Their reproduction of the research revealed that only 12 of the twenty-five items actually contributed significantly to the scale. The remaining twelve items measured organizational commitment, but not identification.

From an organizational perspective, acceptable internal reliability and content validity were noted in Cheney's study (1982), however; factorial analysis conducted by Miller, et al.'s (2000) suggests, that the OIQ does not affectively measure organizational identification as originally conceive. Based on these results, Anderson modified Cheney's instrument from a work oriented setting to that of a cultural group specifically hip-hop culture.

The questionnaire that I administered to participants was taken from the third section of Anderson's questionnaire, which examined identification. This section specifically explored three components of organizational identification, membership, loyalty, and similarity. Modification of the instrument consisted of rewording of questions to speak of and explore hip-hop culture. Considering the research that argues against the unidimensionality of the OIQ, I chose to use Anderson's version of the questionnaire because of his knowledge of the gaps in Cheney's tool. Anderson's version also served as an initial test of OIQ and its use in cultural studies. Since my sample size was small, it will not establish validity or reliability. Future studies should be conducted to establish this purpose (Anderson, 2003).

The first formal meeting with participants was semi structured in that it followed a guide consisting of specific questions. The questions were ordered in such a way as to obtain reliable comparable data, to allow for the free flow of conversation, and to alleviate feelings of intrusiveness (Bernard, 2002).

The purpose of observing the focus group was to obtain information based on interaction between individuals within the group. Although the group consisted of African-American males who embrace hip-hop culture, there were varying opinions

regarding how image affects their experiences in school. Initially, the sessions were to be audio and videotaped; however, an unexpected turn of events prevented the use of the video equipment. The equipment was locked away and we were not able to access it even though we were told we could. The focus group and individual interviews were recorded via audiotape and transcribed immediately for accuracy. These interviews allowed me to explore, observe, and accurately document participants' experiences using their own words. Individual interview notes were highlighted using different colored pens to distinguish them from notes transcribed from focus group interviews. Once the interviews were completed, each participant was allowed to review the transcript for accuracy.

#### **Instrument Distribution/Collection of Data**

Data analysis is a continuous process in research, and it is essential in shaping and guiding of the research project (Glesne, 1999). Narrative inquiry was the guide for collecting and analyzing data obtained for this study. Again, this method is most effective because by recounting the stories of the male participants, it allows their actual voice to be heard.

In the initial meeting with the young men, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study. I also explained that participation was strictly on a volunteer basis. They were told that their participation would allow them a chance to speak

about a subject they enjoyed, hip-hop, and that they would be assisting in providing information to educators that may help to understand the Black male better. This understanding could improve relationships with teachers and administrators that may contribute to academic success.

Those individuals under the age of 18 were given Parental Consent letters to take home for a parent signature. Those individuals' eighteen years old were allowed to sign the Minor's Assent. Whenever the permission forms were not returned, a phone call was made to the parent(s), the study was explained and a verbal agreement for the young man to participate was obtained. The following day I received the signed parental consent. Of the 24 males selected to take the questionnaire, only two declined to participate.

The questionnaire was administered between the months of January 2009 and February 2009. At Windsor Forest high school most of the young men were under the age of 16, therefore; it was extremely important to obtain parental consent. All of the young men randomly selected from the enrollment list at Corporate Academy happened to be 18 years of age or older. Because they were not considered minors, each individual who agreed to participate, was required to sign the minor's assent form. Since parental consent was not necessary, each participant

at Corporate Academy completed the hip-hop questionnaire the same day as my visit.

A total of nine questionnaires were completed and collected from Windsor Forest High School. Eight questionnaires were completed and collected from Corporate Academy. Those individuals chosen for the focus group were those who rated high levels of identification with hip-hop on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was made up of a seven-point Likert scale with one as the lowest level of Identification and seven as the highest level of identification. There were 25 items divided into three dimensions of identification, membership, similarity, and loyalty. According to Anderson (2003) these are significant indicators of identification that assist in guiding this instrument. "Membership is the belonging and interacting with a group of people; similarity is a desire for or perception of similar interest, goals, attributes and identity; loyalty is contributing to a sense of commitment and support (2003 p.104)." Anderson's study revealed that identification in the organizational setting was largely based on how loyal individuals were to a group and the similarities associated with its members. While a cultural group exists on a larger scale, he surmised that the instrument gaged benefits for both groups though in different ways. His guiding questions had to do with perceived membership as it relates to similarities of tastes and

outlooks; and loyalty to the culture. The overarching question, what is their level of identification? In this study, the survey instrument was made up of a seven point likert scale with a total range of 25. Based on the scale of 1 to 7, 7 is considered the highest level of agreement for identification, each of the 25 items were multiplied by the seven points. For this study, a difference of 175 is considered as the highest level of identification with hip-hop. A score of 25 is considered a low level of identification with hip-hop with the median of 100 as the neutral anchor Point. Those individuals who scored from the median to 175 summation score were accepted into the focus groups.

Of the 17 respondents, only those that scored in the range of 102 and over were considered for focus groups. Nine respondents scored high enough for the focus group (Table 2). Those respondents who scored 101 and below were not considered for the focus group. I relied on Anderson's (2003) research that referenced the content, validity and the appropriateness of the length of the questionnaire as well as the overall ability of the questionnaire to measure identification. For this reason, there was no pre- test administered.

The groups were scheduled to meet on Saturdays. I could not conduct the groups during the school day because to do so during regular school day would interfere with academic seat

time. The individual schedules of the young men also made meeting during the week difficult. Five young men showed up for the group at Windsor Forest High. These were the individuals scoring at the high range of identifying with hip-hop on the questionnaire. Only two came to Corporate Academy on the Saturday of their group was to meet. Separate interviews took the place of the originally scheduled focus group.

While the young men seemed genuinely interested in the research, class scheduling and transportation issues were barriers to further participation. Additional attempts scheduled; however, personal illness and time constraints prevented more meetings.

Each group met for approximately 60 minutes to answer questions about how they view their identification with hip-hop, whether this identification has influence the instruction they receive in class, and the treatment they receive that impact academic achievement.

Each participant chose a pseudonym that was recorded. I wrote down the first initial of the name and the first few words spoken by each participant as the sessions were audio-taped. Morgan (1988) contends that this method is ideal for keeping track of data and for facilitating transcription. Themes in the perceptions and opinions expressed by the participants were identified on the written transcripts using various colored

markers. Their responses were color coded with similar colors used to identify similar patterns. Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) categorizing and grouping data in a specific order made for easier interpretation.

### **Ethical and Political Considerations**

This qualitative study required a commitment from individuals to volunteer their time while providing sincere answers in an effort to ensure the success of the project. After meeting with the participants and getting a commitment from them, a letter of introduction carefully and truthfully explaining the nature of the project was given to them for their parent(s) signature. Follow-up telephone calls were made to those homes where phone numbers are provided to further clarify the intent of the project. Because the participants will range in age from 14 to 18, informed consent was required of some and not from others. Other ethical concerns include the right to privacy; each participant was assured of confidentiality.

Data was identified using pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Participants were informed that the only exception to the divulging of confidential information would be in the event of hurt, harm, or danger to the participant or to another human.

To circumvent the politics involved in negotiating access to the educational settings, I personally met with key

administrators at the Board of Education and discussed my proposal. Because of my familiarity with the system, it was easier to work within the guidelines of the Board while limiting disruptions to the normal school routine.

The use of tape recording devices could be perceived as an ethical concern; however, appropriate individuals were made aware of recorded interviews both verbal and in writing. The researchers' degree of involvement can also become an ethical concern, as researchers are not "neutral entities". Precautions were taken to guard against researcher bias by review of notes and the use of an unbiased research editor who audited my notes and interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggests that this procedure also promotes trustworthiness.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to explore the African-American male's perspectives of whether his identification with the hip-hop culture affects his academic achievement in the classroom. Over a period of time, a group of African-American males in the Chatham County school system were interviewed about whether they perceive their identification with hip-hop has influenced the lessons or/ and the treatment they receive and its affects on academic achievement. Their responses were recorded using a qualitative methodology that also provided a

mechanism for the voices of the participants to be heard. The results of the study are presented in chapter four.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Presentation of Data and Findings**

It is easy to ask the question directly and record narrative responses. However, the addition of empirical data with the actual verbal responses provides some validity and helps in the answering of the research questions.

For this study, I engaged twenty-four African American males from the Savannah Chatham County Public School System. A twenty-five item identification questionnaire was administered to the participants to determine their level of identification with hip-hop culture. The higher the numeric score, the more the individual identifies with the hip-hop culture. Of the twenty-four males selected for the study, 17 actually completed the questionnaire. The parents of some did not agree with their participation and some of the males themselves did not want to participate. Upon completion of the questionnaire, those who scored in the high range for identification were selected for a focus group. At one site, only two participants came the day the group was scheduled to meet. Individual interviews took the place of the group in this case. These forms of data collection are useful in determining individual perspectives in a formal

conversational manner. Opened-ended probing questions were essential to evoke extensive participant narratives.

To protect the participant's identity in this study, each young man was asked to select a pseudo name. Pseudo are alias or made up names chosen in place of biological names. Since the group was small, it was easy to remember the pseudo connected to the biologically given name.

The data presentation is provided in the form of individual and focus group transcripts. The questionnaire results are provided as well. The narratives from the focus group are written exactly as quoted by the individual participants; therefore, grammatical errors remain. The research question is presented followed by focus groups responses. My thoughts and reflections appear in dark print immediately following the young man's response to my question.

We began with detailed profiles of the participants of the focus group follows. They speak about their experiences with Hip-hop and school. A description of the individual assists in understanding his experiences.

### **Participants Profile**

*("D") - a 15 year old ninth grader, one grade level behind. I have worked with his family, so I am familiar with his background. He is the oldest of four boys. He comes from a two-parent family that is not without their struggles economically*

and socially. Dee wears his hair close cut and his clothes are always neat and fitting. He is what most adults would consider mannerable and answers always "yes ma'am or no ma'am". He likes all genres of music, and is recorded as saying, "I don't know where I would be without hip-hop."

Silas- is a 17 year old, ninth grader who believes his name is significant because of its Biblical association. He chooses not to have a tag. He lives with an aunt. His main concern is "doing what is right in school to get out" He presents very clean cut, with a low hair cut, neat fitting clothing, kaki pants and white polo shirt, which is the school's uniform. He wears a belt and does not attempt to sag his pants ( sagging is wearing the pants below the hips).

("Cut") - is a 10<sup>th</sup> grader. He is also 17 years old. He is quieter than the others. However, he reveals his suspicion that teachers single him out because of his dreads and the fact that he prefers to "sag" his pants. He is late to class most of the time and has to report to the tardy table, where I met him initially and he agitatedly verbalized his suspicion.

Monte'- is an 11th grader who will turn 20 this summer. He takes pride in his dreaded hairstyle and his identity with hip-

hop. He credits his brothers and cousins with "turnin him on" to the culture. He believes he is the culture and the culture is he.

("Lil C")- A quiet ninth grader is 15 years old. He does not have a lot to say in group. His perspective on hip-hop seems to be directed towards its capital potential. He mentions several times that, Hip-hop... "it's about the money... or I try to hustle to get the money".

Cal- an eighteen-year-old student attending Corporate Academy. Cal originally came from another high school in Chatham County. He entered Corporate after falling two grades behind and having problems with attendance in the traditional high school setting. He was to be a part of a focus group, but only he and one other young man came for the group. He agreed to be interviewed.

Steven- A twenty year old who expects to graduate from Corporate Academy the end of this year. He originally attended Windsor Forest high, but left because he believed he could "get caught up" and graduate with his class.

The following are the research questions that guided this study:

1. Does the African American Male view hip-hop as affecting his academic achievement?

2. Does identification with hip-hop culture contribute to attitudes of resistance to education?
3. Does hip-hop promote an oppositional culture that affects academic achievement?

### **Research Findings- Question One**

#### *Question 1*

*Does the African American male view hip-hop as affecting his academic achievement?*

*Results from focus group:*

*In response to research question number one, the following theme was present throughout the discussion with the focus groups: several of the young man seemed to agree that the hip-hop image affect their academics. When asked the question the following responses were given:*

*Dee: " first day of school and soon as you walk in teachers kind of identify the kind of person you might be and they treat you different."*

***Is the treatment based on how you look or act?***

*Dee: "probably both but they don't know you so it might be based on looks"*

*Silas: "I feel the same as him cause people get impressions about the way you act and dress the way you present yourself to them and they do treat you different."*

**Initially it seems like teachers treat them differently because of their identification with hip-hop. However, when I asked if they present themselves in a different way because of hip-hop culture, the consensus was that they did not.**

Monty: "no they just feel that way, I have classes, people dress like me (uniforms,) and they act just as bad as me, and they won't get treated different. I guess the teachers just because of who we are, they treat us on how we are."

**Do you mean terms of how you look?**

Monty: "how we look and being black".

**These young men seemed to feel that not only are they treated differently because of their identification with hip-hop in terms of dress but that they are treated differently because of race.**

Silas: "teacher's expectations are related to your appearance. if you are in the streets and you see someone with a clean cut suit on you expect something a little higher from them and you see someone with jeans on and dreads you think he's hanging out on the corner or something so it's like different expectations in different situations like that."

**During our discussion, the young men acknowledged that someone with dreads can be just as intelligent and that the reactions of others may simply be based on stereotypes.**

*Individual Interview Responses*

The two young men from Corporate Academy seemed to share the perceptions of focus group participants from Windsor. They reflected on their treatment in the traditional school setting and commented as to how they were treated prior to the uniform policy.

Cal: "Most times before I could even walk into the classroom teacher began to berate me about something. Usually it was being late, now it is pull your pants up. As for being late, most times I was no later than the person coming behind me"

**Steven recalls spending so much time in the principal's office for dress code that he was rarely in classes.**

Steven: "I believe it had a lot to do with how I looked. teachers don't really like dreads even when they are neat, but mines are not neat. They always had something say, they don't say nothing to white boys".

**When asked, how does identification with hip-hop style of dress language etc. affect how teachers and principals treat you?**

Steven: "you are automatically categorized with the negatives aspects of what they know about hip-hop songs they heard me talk about selling dope so they see me as a dealer or a gang bang. On the educational level, they see me as a slacker or an under achiever. This may be true for some of black males who like hip-

*hop culture and they misrepresent the value in it for all the rest of the us".*

*The research findings based on these interviews provide a voice for the African-American male's perception of whether hip-hop culture affects the academic. African-American males seem to think that because they embrace and identify with hip-hop and its various elements, people in the school system automatically form a negative opinion of them. This perception takes away their opportunity to prove their ability in the classroom. For instance, when he walks into a class wearing dreads, pants sagging, talking loud; he is told to sit down and be quiet. He raises his hand to ask a legitimate question about the assignment but the teacher purposely ignores him. As stated, they feel that everyone's perception of them is based on negative stereotypes of hip-hop culture. To Glean some of the richness of the voices some of the interview is listed below. R- is the researchers question and the other letters are the young men responses. The fill transcript follows in the appendices.*

R- What is the overall message that you get from Hip-hop?

S- Different messages depending on the rapper, the song. You may have a dance; you have gangster rap- R & B all that singing, different things.

LC- I kind of get the same message- about the money all that the hustle.

R- Who do you listen to LC?

LC- T.I

S- I like Eminem- so I listen to a lot of him, but his message is about life..

Rappers, I listen to all the same messages- money, girls, the way they dress, cars, and all that.

R- Are the message a true depiction of life for you all?

Dee- I don't really see it that way.

R- How do you see it?

Dee- Its more their life but my life is not really like theirs.

I don't have as much drama.

R- Where does education come into this?

S- Kanye and Common talk about education.

What is their message?

Dee- Sometimes rappers- Eminem, Nas, Kanye West, when I listen to them its like- lyrics and its makes you want to get a book that they might talk about.

S- I'm not sure when I do my homework, it helps me concentrate better. During school, I just try to get through the day, do my work. I don't cause too many problems now that I am I high school. I am trying to strengthen up. But I think music plays a big role because now it's like its a part of me, I say its got a little something to do with education.

Dee- and because it's a part of us hip-hop if you like took away, I wouldn't be able to function, I wouldn't be too interested in school and no education.

R- Even though they don't talk about it in school?

Dee- Like drugs, if you stopped someone from using- I guess that what's goin happen to me cause I listen all the time.

### **Research Findings- Question Two**

#### *Question Two*

*Does identification with hip-hop culture contribute to an attitude of resistance of education ?*

*The resistance model supports the notion that Black children resist education because they do not see the tangible benefits of an education. Some Black children also feel that the expectation of teachers is lower for them than for White children. Does hip-hop culture that promotes glitter, glamour, fast money and violence contribute to this attitude of resistance? The young men in the groups held varying opinions when asked this question. For instance, Lil C views hip-hop music as a "message but not a message of resistance". For him the message is always about the money all about the hustle. He mentioned this on several different occasions while others in the group related that the message of resistance depends mainly on the artist.*

*Lil C: "For me, it's basically about the money. Cause when I get to school, I try to hustle so I try to get to the money".*

*Dee: "Hip-hop culture, its more their life but my life is not really, like theirs, I don't have so much drama.*

***When asked where education fits?***

*Silas: "Kanye and Common talk about education".*

*Dee: "Sometimes rappers- Eminem, Nas, Kanye West, when I listen to them the lyrics, it makes me want to get a book that they might talk about".*

*Silas: "I'm not sure, when I do my homework it helps me concentrate better. During school, I just try to get through the day, do my work... But I think music plays a big role because now it's like a part of me, I say it's got a little something to do with education".*

*Dee: "...and because it's a part of us, hip-hop if you like took it away, I wouldn't be able to function. I wouldn't be too interested in school and no education".*

*Individual Interview Responses (Corporate Academy)*

*Cal: "I don't think that hip-hop culture is leading to resistance to education. In the music that I listen to, it talks about life, life in the projects, life in the ghetto just life, life happens at school too. They might talk about what happens*

at school, but I wouldn't say they tell us that we don't need to learn."

Steven: "No, I don't think they tell us to resist learning. Because many of the artists are educated to, Like Little John, and In order to get or to know what they are talking about and their story you have to educate yourself on what they talking about, on the subject. I think most Black boys just get tired of people trying to handle them".

Although there may be an attitude of resistance to education in some hip-hop music, the young men in this study did not feel that the message affected their attitude towards school in a negative way. One young man mentioned that some music actually made him want to "read a book" mentioned in the song. Another young man credited hip-hop with keeping him interested in school.

### **Research Findings- Question Three**

#### *Question Three*

*Does hip-hop promote an oppositional culture that affects academic achievement?*

*Hip-hop music with its often-rebellious message is believed to contribute to a specific physical demeanor viewed as tough or thuggish. Those youth who exhibit this image frequently oppose societal norms; therefore, their value regarding academic*

achievement is questioned. Not very different from the voices of the civil rights movement, many in the hip-hop culture oppose disenfranchisement of their people. These young men were asked if they perceive hip-hop culture as promoting an oppositional culture? The emerging theme was the hip-hop did not promote an oppositional culture. The responses were as follows:

Silas: "Not really-sometimes, they just say, "do you" be what you can be -most of it is not telling you to go out and kill someone. Some may think that why I say it depends on who you listen to and what you take from it".

#### *Interview responses*

Steven: "Yes and no. Lately the main reason of hip-hop seems to be shifting to rebellion against opposition in the other people. It's wrong to oppose people were not trying to do you but those same people ask your help and backing. That's where I see the oppositional culture going against someone trying to make you. into someone that you are not. Others Stated: **R**-Do you see hip-hop as promoting an oppositional culture? Do you know what that is?

All- Yea

R- A culture that's against normal standards

S- Not really- sometimes they just say, "Do you" be what you can be- most of it is not telling you to go out and kill someone.

Some may think that why I say it depends on who you listen too and what you take from it.

R- How are you all doing academically?

S- I am doing good.

Others- Okay

R- Does hip-hop or its influence have something to do with that?

Do you think that because of your embrace of the culture teachers don't give you your due?

*(Entire Transcript from Focus Group and Interview Appendix F and G )*

### **Summary**

The purpose of this research was to hear from African-American males as to whether their identification with hip-hop culture affects the academic achievement. The participants came from two different sites. They were provided the same questions, and, interestingly enough, similar themes emerged. Hip-hop is not a passing fad to any of these young men; it is a life style. Hip-hop for some serves as a mood regulator, hip-hop culture encourages a capitalist mentality- about making money, and finally hip-hop culture with from teachers and administrators.

Out of those who completed the questionnaire to determine their level of identification with hip-hop very few scored under 100 with 175 being the highest. Those who scored between 125 and 175 were included in the focus groups. Transcriptions of the

focus groups determine the following: hip-hop culture is a lifestyle, while they also think that there are those who try to emulate the style. Their definition of hip-hop consists of rap music and style of dress, along with speech or how they talk. For them, hip-hop is not a passing fad. Hip-hop is all they know; it is a life style. Another thing that was consistent is the use of hip-hop as a mood regulator. Many of the young men spoke about how listening to the music keeps their mind stimulated. Another young man spoke of hip-hop is having a calming affect on him when he is completing class work, while another young man believed that hip-hop culture for him was about the money. The latter young man related that he "hustles" to get money and added that hip-hop is about friends and families who sometimes get involved with him in his hustle because "it is about the money".

Another prevalent theme from the focus groups was a feeling that the image affect educator's perceptions of who they are . Participants provided examples of situations in school where they felt that they were singled out merely because of their physical appearance, especially those males who embrace the hairstyle of wearing braids or dreads. Interestingly enough, when asked if they felt that, their race affects the reaction of others, the responses were negative. Many of the young men stated, "If a Caucasian person were acting the way I was acting,

they would probably get the same treatment because of the way he was acting and not his race.” As far as hip-hop promoting resistance to education or an oppositional culture, there seemed to be a consensus that it depends on which artist you choose to listen. There was also the perception that such resistance may be because African-American men are resisting societal norms that are forced upon them.

The final chapter will further discuss the conclusions of this study and implication for future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The purpose of this research was to conduct a qualitative study exploring, the African-American males' perspective of whether his identification with hip-hop culture affects his academic achievement. The key questions of concern were:

- 1).Does the hip-hop image negatively affect the academic achievement of African-American males?
- 2).Does identification with hip-hop culture contribute to an attitude of resistance to education?
- 3). Does hip-hop culture promote an oppositional culture that affects the academic achievement of African-American males?

Critical race theory was used as a lens to explore the issues of race in the educational system. In education, critical race theory can be used to identify, and analyze those structures, programs and policies that serve to continue the oppression and unjust practices that target minority students. The males in this study the participants told of experiences where they believed that their race was a factor in treatment received more so than their embrace of hip hop dress. Dee is quoted as saying, "the first day of school as soon as you walk in teachers kind of identify the kind of person you might be and they treat you different... they don't know you so its based on looks" Monty added that it did not have much to do with how they presented themselves because, " I have classes and people dress like me and act just as bad as me and they don't get treated different. I guess the teachers just because who we are, they treat us on who we are...How we look and being Black."

( Appendix G), Are reactions to African-American males due to their identification with the hip-hop culture or because they are members of an African-American race? Race plays a major part in the disparities in injustices experienced by the African-American male. Critical Race Theory asks such questions and require the analyzing of the answers for the possibility of changing those policies and social behaviors that target especially the African American male (Solórzano & Tate as cited

in Jay, 2003, pp. 4-5). Critical race theory may also explain other experiences that center around gender and class. The fact that these were males may be a variable to their treatment. We did not explore the socioeconomic demographics of the participants, therefore; we can not speak to the possible impact of class. However, Critical race theory also lens itself to analyzing class as a critical factor in the treatment of African American males.

In order to capture the stories in the voice of the African-American male for this study critical narrative inquiry was utilized. The participants recounted stories where they felt singled out due to race, as well as stories that relate to their identification with hip-hop culture.

Chapter one of this research presented the problems faced by African American males in the educational systems. High suspension, expulsion rates, low academic achievement and high dropout rates are problematic issues facing African-American male in American education. Chapter two offered a review of the literature on the education of the African American male from a historical perspective. Specific literature related to research of hip-hop and academic achievement was reviewed as well. Also in this chapter was a review of the literature on identity development. Most importantly, literature review addressed the significance of curriculum studies to this study. The currently

used curriculum serves to “exclude the voices, experiences, languages, and discourses of others, it is an obstacle to the academic achievement of African American students.” ( Lambert, 2006, p.24). Curriculum studies open the door for discourse on the importance of recognizing culture and experiences as an integral part of the pedagogy. If educators were open to the idea that educational experiences are not just academic, but they are political, cultural, gendered and racial, they would deconstruct the current negative realities and reconstruct these realities that have positive meanings for both teacher and student.

Chapter three presented the research methodology. Chapter four provided the findings of the research from the perspective of the participants and the results from the instrument utilized. This fifth and final chapter will provide a brief recap of the findings of the research questions. It will also present implications for future research and conclusions.

Based on the focus group and interviews conducted with African-American male participants, their identification with hip-hop culture plays a minor role in their academic achievement. Our findings for the overarching question, “Does identification with hip-hop affects academic achievement”, varies based who you asked and on his past educational experiences. While the males’ interview agreed that hip-hop,

culture is a way of life, a lifestyle for them, some participants perceived their identification with hip-hop culture as having negative affects on their academic achievement, and others saw it is having positive affects.

The positive affects seem to relate those positive messages delivered in the songs of various artists. According to the young men, these hip-hop artists neither condone nor condemn education. These young men use rap music in a positive way. They use it as a mood stabilizer to assist them in centering and slowing down to complete academic assignments.

The style of clothing related to the hip-hop culture, more than any other element, seems to affect how they are perceived by others. Several narratives recount conflict with teachers stemming from what they believe to be their appearance. In contrast, one participant spoke about how his behavior accounts for the treatment he received and that a student of any race would receive the same treatment for that behavior

Ogbu( 1978) contends that Black children exhibit a greater resistance to school than whites. Harris (2006) cautions the acceptance of this theory could likely lead to policymakers "narrowly conceive of the gap's [between whites and blacks in education] causes and assume convergence is unlikely because blacks refuse to learn" ( p.826). The findings for research question two provides the participants perception as to whether

hip-hop culture contributes to a resistance to education. None of the participants believe that the hip-hop culture contributes to a resistance to education. Many of the males voice the opinion that there is a need for teachers to provide more encouragement and support. They also stated that school dropout drugs, etc "it's a personal choice".

In hindsight, research questions two and three are somewhat similar. Harris (2006) uses both phrases interchangeably. Oppositional culture or we model contend that the achievement gap between Black and White occurs mainly because Blacks believe there are less tangible benefits to education and fewer job opportunities and economic advancement than there are for whites. One of the focus group participants stated it best. When asked, do you see hip hop as promoting an oppositional culture, he replied, "Not really-sometimes they just say, "do you" ( be yourself) be what you can be. Each of the focus group participants stated that they were doing well academically. However when asked if hip- hop or its influence has anything to do with their academic achievement the young man recounted stories where they felt that they had been unjustly treated. (Appendix F & G ).

Overall, they believe that hip-hop does play a major role in how well they do in school. They all agree that even though embracing the culture may affect a person's perception of them,

they would not consider changing who they are. For the males hip-hop culture is a way of life they have grown up around it; it is life, as they know it.

### **Implications**

What I like most about my job as a School Social Worker is the contact that I have with the children, especially the adolescents. I enjoy talking to them and listening to their views and perspectives. I wish I had enough time to get to know each young man individually. A more personal rapport would have allowed for more in-depth information regarding personal experiences and what it really means to be a part of hip-hop culture. Academically, I would have liked to have more time to review academic records at each participant. In hindsight, I would have like to have conducted a questionnaire of the teachers. Perception of hip-hop culture explored alongside the academic achievement of those students who identify with the culture may have also added the validity to this study. Educationally African-American males still feel marginalized in schools. Administrators, teachers and policy makers can do more to assist in the academic and social development of African-American males. The hip-hop image is an aesthetically cultural manifestation of African American male identity. Though the image is perceived as negative and thuggish, it does not measure the abilities of the person who embraces its difference. These

young men are articulate, bright and cognitively in touch with ramification of their academic experiences.

Policies and procedures that are instrumental in adding to the number of black males in the streets, expelled, or dropout must be addressed. New policies must be practical in that they make it easy to attain positive results and equitable to exhibit fairness to all. Curriculum must be established that allowed the African-American males to contribute his thoughts and feelings as to the best path for educational success. Finally the African-American male must be more conscious of his appearance and how that appearance, when accompanied by a rebellious attitude, influences impressions and affects the interactions of others towards them.

Hip-hop culture is a lifestyle not a passing fad its integration into the fabric of society demonstrates its significance in the life experiences of those who embrace it the most. Pedagogy that allows for these experiences to serve as text liberate and pull further from the margins the voices of the African American male.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

## Informed Consent Form (Parents /Guardians)

**Parental Informed Consent**

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Chiquetta Mitchell and I am a graduate student in the School Of Education at Georgia Southern University. This letter is to inform you of research that I am conducting in fulfillment of the Georgia Southern University requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Curriculum Studies; my supervisor is Dr. John Weaver. The purpose of this research is to explore the Black male's perspective of how his identification with the Hip-Hop culture affects academic achievement; whether the Hip-hop image influences or intensifies racist attitudes towards him. Very little research has been done that actually allows the Black male to speak candidly about how being a Black males influences what happens in the educational setting and especially now that many of them embrace the Hip Hop culture in style of dress, and language, how this might impact teacher/administrator attitudes towards them. I would like your son to participate. It would be a very valuable asset to learn from their experiences those things that hinder their success. It might also assist in the development of policies and intervention to increase the numbers of Black Males graduating from high school.

His participation will include being interviewed using audio tape for 30 to 45 minutes that allows for exploration, observation and accurate documentation of his personal views on the subject, in his own voice. He may also be asked to participate in a focus group along with other Black males providing an opportunity to discuss these issues in a group setting. The group will be video taped. He will also complete a brief questionnaire to determine his level of involvement with Hip Hop. He may feel somewhat uncomfortable during the interviews as he describes certain experiences that were humiliating or upsetting.

I will protect his identity by allowing him to provide a pseudonym (made up name), and his actual face will not appear on the video. I will give him a hard copy of the transcript from the interviews. He will be able to make changes as his feels necessary. He may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or penalty.

This study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of Georgia Southern University. The results of this dissertation study may be published in a scholarly journal.

I am asking your permission for your son to participate in this study. I will provide him with a simplified "assent" letter/verbal description of the study. If you have any questions about this research study, please call me at (912) 238-5417 or (912) 695-4900 (cell). You may also contact my advisor / committee chair, Professor John Weaver at (912) 871-1709. If you have any questions concerning rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 486-7758.

You will be provided a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Please sign below if you are willing to allow your son to participate in the dissertation research study outlined above.

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_



**COLLEGE –College of Education**

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**DEPARTMENT- Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading**

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### MINOR'S ASSENT

Dear Student,

This letter is to inform you of research that I am conducting in fulfillment of the Georgia Southern University's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with an emphasis of Curriculum Studies; my supervisor is Dr. John Weaver. The purpose of this study is to explore the African American Males' perspective of whether his identification with hip hop culture affects academic achievement. Very little research has been done that actually allows the Black male to speak candidly about what happens to him in the educational setting and especially now that many Black Males embrace the Hip Hop culture in style of dress, and language, how this might impact their attitude towards education or their academic achievement. I would like for you to participate. It would be a very valuable asset to learn from your experiences those things that hinder your success. It might also assist in the development of policies and intervention to increase the numbers of Black Males graduating from high school.

Your participation will be for a six week period and will include being interviewed using audio tape for 30 to 45 minutes that allows for exploration, observation and accurate documentation of your personal views on the subject, in your own words. You may also be asked to participate in a focus group along with other Black males giving you an opportunity to discuss these issues in a group setting. The group will be video taped. You will also complete a brief questionnaire to determine your level of identification with hip-hop. The data will be stored in a locked file for a period of one year, (until 2010). Only the primary investigator (me) will have access to the data. You may feel somewhat uncomfortable describing certain experiences where you were made to feel humiliation or anger. You can end the discussion at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

I will protect your identity by allowing you to provide a pseudonym (made up name), and your actual face will not appear on the video. I will provide you with a hard copy of the transcript from the interviews. You will be able to make any changes you feel are necessary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or penalty.

This study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of Georgia Southern University. The results of this dissertation study may be published in a scholarly journal.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you are not of age, this document is considered an assent letter for the study. A consent form signed by a parent or guardian is attached if you have any questions about this research study; please call me at (912) 238-5417 or (912) 695-4900 (cell). You may also contact my advisor / committee chair, Professor John Weaver at (912) 871-1709. You may also contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs for answers to questions about rights of research participants at (912) 478-0843.

If you understand the information above and want to do the project, please sign your name on the line below:

**Yes, I will participate in this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Table 1

*Demographic Profile of Participants**Profile of Participants (n = 17)*


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Participants	Age	Academic status	School
CA-1	19	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-2	20	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-3	20	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-4	19	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-5	19	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-6	20	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-7	18	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
CA-8	20	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Corp Academy
WF-1	20	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-2	18	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-3	17	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-4	17	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-5	19	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-6	19	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-7	15	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-8	15	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS
WF-9	17	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	WFHS

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## Appendix C

## Participant Questionnaire



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM STUDIES

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## Identification with Hip- hop Questionnaire

This questionnaire will determine your level of identification with Hip-Hop as a culture including style of dress, musical preference, way of speaking and dance. Choose ONE number, which represents your answer. The range is from 1- 7 with **1 as “strongly disagree”** and **7 as “strongly agree”** The numbers in between indicate a medium level of “agreement or disagreement.”

	I disagree strongly		I neither agree nor disagree			I agree strongly	
1. I would watch and listen to hip hop music /videos even if they were no longer considered popular	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. In general, those involved in Hip hop culture have similar goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I would be proud to be known as someone who listens to/watches hip-hop music /videos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The image of hip hop music, dance, style of dress etc. represents my life style.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I often describe myself to others by saying “I like rap/hip hop music/videos and style”.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I try to encourage others to see hip-hop as being a good thing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Lovers of hip-hop are different from others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I enjoy listening to hip-hop more than any other musical type.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I tell my friends that hip-hop and its artists are a great culture to be a part of.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. I take criticisms about hip hop personally-that it is not real music or that it has too much sex and violence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I am personally willing to help hip-hop continue to be a success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Listening to others outside of hip hop culture criticize the style and music is irritating to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I have admiration and good feelings for hip-hop, its artists and audience.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Fans/listeners of hip hop remain true to the culture for life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I feel I am a part of a community with hip-hop.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. The growing recognition of hip hop is an example of what a dedicated hip-hop audience can achieve.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I individuals who identify with hip hop have a lot in common.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I find it difficult relating to the lyrics and style of hip-hop.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. The use of hip hop music and style is only a small part of whom I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Telling others about the new music and style of hip hop is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I find that my values and the values expressed in hip-hop music are very similar.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I feel very loyal to hip-hop.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I feel a sense of belonging among others that like hip-, hop music, video, dress, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. It easy to identify myself with hip-hop music and style.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I really care about the future of hip-hop.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

\* Anderson, R.D.S. (2003) Black beats for one people: Causes and effects of identification with hip-hop culture. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Regents University. (UMI No. 3082039)



Table 2

*Participants Who Have High Identification  
With Hip-hop*

Participants	Summated score	School
CA-1	135	Corp Academy
CA-2	151	Corp Academy
CA-3	100	Corp Academy
CA-4	047	Corp Academy
CA-5	113	Corp Academy
CA-6	121	Corp Academy
CA-7	126	Corp Academy
CA-8	131	Corp Academy
WF-1	133	WFHS
WF-2	122	WFHS
WF-3	122	WFHS
WF-4	147	WFHS
WF-5	153	WFHS
WF-6	057	WFHS
WF-7	118	WFHS
WF-8	095	WFHS
WF-9	145	WFHS

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Discussion Questions

#### Purpose

1. To determine how important hip-hop is to participants, and how this importance is manifested in their lives?
2. To explore ways in which they identify with hip-hop culture?
3. To establish how hip-hop has influenced their attitude toward academic success?

#### School and Hip Hop

1. What do you think Hip-hop is?
2. What is the main thing that attracts you to hip hop/What is a good example of what hip-hop is to you?
3. Are Black males who do not embrace hip-hop treated differently from those who do? How?
4. Does your identification with hip-hop (style of dress, language etc) effect how teachers and principals treat you?
5. What parts of your identity would you say are related to hip hop culture?
6. Does teachers expectations of you relate to your appearance? How?
7. DO you have an opportunity to discuss popular culture or hip-hop in your classes?
8. Do most of your teachers seem to have a positive or negative impression of hip-hop culture?
9. Are you discriminated against because of your identification with hip-hop? How?
10. What overall message do you get from hip-hop music?
11. Do you see hip-hop as promoting an oppositional culture?
12. Do the messages you get from hip-hop influence your perception of education? How?
13. Does listening to hip-hop motivate you to succeed academically?

## Additional Questions for Focus Groups

1. When and where were you when you were first introduced to Hip-hop?
2. Has it changed much since then?
3. Are there any artists that you admire? Who? Why?
4. Do you try to imitate or copy them? In what way?
5. Do you think you could be a friend or relate to any of them?
6. Do you dress in what is considered hip-hop (or urban) fashion? Why?
7. Are Black males who do not embrace hip-hop specifically the fashion, treated differently from those who do?
8. Does your identification with hip-hop affect how others treat you?
9. Does your identification with hip-hop cause you problems in school?

## Appendix E

## Individual Interview Responses

1. How important is hip-hop to you?

Cal- "it's very important to those who choose to participate. It like... gives us a outlet to the struggles of life. Like when you put life to music, it's like cool. Some things you say in music you can't say."

Steven- "Yea. It's like ours, our music and we can say what we want"

2. How do you identify with hip-hop?

Steven- "I can relate to what they say. The stuff they go through, it like touch home sometime.

Cal-"Yea, in a twisted way it's kind of soothing. I mean I don't get comfort in someone pain, that's why I say twisted, but it's kind of good."

Steven- "Cause we all have pain"

3. How has hip-hop influenced your attitude towards school?

Steven-"I think it has influenced me stay in school. It depends on who you listen to. There are certain groups who focus on positive mindsets. Their lyrics talk about staying in school, not selling drugs, and being good parents to their children."

1. What is hip-hop?

Cal- it's a culture way of life.

Steven- Yea. Its life, but rapping is a skill too. Like to able to write songs, spit lyrics and beats, its like amazing thing to experience.

2. What is the main thing that attracts you to hip- hop?

Steven- "The main attraction for me is hearing everyone's way of life. Like I ain't never stayed in California, but a good artist can make you feel like you there. My main example of this or the person who drew me in would be Tupac. His words were able to be felt by lot of people no matter what race?"

3. Are Black males who do not listen to hip-hop treated differently?

Steven- "Not necessarily especially now a days"

4. Does hip-hop or your identification with hip-hop effect how teachers and people treat you?

Cal-"Yes, because I think they put me in with the negative stuff of what they know heard about hip-hop. Hip-hop songs they've heard about selling dope so I'm looked at as a dealer, wife beater, gang banger etc. "

Steven- "Sometimes in school they look at me or us like an underachiever cause of these same reasons. True enough there may be some black males who live the hip-hop culture and fit those means, but I feel that is some bad in all things, I mean some gone misrepresent "

5. What parts of your identity would you say are related to hip-hop?

Cal- " I think how I dress and how I talk"

Steven-" how I dress, my dreads, I like to sag my pants, not so much how I talk?"

3. Do teacher's expectations of you relate to your appearance?

Cal- "Yea, based off first appearance, I think they think I'm troublemaker."

Steven- " Majority of my teachers got a negative outlook on hip-hop but they are based off media ."

4. Are you discriminated against because of your identification with hip-hop?

Cal- " I think so"

Steven -“ But sometimes yea but I think it comes from them, teachers seeing other from people before me who have live up to the stereotypes and they measure everyone of us on that. If you different they don't give you a chance to prove it but even after proving myself different, I am still rejected sometimes.”

5. Does listening to hip-hop motivate you to succeed academically?

Steven- “Yea, it does because a lot of the artists are educated you don't know it until you hear stuff about them, but you need to be educated to that's important.”

Cal- “Not really, I mean I can listen to them and I like and relate to what they saying but I guess it depends on who is saying it cause some rappers just be talking.”

Steven-“they inspire me to continue striving towards something better than what I have come from.”

## Appendix F

## African American Male Focus Group

## TRANSCRIPT

"African American Males perspective as to whether his identification with Hip hop effects academic achievement?"

February 28, 2009

The researcher began with a brief introduction of the study and a definition of focus group.

R- Do you know what a focus group is? A focus group is a group that comes together and there is a specific subject as the topic. In some other groups, they allow you to talk about various subjects or whatever you want to talk about. This group will talk about "whether your identification with Hip hop culture impacts/effects academic achievement?" My theory is that AA males because they identify so closely with hip hop as far as dress, speech, mannerism, etc., sometimes in the school system it effects how people treat you or how teachers provide instruction or grade you. I want your perspective, tell me what you think- each one on you completed a questionnaire for me on hip-hop that measured the level of your involvement or identification with hip- hop. Some of you measured very high while others measured lower.

R- Lets go around and get your names to see who we have here, then we will get right to the questions (\* Names are alias' chosen by young men).

MONTIE- I'm Monty I go to Windsor Forest High and I'm in the 11th grade.

Lil Carter- I'm lil Carter I go to Windsor Forest High and I am in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade

Dee- I am De and I go to WFHS and I'm in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade

Silas- I am Silas and I go to WFHS and I am in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade

R- What is Hip Hop? Anybody.

Silas- I think it's the music

R- Music

S- Yes mamma, music

R- A particular kind of music?

S- Yea, rap music

R- Okay, can something other than rap be considered hip-hop?

Lil Carter- Nope, Rap is hip-hop.

De- I think its dance, that's considered hip-hop too.

R- Oh, dance is hip-hop or a form of hip-hop.

De- yea

R- What about style of dress?

De- yea that's hip-hop too

R- How so, explain that to me.

De- the way you see rappers on the videos dress, you got people out here who wanna dress like them.

R- What does that look like?

De- Baggy pants, tee shirts, tattoos

Monty- or a grill, you know gold teeth.

R- Hum, does that mean that they identify with them? And want to be like them?

S- Yea, they try to relate.

R- you know back when I was growing up, we had little dress "fads", mini skirts, bell bottoms, long time ago, but those were "fads" and they passed- people eventually stopped dressing this way and started something New. Hip-hop evolved in the mid1970's and here we are 2009 and its still here- would you consider it a fad or a culture?

S. D. M, L- (all the same time) a Culture

S. -I consider it a culture.

R- Why do you consider it a culture?

S- To me it's like a way of life cause when I wake up I start w/my MP3 listening to hip hop. I go to school and when I come back home, and I put my MP3 back on to listen to it again.

R- So it's mostly music with you?

S- Yea, music and the way I dress.

R- How do you dress because in school you are in uniform?

S- But when I leave school, I'll probably throw on some jeans and tee shirts or somthin.

R- How do you wear your jeans?

S- baggy, but they don't sag

R- What about the rest of you?

De- When I'm in school and doing my work, I'm usually thinking of some raps I heard the night before or that morning. And it keeps my mind stimulated-that's what happens when I go to school

R- So it keeps your mind stimulated when you think of different rap songs

De- you know like when the class is real quiet and no ones talking but trying to do some work, that's all I think of.

R- Do you relate to a lot of the songs you listen to? How?

De- like most people, when they rap, they tell stories and you be like, that happened to me.

R. - What about the rest of you?

Lil Carter- for me, it's basically about the money for me basically. Cause see when I get to school, I try to hustle so I try to get to the money.

R- Do you see hip-hop as a way to get money?

Lil- yea it is.

R- Is that the only thing you see hip-hop as..

LC- No, it's about friends and family, you know what I am saying sometimes they get involved so ah, I am about the money.

R- How did you decide to dread you hair?

LC- My brother, he got dreads

R- If you never saw anyone else with dreads would you have wanted them?

M- I was just use to seeing my cousins and all them. So I figure I get me some. As far as hip-hop I live in a hip-hop society, I say because you have designer, designer clothes as far as you looking @ Roc a wear w/ Ja-zee, I love Roc-a wear. So you got how they use to wear Addidas back in the day, they brought Addidas back and a lot of people wearing the now.

R- And that's all hip- hop?

M- That's right yea.

R- Let's talk about how it might affect you in school. Now that you all are in uniforms it's different, you can't come dressed in your baggy pants and big shirts. Although I see that some try to "sag" their uniform pants and do different things with your

shirts. (Does your identification with hip- hop affect how you think teachers treat you?)

De- I do, first day of school and soon as you walk in teachers kind of identify the kind of person you might be and they treat you different.

R- Is this based on how you look? Or Act?

De- probably both, but they don't know you, so it might be based on looks.

S- I feel the same as he feels cause people's impressions about the way you act and dress the way you present yourself to them and they do treat you different.

R- Is it a stereotyped image?

De- Yes ma'am

R- But are you presenting yourself towards them in a different way because of hip-hop?

M- No, they just feel that way. I know I have classes and people dress like me (uniforms) and they act just as bad as me and they won't get treated different. I guess the teachers just because who we are, they treat us on how, who we are.

R- Who you are in terms of...

M- How we look and being black.

R- Being Black and the hip hop image?

M-Yea

R- Do they give you the same attention that they would someone else who doesn't look like you?

LC- that depends on the teachers and how they feel. If they feel that they see you trying and you need help, some teachers help you some on the other hand, they just fee as if he do whatever he do. I was in a situation one time, when I called for help from a teachers and the teacher looked at me crazy and she went on to the next student. I don't know what that was for.

R- You don't know why she did that?

LC- No, there was no reason.

R- Do you get in trouble a lot?

LC- no ma'am

R- Not a lot of write-ups?

LC- Only trouble I get in is being late.

R- Do you think that the teacher's expectations of you relate to your appearance?

S- Yes, like if u in the streets and you see someone with a clean cut suite on you expect something a little higher from them. And you see someone with jeans on and dreads you think he's hanging out on the corner or something so it's like different expectations indifferent situations like that.

R. - Someone with dreads can be just as intelligent. Who created this stereotype?

LC- the streets

R- Where did the "streets" get it?

No response

R- Do you all talk about popular culture in your classes? Hip-hop, pop, rock?

De- not really, we talk about culture, like Muslim culture, religious cultures and African culture but not pop culture.

R- You all don't get a chance to talk about popular culture, that's like your culture.

S- No Ma'am we don't talk about that in class. Maybe outside of class.

R- Do you think it is relevant to who you are?

S- I do, because so many kids in school listen to hip-hop and live by hip-hop. I figure if it's that important we should at least have a 15-20 minute to talk about it.

R- Would you say Hip ho is who you are?

ALL- Yea, yes ma'am

R- You all say that?

S- in some ways yes.

R-If some one said "tell me about your self" how would you describe yourself?

M- I guess I could say, I wear dreads, I try to act hip-hop you know?

R- How is that? What is that?

M- The way I act, everything, I talk with a little hip-hop in my voice- I always use some slang her and there. The way I dress, I know that.

R- And you've always done this?

M- Since I, I grew up everybody, my older cousins and brothers, I was always around it.

R- What about you Lil Cater?

LC- Same for me

R- What you Dee? Cause you and S don't appear to embrace the style, dress wise?

Dee- Well I like listening to music, it doesn't matter the type of music long as it has a good hook to it and outstanding beat , but when I wake up in the morning the first thing on my mind is probably a hip hop song- shower @ night think about hip hop, all during school, during the day..

R- So if someone asked you to describe yourself?

Dee- I love hip-hop

R- Would you say you embrace the culture? Its who you are?

Dee- Not fully, not like

R- What is the overall message that you get from Hip-hop?

S- Different messages depending on the rapper, the song. You may have a dance; you have gangster rap- R & B all that singing, different things.

LC- I kind of get the same message- about the money all that the hustle.

R- Who do you listen to LC?

LC- T.I

S- I like Eminem- so I listen to a lot of him, but his message is about life..

Rappers, I listen to all the same messages- money, girls, the way they dress, cars, and all that.

R- Are the message a true depiction of life for you all?

Dee- I don't really see it that way.

R- How do you see it?

Dee- Its more their life but my life is not really like theirs. I don't have as much drama.

R- Where does education come into this?

S- Kanye and Common talk about education.

What is their message?

Dee- Sometimes rappers- Eminem, Nas, Kanye West, when I listen to them its like- lyrics and its makes you want to get a book that they might talk about.

S- I'm not sure when I do my homework, it helps me concentrate better. During school, I just try to get through the day, do my work. I don't cause too many problems now that I am I high school. I am trying to strengthen up. But I think music plays a

big role because now it's like its a part of me, I say its got a little something to do with education.

Dee- and because it's a part of us hip-hop if you like took away, I wouldn't be able to function, I wouldn't be too interested in school and no education.

R- Even though they don't talk about it in school?

Dee- Like drugs, if you stopped someone from using- I guess that what's goin happen to me cause I listen all the time.

R- Do you see hip-hop as promoting an oppositional culture? Do you know what that is?

All- Yea

R- A culture that's against normal standards

S- Not really- sometimes they just say, "Do you" be what you can be- most of it is not telling you to go out and kill someone.

Some may think that why I say it depends on who you listen too and what you take from it.

R- How are you all doing academically?

S- I am doing good.

Others- Okay

R- Does hip-hop or it influence have something to do with that?

Do you think that because of your embrace of the culture teachers don't give you your due?

Dee- I notice something wrong, I am not goin let it go by, I m goin speak up to you in a respectable way. If there are teachers

that don't treat me like other students, I am like why she treat me like that; I am just as intelligent as these other students.

S- For example like, he sags sometimes and I don't, me and him are in the same biology class and me and him had to work on this animal cell 3D project. Our biology teachers gave us our grade yesterday and even though we worked together, his grade was ten points lower then mine. I don't understand that.

Dee- I figured it out, it was after class- I had a 90 and he had a 100. I was goin to ask her today. We put the same effort and everything.

R- Do you think it something to do with her perception of you?

Dee- that the first thing I thought. Another example- everyone can get out of their seat, but when I get out of mine, I am the first one to get yelled at. I am always the one yelled at for no reason. I just go to sharpen my pencil and I'm yelled at to sit down. I don't get disrespectful, I just sit down.

M- It happen to me because me and another person working on a work sheet had the same answers- I guess they grade- the way they graded me was almost like they had a different standard for me- they expect me to show more work and the other person doesn't have too. When I don't show work, I don't get credit; they don't show work but still get credit.

R- How much of this has to do with you being AA?

Dee- I don't really like to say that people are discriminating or being racist cause if a Caucasian person was acting the way I was acting they would probably get the same treatment because of the way he was acting, not because of his race.

R- Is it the culture or race?

S- The way we act- carry yourself that the first impression and how people look at you and what they expect. Its not so much about black, white Mexican. Porto Rican all this other stuff. Its like now that we all together we might as well start to like each other, we're around each other.

R- Many Whites embrace hip -hop also. I've seen a few white guys with dreads.

S- I saw that too. The sag.

R- And statistics say they buy more hip- hop music than AA.

S- Starting to speak slang and everything like that.

Dee- I got a lot of friends, Caucasians and when there was an awards show last night and rap artist we discuss that. I got a lot of Porto Rican friends and we talk about rap too.

R- Let me make sure I got this right- you said Black males who do not embrace hip-hop are treated differently than those who do.

Dee- Yea

R- Why? Why would you think that clothes are clothes?

Dee- I guess it's the way you act too.

LC- talking loud, Expression

R- The drop out rate is pretty high many go to alternate schools, why is that?

Dee- some just can't function in regular school

S- I was just gonna say, I guess they drop out because no one believes in them, they keep going but if you just getting looked down on, no reason to just keep putting up with the same thing over and over.

R- But you said a lot of it has to do with tier attitude

S- Attitudes towards themselves and others. I mean, the way I see it I'm getting my education for me so it can help me in the future. I am not really getting it fir on one else. I know my family gonna be there to support me help me, keep me in school, and help with my work and every thing like that so...

R- So what is it that you think se can do differently in the school system to help African American males reach success/

Dee- if enough people give us some encouragement, encouraging us people keep telling us we can't do this, we can't do that.

LC- drugs, school drop out -it's a personal choice

R- Now having an African American president, do you think that...?

Dee yea, it should show us we can change, it should motivate us.

R- What is it gonna take? To help you all be successful

R- If embracing hi hop would affect how people view you, treat you, is that something you would consider changing?

S- I wouldn't

M- Me neither, I mean I grew up around it why should I, you change something that's been with you your whole life because you feel you should to please somebody else.

R- So if you were going on a job interview and they said you have to cut your hair...

M- That has happened to me. I went on a job interview at finish line and they said "you have to cut your hair" and I didn't want to cut my hair so I just went without the job.

R- LC would you cut yours?

LC- I don't know, I might braid it or something

R- Would you all if it were the other way around? - You had to grow it out?

S- I wouldn't, I 'm saying, no matter how my hair looks or how I look in the work place, I'm just gonna do my best, work for my money. So I figure if you got a customer come in the store, they only gonna see you one time.

R- What are the most positive memories you all have of school?

S- When I got a good report card, Elementary and middle school, I made honor roll in at lest each grade. I couldn't wait to show my parents because I got paid. I knew that's what they wanted.

Dee- Elementary school and middle school- you had a teacher that really tried to work with you.

M- Middle school, I made the honor roll and I knew my mom was happy. It made me feel good because my mom felt good.

R- Describe a time when you were treated unfairly.

LC- last year my math teacher, she would never help me. Told me I could go to tutorial

R- You asked for help/-Did you go to tutorial?

LC- yea, it didn't help. All we really did was just sit there. It was like being in a normal time being in class. She ain't really walk around and help us with no problems.

R- So there was no one on one personal help?

LC- Nall

R- How much individual attention do you all get in class?

S- High school is now you got a little set pace. Some teachers, the nice ones they be like if you need more help you can request it and they'll stay after school and work with you. That's the teachers that I like, they make me feel more comfortable in class., it helps me know that if I 'm a fail at least I'm mo have some help to bring my grades up and understand the work. But other teachers, they be like you don't come to tutorial, I can't help you or you know you not doing good in school. My teacher first semester told me "if you don't pass this test, you most likely won't pass the grade

and there's no need for you to show up in tutorial. So I was like...

R- Sometime it sounds like they don't give you much hope. They say things to make you think what's the use?

S- I came into her class and she told me, she was like overall it takes 9<sup>th</sup> graders two times to pass my class then she said, see you next year and she walked off.

R- Is that teachers still here?

Dee- I got her now.

R- What is the most important element in hip-hop for you all?

Dee- the message in the music

LC- the music

R- Do you mean the beat? Its got to be right?

R- I thank you all for your openness in talking with me. If this didn't take for some reason is it okay for me to pull you from class

All- yes, yes mamma.

