ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	PEACE, LOVE, UNITY & HAVING FUN: STORYING THE LIFE HISTORIES AND PEDAGOGICAL BELIEFS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE TEACHERS FROM THE HIP HOP GENERATION.
	Thurman LeVar Bridges, Doctor of Philosophy 2009
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This study was motivated by a desire to address the diminishing presence of

African American male teachers in U.S. schools and the significance of this study is

multifold. First, through an examination of the life histories of African American

teachers from the Hip Hop generation and their pedagogical beliefs, it sheds light on

cultural contexts in which their experiences with Hip Hop culture, their motivations

to teach, and their pedagogical approaches emerged. In doing so, this study expands

upon the existing literature on teacher beliefs, which all but excludes the ontologies,

epistemologies, and pedagogies of African American male educators.

This study focused on nine African American male K-12 teachers who were

born between 1965 and 1984 and feel closely connected to Hip Hop music and

culture. It examined their social, political, educational and cultural experiences (e.g.

coming of age during the crack epidemic, their connections to political movements

like Civil Rights and Black Nationalism), their schooling experiences, and their

involvement with Hip Hop culture and how these experiences have influenced their

pedagogical beliefs.

The participants embraced non-traditional pedagogies, relied on Hip Hop culture to

support their daily instruction, and situated Hip Hop culture as the foundation of a

transformative pedagogy that alleviates achievement challenges facing students of

color, while producing positive academic outcomes for, particularly, African

American boys.

PEACE, LOVE, UNITY & HAVING FUN: STORYING THE LIFE HISTORIES
AND PEDAGOGICAL BELIEFS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE TEACHERS
FROM THE HIP HOP GENERATION.

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2009

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Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this body of work to my father, Thurman L. Bridges, Jr., my sister, Sharon Bridges, and my grand father, Thurman L. Bridges, Sr., all of whom passed away during my doctoral program. I recognize their significance, in both life and death, in molding me into an honorable, compassionate, and hard working man. Likewise, I would like to honor God for providing me with the innate desire, motivation and tenacity to fight for what I believe in. I am humbled by the presence of God in my life and rely on the creator's energy and wisdom for renewal and guidance. My mother, Susie Ree Bridges, is the mother of all angels. Too me, she is the prototype of the manifestation of God's enduring love. I thank her for every sacrifice, hug, word of encouragement, and prayer. I am because she is, and for her, I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank the rest of my family, particularly, my brother, sisters, nieces and nephews for the constant boosts of confidence and the extra doses of love and care.

My advisor, Tara M. Brown, is an amazingly brilliant woman, who saw in me what I didn't recognize in myself. I thank her sincerely for being open to my ideas, and for challenging me to look beyond limiting conceptions of the plights of Black men and boys. I would also like to thank Marvin Lynn for contributing significantly to my early development as scholar. My work is heavily informed by his scholarship and I am grateful for his mentorship. Likewise, I would like to thank my dissertation committee members for investing in my potential as a junior scholar. In particular, I am grateful to Patricia Hill Collins, Jacqueline Irvine, Sherick Hughes, Odis Johnson, and Dan Chazan, for helping me to improve the quality of work and for guiding me both academically and professionally. For all of their mentorship, I am eternally grateful.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, Simone Gibson and Janet Awakoya, who have been stabilizing forces in my life. We endured our dissertation processes together and have developed a lasting professional and personal bond. I am honored to call them colleagues and life long friends.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This dissertation study was motivated by a desire to address the diminishing presence of African American male teachers in U.S. schools and the significance of this dissertation is multifold. First, through an examination of the life histories of African American teachers from the Hip Hop Generation and their pedagogical beliefs, it sheds light on cultural contexts in which their experiences with Hip Hop culture, their motivations to teach, and their pedagogical approaches emerged. In doing so, this study expands upon the existing literature on teacher beliefs, which all but excludes the ontologies, epistemologies, and pedagogies of African American male educators.

This study focuses on nine African American male K-12 teachers who were born between 1965 and 1984 and feel closely connected to Hip Hop music and culture. It examines their social, political, educational and cultural experiences (e.g. coming of age during the crack epidemic, their connections to political movements like Civil Rights and Black Nationalism, their schooling experiences, and their involvement with Hip Hop culture) and how these experiences have influenced their pedagogical beliefs.

This study revealed that the nine participants embraced non-traditional pedagogies, relied on Hip Hop culture to support their daily instruction, and viewed the intersections of Hip Hop culture and traditional curriculum as powerful sites

through which to address the achievement challenges facing students of color, while producing positive academic outcomes for, particularly, African American boys.

My Epistemology

In his 1994 Inaugural speech, Nelson Mandela, in the words of Marrianne Williamson, eloquently addressed the people of South African by saying,

> Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous. Actually who are you not to be? You are the child of GOD.

As I reflect on my epistemological foundations, the poignancy of the message behind those words reverberates within my consciousness. I am reminded of my deep spiritual roots as a child raised in a household where Christianity and Islam were celebrated equally, as well as my lived experiences as a young man raised in an inner-city environment where the vestiges of poverty threatened my life. Now as a doctoral candidate and teacher educator striving to lay a new foundation within the academe', I am challenged to revisit my epistemological beginnings as a means to evaluate my sources of knowledge, perspectives on the world, and more importantly, my beliefs about education for African American children.

I share similar backgrounds with the youth I teach and my adolescence as an "at-risk" African American student can be likened unto urban warfare. Drug abuse, alcoholism, and violence pervaded my community and for many years I fought for survival in an environment overwhelmed by the grips of poverty. I experienced the heartbreak of drug addition and saw its affect on my family and witnessed the

deleterious impact that alcoholism can have on an individual and an entire community. As a child, I navigated the streets of my own neighborhood, evading the propositions of drug dealers and users. And now, as an adult, I endure the loss of close childhood friends to drug addiction and senseless murder.

However, as an educated African American man, I represent the potential brilliance brimming from youth of color in marginalized communities. Blessed to have parents, educators, and mentors who, early in my development, recognized my abilities and nurtured my distinct gifts, I have been able to achieve a high level of success both personally and professionally, despite my "at-risk" label. My family encouraged me to look inward for validation and to be obedient to the voice of GOD that exists in all of us. Therefore I am guided by my ambition for self-empowerment, a passion for education, and a sense of responsibility to mobilize marginalized people and communities. These experiences, though difficult to revisit, have played a profound role in my development as an educator and scholar, and they shape my thinking about urban communities and the young people within them.

My history also has a very strong religious base. Most people are shocked when I tell them of my religious background. My father was a Baptist minister and my mother is a Muslim within the Nation of Islam. Now as an adult, I self-identify as Muslim and am heavily influenced by the lives of great historical and contemporary leaders such as: Minister Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Marcus Garvey, and Louis Farrakhan. Despite their various religious perspectives, they were all dedicated to addressing and alleviating the harsh realities of people of color. Therefore, my spiritual base represents an amalgamation of religious, social, and

political movements aimed at interrogating racism, elitism, and sexism within the U.S. context.

As such, I believe that the most powerful tools for creating positive change in the lives of marginalized groups are education and the acquisition of knowledge. However, an educational model rooted in White male supremacy and one that is used to maintain a social order in which people of color and those who live in poverty are positioned at the bottom, can be as detrimental to low-income students of color as no formal education at all. To teach a child, particularly an African American child, of the accomplishments and contributions of Whites, while relegating the accomplishments and contributions of African Americans to that of slavery, suffering, and degradation, perpetuates the legacy of Black inferiority to Whites in the U.S. Under such conditions, African American students will then continue to struggle academically in an educational system where they are forced to accept an inferior status. Therefore, I have been perpetually challenged by this pressing question: What is the purpose and function of formal education and how has it helped or hindered people of color?

This pressing question contributed to my decision to become an educator. My greatest accomplishment thus far has been my role as an African American male teacher in an urban school environment. As a teacher, I was responsible for motivating young people, who lived the same realities I did as an adolescent, to be bold enough to share their talents with the world. I had the honor of teaching some of the most talented, beautiful, and intelligent young minds our society has ever produced. They possessed an undeniable spark of genius that craved attention and

validation which, I believe, exists in all young people. While teaching, I learned more about myself than I have from any other personal experience. It is because of my students, that I realize the importance of my own life history and I now embrace the healing power of sharing that story with those who face similar obstacles. It is for these reasons that I focused my dissertation research on the life histories of African American teachers who, like me, have endured the social, political, and education challenges endemic to the Hip Hop generation.

As my adolescence mirrors that of many students who struggle academically in schools, I am deeply invested in addressing the growing needs of African American boys in urban school environments. Much of my success in school is due largely to the support and guidance I received from African American men in my family, school, and religious communities. Their presence, for me, provided positive models of African American manhood. However, my early experiences with African American men are in sharp contrast to the experiences of many African American boys today. As a former classroom teacher in an urban school, and a teacher and researcher in an urban alternative school, I realize that many African American male students are in search of positive male role models, particularly in school.

The personal relationships I have developed with African American boys as a classroom teacher have been extremely rewarding and I have come to realize the significance of my presence in their lives. I realize that much of my appeal, from their perspectives, is rooted in the fact that I am culturally connected and personally invested in their lives and well-being. I was raised in a community similar to theirs and I spoke and understood their language and cultural codes. Using music, personal

scenarios, and contemporary issues, I worked diligently to connect the school curriculum to their everyday lives. I believe that those connections contributed to my students' success on state standardized tests and their affection toward me as their teacher.

More recently, I have encountered a number of African American male teachers and school administrators who are deeply engaged in incorporating Hip Hop pedagogy into mainstream school curriculum. They too see the benefits of validating students' personal experiences and cultural expressions while ensuring that they meet local and state standards. But more importantly, they have expressed a deep understanding of the social struggle and enduring resistance from which Hip Hop emerged. Therefore, their interest in Hip Hop pedagogy transcends the common practice of only teaching traditional curricular standards through Hip Hop music. They are committed to embracing Hip Hop cultural as a transformative pedagogy by teaching urban youth about political activism and social justice, thus making larger political and social statements.

My upbringing, as a student of social and political movements (e.g. Nation of Islam and Black Panther Party) has instilled in me a sense of urgency in problematizing the systems that oppress people of color. Therefore, my intellectual contribution to the field of education will also be to aid in the development of new, innovative, and critical theoretical paradigms. Cornel West (1993), in his article, *The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual*, speaks about a new "regime of truth" which challenges Black scholars to critically examine the unique African American experience.

I am committed to transforming schools such that students of color may truly have the opportunity to succeed. Therefore, my research focuses specifically on what works for African American students in public schools. An examination of these successes in education is meant to be a catalyst and prototype for disrupting instructional and curricular practices in urban schools throughout the U.S. that educationally and socio-economically marginalize youth of color. My goal is to deconstruct archaic processes of teaching African American children and to identify new systems that work for urban youth. Scheurich & Young (1997), West (1993), and Dillard (2000) all urge African American intellectuals to be bold enough to embrace their positions as people of color within the academe' and to unapologetically focus their research on African Americans, if that is indeed their interest. In the process of conducting educational research which focuses on African American teachers and students, I believe that new research paradigms, theoretical perspectives, schools of thought, and peer reviewed journals may emerge that will address and alleviate the challenges, while highlighting the educational successes, of teachers and students of color.

Through my research, I will examine the pedagogical beliefs of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation who, I assert, are committed to promoting positive social and academic development among urban youth, particularly African American boys. My research will investigate the beliefs and pedagogical practices of those teachers who work to elevate the political and social awareness among urban youth, while providing them with the resources they need to manifest,

as Nelson Mandela suggests, the glory of GOD that they all possess—not just some of them, but each and every one of them.

Rationale

In a 2005-2006 report, The National Center for Education Statistics revealed that 42.9% of the public school student population is made up of students of color, while 83.1% of public school teachers are white. Only 7.4% of public school teachers are African American and African American male teachers represent less than 2% of the K-12 teaching population (Dillard, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005-2006). Therefore, White women constitute the majority of the teaching population in U.S. public schools, while children of color represent nearly half of the student population. As such, much of the existing research on teachers focuses on the experiences, beliefs, and pedagogies of white women and largely excludes young African American male teachers from the educational discourse on teacher beliefs and motivation.

According to Foster (1990), "if research on the backgrounds, identities, and culture of teachers help shape our views on teaching, then an omission of the perspectives of African American teachers severely limits our knowledge of teaching" (p.124). Given that the limited research on African American male teachers highlights innovative pedagogies, distinct teaching styles, and an emphasis on social justice, which are vital for, particularly, African American students, our lack of knowledge about these teachers is particularly troubling (Lynn, 2002; Lynn *et al.*, 2006). Data from this dissertation study helps to fill that gap.

Enter Hip Hop

Hip Hop Culture is a global phenomenon that challenges its participants to think critically about the realities of being a person of color in, particularly, urban America (KRS-One, 2003; Rice, 2003; Rose, 1994). As demonstrated in this study, the analyses that Hip Hop engenders in its illumination of racism, sexism, and elitism within U.S. society can compel those from the early development or "Golden Age" of Hip Hop to share their stories and experiences with younger generations and to disseminate messages of hope, prosperity, and progress to urban youth (Rice, 2003; Rose, 1994).

Since the terms culture and Hip Hop are so heavily used in this study, I will unpack both terms and provide deeper descriptions of each before I delved into an analysis of the relationship between Hip Hop culture and the social and academic well being of African American male students. Culture, broadly defined, is a cultivated way of life of a group of people. It represents the groups' learned and accumulated experience through social interactions and consists of behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols which they accept and perpetuate (http://www.tamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html).

Hip Hop culture, largely influenced by Afrika Bambaataa, is a cultivated way of life for urban youth, grounded on the tenets of peace, love, unity and having fun. The third edition of the American Heritage College Dictionary defines Hip Hop as, "the popular culture of big city and especially inner-city youth, characterized by Graffiti art, Break dancing and Rap music-of or relating to this culture" (American Heritage College Dictionary in KRS-One, 2003). *Hip Hop* is a term used to describe

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the collective experience, modes of thinking, and epistemologies of urban youth.

These are generally expressed through the nine elements of Hip Hop identified by

KRS-One (2003): Breakin' (Breakdancing), Emceein' (Rap), Graffiti art (Aerosal

Art), Deejayin, Beatboxin', Street Fashion, Street Language, Street Knowledge and

Street Entrepreneurialism. As will be demonstrated, participants in this study argued

that Education is also an essential element of Hip Hop. As such, Hip Hop is not

limited to music or dancing, nor is it only a source of economic gain, but it represents

a voice of urban youth as a genre and form of cultural expression that was created by

and for youth of color.

Understanding the history of Hip Hop and the social and political critique

embedded within its artistic expression provides contemporary urban youth with an

understanding of the libratory origins of this art form (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell,

2002; Hill-Collins, 2006; Kitwana, 2002; KRS-One, 2003). As Russell Simmons

asserts,

> The Hip Hop community is a spiritual and compassionate community. Its
>
> ability to speak in honest and truthful ways to millions around the world
>
> makes it one of the most powerful art forms of the late 20th and 21st century.
>
> Despite the public outcry and naysayers, we continue to grow and transform
>
> the minds of young people in a way that makes ours the most insightful and
>
> integrated youth culture in American History (Russell Simmons in KRS-One,
>
> 2003, pg. 180).

All of my participants, through their involvement in the early development of

Hip Hop, used messages then dominant within Hip Hop to encourage their students to

end "Self-Destruction," to put "Ladies First," to "Fight the Power" and to "Heal Oneself." These messages helped to shape their identities as African American male teachers and to promote self-esteem, community activism, social consciousness, a commitment to social justice, and critical thinking skills among of African American youth (Bynoe, 2004; KRS-One, 2003; Rose, 1994). One participant, Mustafa, situated Hip Hop as a space where people of color can revive their spirits and reinvest in their communities. He asserted,

Hip Hop is the Black man's Negro spiritual. It speaks to the struggles, the aspirations, the challenges, and the shortcomings, all in the same place. In a lot of ways, Hip Hop has become what the church used to be, which was a place for lots of different points of view within the community. It's that universal meeting place. It has the ability to bring people of different walks of life together to share an experience of culture, of love, takes the place of dance that places of worship used to.

He further argued that it is a place where young teachers of color, and their students, find spiritual renewal and validation.

These ideals are consistent with the socio-political origins from which Hip Hop emerged. Historically, Hip Hop crews grew out of former gangs who would, rather than fighting, engage in battles of words, beats, and dancing (Bynoe, 2004; KRS-One, 2003; Rose, 1994). The goal of these interactions was to determine who could, according to participant, Keyote, "rock the mic" better. Hip Hop battles, be they rapping, dancing, DJing, or bombing, even though there was dissing (joking at the opponents expense), was not about dehumanizing or debasing others but about

demonstrating one's skill and wit. That is why Hip Hop was used as a tool to end violence and bring communities together.

Many African American men who are a part of the "Hip Hop generation" – born between 1965 and 1984 (Hill-Collins, 2006; KRS-One, 2003) and are proponents of the original philosophy of the Hip Hop community, are unique due to the intersections of their early experiences with Hip Hop cultural as a powerful social and political voice for people of color and their experiences with racism and classism in the U.S. educational system (J. Brown, 1999; Lynn, 1999, 2002). The interaction between these diametrically opposed experiences – one which engendered a sense of voice and agency among people of color and the other which fostered feelings of inferiority and lack of self-worth – contributes to their reliance on Hip Hop artists as surrogate teachers and to Hip Hop culture as alternative classrooms (Hill Collins, 2007).

The Hip Hop generation embodies a new type of activism and is distinctive as it is the first to be raised in a racially integrated U.S. society. As the offspring to Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements, the Hip Hop generation has bore the fruit of voting rights, educational reform, and affirmative action campaigns. However, they too have experienced the rapid erosion of the racial, social, and educational gains that their fore-parents worked so diligently to achieve (Bynoe, 2004; Kitwana, 2002; KRS-One, 2003). Kitwana (2002) asserts,

> We've [the Hip Hop generation] developed a different sense of urgency
> rooted in what we've lost in a mere generation-what some critics have deemed
> the reversal of civil rights gains, such as welfare reform and the decline of

affirmative action-as well as in new attacks targeting Black youth like police brutality, anti-youth legislation, and the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of Hip-Hop generationers (pg.147).

This generation of African American male teachers and activists recognizes the undeniable gains achieved during the Civil Rights era, but they too are aware and critical of the unfinished business of the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements. Data from this study revealed that they recognize the centrality of racism in American life, but more specifically, they problematize the deleterious effects of racism on marginalized people and communities. Furthermore, they rely on the critique and resistance found within Hip Hop culture to expose racist practices within public school systems, law enforcement, and the broader legal system (Kitwana, 2002).

The personal narratives of the African American men from this generation have been largely unheard. Their experiences with racism, social and political movements of the past, and Hip Hop have engendered among them a set of beliefs about teaching students of color in U.S. schools, that has been undiscovered and under-theorized. Therefore, this dissertation study sheds light on the plight of African American males in schools, both teachers and students, while highlighting humanizing discourses and pedagogies that would motivate more African American men to consider teaching as a profession while encouraging African American male students to invest in the public educational system. In this study, however, the cultural and educational experiences of African American female teachers and students are minimally emphasized, not because they are de-valued, but because

positive discussions around the experiences of African American males in the K-12 schools are rare.

Therefore, my work focuses specifically on the life histories of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation as a means to insert their perspectives into the educational discourse about teacher beliefs and to provide a deeper understanding of the context through which their pedagogical beliefs emerged. Through gaining a deeper understanding of the lives, motivations, and pedagogies of African American male teachers, data from this study will help public school administrators and teacher education programs to recruit, retain, and provide resources that will attract prospective Black male teachers. Furthermore, by examining the pedagogies of this shrinking population of K-12 teachers, this study also works to dismantle the "great white hope" ideology that pervades popular culture and educational research. This ideology celebrates the lives and pedagogies of beneficent White teachers who serve students of color while ignoring the contributions of teachers of color. Lastly, this study highlights best practices for teaching students of colors in urban schools and informs our thinking about who can and should teach, particularly African American boys.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation study is situated within three domains of research literature: 1) beliefs about teaching among teachers of color, 2) the educational experiences of African American male students and 3) and the intersections of Hip Hop culture and Critical Race Theory.

Teaching Beliefs about teaching in Urban Schools

This section on teacher beliefs focuses on the beliefs of teachers of color, particularly African American teachers, as this is the population from which my participants are drawn. I have identified two themes that examine how their experiences influence their beliefs about teaching, particularly students of color and especially in urban schools; 1) expectations and 2) instructional practice. Also explained within each theme, is how these themes, in general, are described and experienced differently among teachers of color than among White teachers.

Expectations

According to the literature, African American teachers believe in their students' mental capacities and have high expectations for all African American youth, regardless of class and gender distinction (Lynn, 1999). Researchers assert that for many teachers of color, particularly African American teachers, teaching represents a form of ministry and they feel compelled to change the lives and save the souls of the students they teach (Irvine, 2003; Lynn, 1999). They often embody a sense of hope and possibility as it relates to teaching in urban schools. According to

Nieto, "Hope is the essence of teaching, and these teachers demonstrate hope in many ways. They have hope and faith in their students, in their own abilities as teachers, in trusted colleagues and new teachers, in the promise of public education, and in the profession of teaching" (Nieto, 2003, p.16). The belief that all students of color can and will learn is a representative characteristic of many teachers of color and the potential to have a positive impact on the lives of students of color contributed to their motivations to teach (Nieto, 2003). As a result of this enduring hope and promise, Lynn (1999) found many African American teachers hold themselves and others accountable for the educational development of every African American child (Lynn, 1999).

Nieto (2003) conducted a case study to explore that motivation and persistence of teachers of color in urban schools. Her research explored the lives of seven urban high school teachers in Boston Public Schools. The teachers were from diverse backgrounds—African American, Cape Verdean, and Haitian. Collectively they had several years of teaching experience-most had been teaching for more than 25 years. According to Nieto,

> Teachers in the inquiry group spoke about love to describe how they feel
> about their students and the subject matter that they teach. Love for them is
> not only a sentiment, but also combines trust, confidence, and faith in their
> pupils. Teachers demonstrate love through high expectations and rigorous
> demands on students and by keeping up with their subject matter through
> profession activities (p.16).

Research shows many African American teachers tend to view the behavior of students of color more favorably that White teachers, thus demonstrating an understanding of and appreciation for students' race, culture, and ethnicity that is important in teaching (Love, 2005). Downey & Pribesh's (2004) study revealed that many African American teachers viewed their African American eighth-grade students' behaviors and efforts more positively than did White teachers and overall rated their behavior more favorably by White teachers (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). African American teachers in this study also rated African American students as having fewer behavior and academic problems (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). Furthermore, rather than viewing students of color as lacking will, ability, or moral character, they tended to reflect on their own teaching as the source of the problem and sought ways to adjust their instruction (Nieto, 2003).

Teachers' beliefs about and expectations of students play a significant role in determining of the levels of empathy and support they provide for marginalized student populations. McAllister & Irvine's (2002) research shifts the focus from teachers' beliefs about students to teachers' beliefs about themselves and how empathy and caring impacts their instruction. They assert that empathetic dispositions are desirable characteristics among teachers; however, caution should be taken when empathy is overly emphasized. As such, empathy is important, however, empathy alone is not sufficient nor the sole requirement for becoming a culturally responsive teacher (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Their research examined the beliefs of 34 in service teachers (33 female and 1 male). Of the 34 participants, there were 25 African American women, 2 Latinas, 6 White women, and 1 White male. All 34

of the teachers believed that empathy was an essential characteristic when working with diverse populations of students but not enough to be an effective urban educator. McAllister & Irvine (2002) asserted, "The participants believed that empathy was an implicit part of being caring, supportive, and responsive to their students. Empathetic disposition led to more positive interactions with their students, supportive classroom climates, and student centered pedagogy" (p.442).

Foster's (1990) research on African American teachers sought to capture the wisdom and practices of experienced teachers of color. She studied 16 exemplary teachers-12 female/ 4 male who were chosen by community nomination to learn more about their childhood experiences, their families and communities, and schooling experiences. The participants were born between 1905 and 1973-the majority of whom were in their forties and fifties with 20-60 years of teaching. Foster found that many of her participants remembered African American teachers who lived in their communities and served as surrogate parents to children in their neighborhoods and church communities. Foster asserted, "teachers growing up in segregated communities were firmly anchored in their African American communities with their community life reinforced by their schooling experiences" (Foster, 1990, p.125). Teachers expressed their awareness of the marginal positions African Americans occupied in the U.S. (Foster, 1990). Due to a close proximity to their students and shared experiences with oppression and marginalization, these teachers held exceedingly high expectations of their African American students. Many believed that a high quality education was the tool to alleviate the harsh conditions facing people of color in the U.S.

This body of research reveals that teachers of color tend to hold high academic expectations of African American students. Their general belief that all children can and will learn and as well as their empathy for and support of African American students, is evidence of their personal investment in students of color. Furthermore, many teachers of color draw from a rich spiritual tradition, which, they assert, played a significant role in their decision to become educators. Some also draw heavily from early lessons learned from African American teachers, primarily women, in their schools and communities. Therefore, spiritual beliefs and connection to a legacy of teaching, seemed to significantly impacts their beliefs about the academic potential and success of students of color and influenced the ways in which they help themselves accountable for ensuring their students' success.

This is in contradistinction to research showing that many white teachers view urban students of color as less capable than their White middle class counterparts, even when performance was equivalent. Dowey & Pribesh's (2004) research revealed that White teachers tended to rate African American students' behavior less favorably than African American teachers. They further stated, "Black students were typically rated as poorer classroom citizens than are white students," (Downey, 2004, p.275). They also asserted, "teachers rate [d] Black students as exhibiting more externalizing problem behaviors than they do white students" (Downey, 2004, p.275). Research literature also reveals that many White women teachers see themselves as having diminished significance as educators, when teaching students of color, (Solomon, 1996; Reed, 1998) and having to keep tight control of their students, providing them with limited autonomy and opportunities to interact with one another

(Reed, 1998). These diminished expectations significantly influenced the attitudes that some White female teachers have about students of color. Furthermore, it uncovers a potential trend towards their deficit thinking about students from historically marginalized groups (Solomon, 1996).

In addition, the recent literature showed that many White pre-service teachers feel resentment and resistant towards teacher education programs that force to them work in and study the experiences of people in impoverished schools and communities (Leland & Harste, 2005). According to Leland & Harste, "many of the students in this group did not approve of our emphasis on critical literacy and did not see any benefit from working in urban schools during their teacher education program" (Leland & Harste, 2005, p.66). Students in this study, mainly White women, seemed angry that they had to be subject to what they deem as unfair student teaching placements. One pre-service teacher in particular lamented about her student teaching placement in an urban school stating the she applied to a normal teacher education program, not one that made her spend time in urban schools. She went on to say that she would not have signed up for that particular teacher education program if she had known that the emphasis would largely be on diversity, critical literacy, and urban students (Leland & Harste, 2005).

Instructional Practices

Ladson-Billings (1992) characterized the cultural, political, and social beliefs of African American teachers as culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billing, 1992). According to Ladson-Billings (1992), culturally responsive teachers "urges collective action grounded in cultural understandings, experiences, and ways of

knowing the world" (p.382). Furthermore, culturally responsive teachers are deliberate in focusing their attention on students whose educational, economic, social, and political, and cultural futures are most tenuous (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As such, culturally responsive teachers rely on students' real life experiences to shape their instruction and both the teachers and students are engaged in collective struggles against the status quo and, thus, all members of the classroom are positioned as political beings (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992b).

Though being a teacher of color is not a prerequisite of culturally responsive teaching, research suggests that many African American teachers, particularly women, possess qualities and have adopted instructional strategies that benefit students of color. According to Irvine (2003) these teachers view teaching as a spiritual calling, caring, other mothering, believing in students abilities, demanding the best from all students, disciplining students in a compassionate yet nonsense manner (Irvine, 2003;Love, 2005).

Dixon's (2003) findings on the beliefs of African American female teachers substantiated Ladson-Billings (1992) and Irvine (2003) research on culturally responsive teaching. Dixon's research revealed three over arching themes about teachers self-perceptions and instructional practices: (1) *Teaching as a Lifestyle-* therefore, good teachers dedicate time and effort to creating lessons and materials that engage and challenge their students. (2) *Discipline and Expectations for Excellence-* therefore, effective teachers manage their classrooms well and challenge their students to excel and (3) *Teaching as Other mothering-* therefore*,* teachers believe that they serve as surrogate parents to their students (Dixon, 2003).

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Research on African American male teachers reveal that they tend to be motivated to impart knowledge and prepare students to survive in a racialized society. African American male teachers possess a commitment to teaching African American children, particularly males who live in difficult circumstances, because in many ways they see themselves in the students they teach (Lynn, 2002).

Lynn's (2002) research on African American male teachers shed light on the motivations, persistence, and self-perceptions of this under-represented but critically important population. The majority of African American men teachers tended to identify themselves as persons with the ability or the responsibility to change the lives of African American youth, particularly those living in working class poor communities (Lynn, 2002). African American men possess an invaluable knowledge about their communities to help change the conditions of poor people in the United States (Brown, 1999). These teachers are confident that their knowledge and experience in the community are important factors in shaping their identity (Lynn et al., 2006) and they see teaching as their a contribution to the greater good of the community (Brown, 1999; Foster, 1997; Lynn, 1999, 2002). These men also see themselves as father figures with a responsibility to provide leadership in the lives of young men, and they position themselves as a protector of the humanity of African American boys who live in a society that is structured for their demise (Lynn, 2002).

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999; 2002) and Dixon (2003) argued that African American teachers, from a historical perspective, utilize culturally responsive teaching practices because, "Black teacher were able to create homelike atmospheres in school where students experienced a continuity of expectations and interactional

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patterns between their home and schools, their parents and their teachers"

(Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, p.710). However, teaching is also political; therefore,

educators feel personally committed to and responsible for breaking the cycle of

subordination (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999).

Furthermore, teachers of color tend believe that they have the power to

influence students' self-perceptions and influence their aspirations beyond the

immediate limitations of their environments (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999).

Beauboeuf-Lafontant asserted, "The history of 'good' Black segregated schools and

the teachers fondly recalled in those schools is important to the concept of political

relevance because it evidences this positive struggle and demonstrates that politically

relevant teaching has a long and proud past" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, p.719).

Michelle Foster's (1990) research on African American teachers from

multiple generations highlighted teachers dedicated to talking with children in the

language that they understand while focusing on social justice, political

consciousness, and activism. The teachers in her study expressed an earnest interest

in engaging students in critical dialogues about racism and injustice. Foster (1990)

summarizes, "These teachers share the beliefs that teaching African American

students successfully requires more than merely mastering subject matter and the

accompanying pedagogical skill, but consists of engaging them in a dialogue that

questions and seeks to change the status quo" (p.138). These dispositions are largely

derived from their experiences, as students, with African American teachers who

possessed similar qualities. As a result of their historical experiences with African

American teachers, many developed an interest in education that reaches beyond imparting subject matter knowledge on black children (Foster, 1990).

Some scholars argue that African American teachers have always been leaders in the struggle for social, economic, and political rights of African Americans in the U.S.-particularly for African American students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Case, 1997; Dixon, 2003). Many have historically viewed their roles as changes agents in the cause to mobilize the community. According to Lynn, "Black teachers are among a special class of Black critical race and gender theories who have historically fought for the liberation of Black men and women even when it was not in their own personal best interest to do so" (Lynn, 2002, p.123).

Lynn further argues that African American educators have the unique ability to express cultural solidarity and communicate with African American students, and their families, in styles that are familiar and they are better equipped to recognize the historical, political, and economic realities that shape their educational opportunities (Lynn, 1999).

Research shows that a commitment to social justice and the ideals of democracy, fair play, and equality figures prominently among the reasons why teachers of color chose this profession (Nieto, 2003). In addition, an overwhelming majority of teachers embrace the idea of education for social justice and culturally relevant teaching as an important teaching practice (Love, 2005).

Song's (2006) research parallels Love's (2005) work and sought to address teachers' beliefs on teaching, learning, and students of color. Her study largely consisted of pre-service and in-service African American female teachers. Song's

findings reveal that African American teachers believe that teachers need to prepare

their instruction based on their diverse students needs and be sensitive to learning

needs of all students and that teachers should try to come up with the strategies to

meet the needs of students from low socio-economic families. They further

articulated that poor students and students who speak English as a second language

could learn the challenging materials and that heterogeneous classes might allow

higher level achievement (Song, 2006).

Ladson-Billings (1995) studied the pedagogies of eight successful African

American women teachers of students of color in a 3-year ethnographic study.

Several themes emerged from her research. First, all of the teachers identified

strongly with teaching and were not ashamed about their professions and they all

chose to teach in this low-income environment. Secondly, they saw themselves as

part of the community and teaching as a way to give back to the community. Third,

they believed that their work was artistry- or a specific gift that they could cultivate.

Lastly, they felt a sense of responsibility towards ensuring the academic success of

each student, especially those most in need (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This body of research reveals that teachers of color tend to employ culturally

responsive instructional practices when teaching African American students. As

such, their instructional approaches borrow from the cultural understandings, ways of

knowing and personal experiences of students of color. Furthermore, due to their

shared experiences with oppression, they tend to emphasize political activism and

social justice in their curricular focus. In addition, many teachers of color self

identify as change agents and advocates for the African American community. They

tend to believe that teaching is a calling and that it requires that they care for all students as surrogate parents. Also, for many of them, teaching means believing in students' abilities and demanding the best from all students, particularly students of color. Additionally, many teachers of color expressed a great deal of pride in their work as educators and positioned themselves among a legacy of teachers that worked to educate Black youth while dismantling the social conditions that contributes to their marginalization.

Many of the aforementioned characteristics were less evident in the research on the expectations and instructional practices of White teachers. Research revealed that unless White teachers have had meaningful and lasting encounters in teachers education programs that strongly embraces multicultural education or urban education, they tend to posses a deficit perspective related to the academic abilities, behavior patterns, and cultural norms of students and parents of color. This is not to say however, that African American pre-service teachers fail to view students of color from a deficit perceptive, however, it does speak to a trend in the ways that teachers believe and teach. For many White teachers, the compassionate and empathetic yet stern and disciplining disposition that many teachers of color posses, seems to be learned rather than natural behavior. The literature shows that more exposure to and meaningful experiences with students and families of color, is important to nurture caring behaviors. The implications of this, often times, slow learning process can be detrimental to students of color, particularly African American male students. One consequence of the cultural, emotional, spiritual disconnection between African American students, particularly males, and teachers who view their students from a

deficit perspective could be the overrepresentation of students from marginalized

groups in school exclusion is evidence of that (i.e. special education, suspension,

expulsion, drop out) (Brown, 2007).

Researchers argue that these trends are largely due teachers' negative views

on the cultural codes of student of color. Nonetheless, some research findings are

promising in that they show transformation in the ways that some pre-teachers think

about teaching students of color in urban schools (Cross, 2003; Dahouse, 2006;

Downey, 2004; Hanssen, 1998). This promise is largely unfulfilled, however, as very

few pre-service teachers and teacher education programs have exhibited a

commitment to working with students of color in urban schools in authentic ways

(Lynn, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

An examination of this body of research on teacher beliefs on teaching

students of color in urban schools is helpful as it uncovers how the personal

experiences of teachers of color shape their expectations of and instructional practices

with African American students. I further analyzed within each theme, how these

themes, in general, are described and experienced differently among teachers of color

than among White teachers. This analysis, supported by the literature, reveals trends

in the expectations and the ways in which some White teachers, who may have

limited experiences with African American families and communities, and teachers of

color, who may share cultural and historical experiences with African American

students, approached their instructional practices.

This body of research provides a rich description and analysis of the beliefs of

teachers serving students of color. The aforementioned studies highlight the

perspectives of White women as well as male and female teachers of color. However, I did not find much literature that spoke about teaching expectations and practices of African American teachers that yielded negative academic and social outcomes for youth of color. Likewise, much of the literature highlighting examples of culturally responsive teaching was analyzed from the perspectives of experience African American female teachers. As such, I found limited research on pedagogies of inexperienced White women teachers of students of color yielding positive academic outcomes. Furthermore, the research on male teachers, particularly African American males, was limited and generally situation around the experiences of older men from the Civil Rights generation, thus ignoring the experiences of the younger generation of educators. This lack was also consistent among the research on African American and White female teachers.

Notwithstanding, Lynn (1999) and Foster's (1997) research significantly influences my research as the former specifically focuses on African American male teachers while the later provides both generational and historical context to the ways that African American teachers develop their beliefs about teaching and learning.

As such, the expectations and instructional practices of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation have been largely ignored in the literature. The paucity of research on this specific population of teachers, support my assertion that the life history experiences and pedagogical beliefs of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation should be highlighted as they remain relatively voiceless in the existing discourse teacher beliefs. Data from this dissertation study will help to fill that gap in the literature.

African American Male Students

In the following section I will explore the educational, social, and ecological challenges facing African American male students in urban schools. This is important because the literature suggests that teachers' beliefs about students, particularly African American males, have a direct impact on their level of compassion, care and commitment towards ensuring their academic success. Teacher beliefs also influence the quality of and types of pedagogical approaches they employ to teach students of color. Therefore, the deficit perspectives that many teachers, particularly White women, bring to urban classrooms, as outlined in the literature review above, can have devastating implications for African American male students in urban schools. The literature within this section is organized under three themes as it: (1) investigates the current conditions of African American boys in urban schools, which is largely connected to teacher expectations and instructional practices, (2) outlines the theoretical explanation regarding these educational and social conditions, and (3) explores best practices for alleviating the educational and social conditions facing African American male students.

Setting the Context

African American boys, have shown severe signs of distress within our schooling system and their academic performance continues to lag behind their White counterparts. According to the Education Trust Foundation's 2005 report, only 12% of African American 4th graders reach proficient or advanced levels in reading and math, and 61% have not achieved basic level training. By the 8th grade, the same proportion of students fall below the basic achievement level while only 7% reach

proficient or above. To exacerbate these disparities, African American boys are punished more often and more harshly in school (Brown, 2007) and are experiencing high rates of incarceration, drug and weapons offenses, and school exclusion (Noguera, 1996, 2003a, 2003b). According to the Justice Policy Institute, "While African American youth comprise 17% of the youth population, African American youth represent 27% of all drug violation arrests. African American youth represent 32% of all weapons arrests, and were arrested for weapons offenses at a rate twice that of whites" (Justice Policy Institute, 2006).

Lee's (1996) research provides an alarming profile of African American male students experiencing widespread failure in U.S. public schools. He asserts that African American males have been marginalized by school tracking, are over represented in rates of suspension and expulsion, and are three times more likely to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded (Lee, 1996b). These conditions diminish African American boys' personal aspirations, dispositions towards academic achievement, and self worth. In addition, the dearth of positive educational experiences contributes to feelings of alienation that African American boys often experience in schools, fueling widening black/white achievement disparities (Dance, 2002; Graff, 2001; Majors *et al.*, 2001; Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Osborne, 1999; Slack, 1993; Steele, 1997).

The stifling of achievement, aspirations, and efficacy among African American males in schools contributes to their soaring dropout and incarceration rates (Brown, 2007; Patton, 1998b) and is reflected in the frightening over-representation of African American males in prisons and under-representation in colleges and

universities. Williams (2005) points out that the number of African American males

in prison as opposed to in college has increased by 500% in the last 20 years. While

in 1980 there were over 320,000 more African American men enrolled in college than

were imprisoned, by 2000, over 188,000 more African American men were

imprisoned than were enrolled in college. Seeking to explicate soaring incarceration

rates among African American males, Noguera's (1996) report on the social and

economic indicators related to employment, education, health care, and crime, reveals

that African American males are more vulnerable to marginalization than other

subgroups. The labor market represents one of many formal institutions where these

disparities are evident. Particularly in urban areas, unemployment rates among young

African American males are often above 50% and due to their relative lack of

education, this group has been regarded as the permanent underclass and deemed

"unemployable" (Noguera, 1996). Further, African American males are the only

United States population with a declining life expectancy as they are dying of

homicide, suicide, substance abuse, infant mortality, heart disease, hypertension,

diabetes, and HIV and AIDS infections at alarming rates (Noguera, 2003b).

Some would argue that African American men in the U.S. are an "endangered

species" as they are over represented in school suspension, expulsion and drop out

rates, are more likely to receive special education services, and have

disproportionately high rates of homicide, suicide, substance abuse, infant mortality,

heart disease, hypertension, and HIV/AIDS infections (Lee, 1996; Noguera, 2002;

Patton, 1998; Williams, 2003). These trends negatively impact African American

boys, as many of them need positive relationships with African American men who

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are models of success and well-being. This also impacts the schooling experience of African American male students as they have limited experiences with African American male teachers who may possess unique cultural and gendered perspectives that their female counter parts lack. Brown asserts, "Since boys are reared primarily by women, they must learn their masculinity from some abstract concept, either through popular media or their peers" (Brown, p.421, 1999).

In the following sections, I will address some specific theoretical explanations that seek to explicate the challenges facing African American boys in urban schools. These theories borrow from both psychology and sociology in their examination of the factors contributing to African American male underachievement in urban schools. I will also examine school practices that have been effective in fostering academic success among African American boys, including the potential impact of African American male teachers whom researcher have found to have great potential for positively influencing the academic and social development among African American boys (Lynn, 1999, 2002).

Theoretical Explanation

Researchers within the fields of education, sociology, and psychology have written extensively about the social and educational challenges facing African American boys in U.S. public schools, in relation to teachers and teaching, as connected to social and economic conditions of urban communities. For example, Wilson (1998) points to White and middle class Black flight from inner city neighborhoods as contributing to the concentrated poverty that many African Americans face. Such demographic shifts, he contends, have engendered a culture of

poverty among those remaining in these communities as they have been left with few examples of mainstream success, depressed ambitions for upward mobility, and skepticism about the efficacy of schooling. Concentrated poverty, social isolation, and economic depression are prevalent in marginalized communities and contribute to the feelings of hopelessness that pervade urban schools and neighborhoods. Such ecological conditions, which foster a diminished sense of agency among those living in poverty, have been connected to identities and behaviors considered to be oppositional to school success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and contribute to soaring rates of school dropout, crime, and incarceration among African American males (Noguera, 2003).

Sociologists have examined the ways in which African American boys have negotiated these ecological challenges by developing counter-cultural strategies for addressing the harshness of their realities. Various cultural-centered explanations have been employed to shed light on the "oppositional" behaviors that African American boys exhibit in schools. As Dance (2002) points out, African American boys often react to dangerous surroundings and feelings of alienation from school by suppressing feelings of remorse or fear, leading them to be labeled "hard" or "hardcore" (Dance, 2002, pg.5). Their disaffected outer shells are largely a response to racial and class biases within schools and society that have perpetuated their marginalization. Teachers who do not understand or care about these contributing factors, discipline, alienate and banish these students as troublemakers. Many African American boys face these realities early in their educational careers and, in turn, experience deflated self-esteem and leveled aspirations for school success. For

these students, the stigma of inferiority contributes to academic regression, which generally starts at the 3rd grade (Dance, 2002; S. J. Lee, 1996b; Noguera, 2003b; Slack, 1993).

Steele (1997) uses "stereotype threat" to explain how the stigma of racial inferiority diminishes academic performance of boys. Due to stereotypes that they are innately underachieving, disengaged, defiant, and uneducable, African American male students may feel threatened and thus, under-perform in or reject school for fear that these stereotypes of them are indeed true (Steele, 1997). Osborne (1999) references the term "disidentification" to explain the ways in which African American students disengage from the schooling process. He describes this as a culturally oriented response to stereotype threat and negative schooling experiences and as a strategy for preempting assumptions that they are un-intelligent and un-teachable. Due to a dearth of positive academic, social, and personal experiences in schools, African American students, particularly boys, may identify less with their schooling experiences and more with their home and community. They ultimately "disidentify" with school, which they deem as harsh and unforgiving spaces to negotiate (Osborne, 1999). Disidentification from school and the negative academic self-concept that some African American boys develop very early in their schooling, contributes to future poor academic outcomes (Slack, 1993; Steele, 1997).

In considering cultural explanations for school failure, Ogbu (1998) argues that it is vital to understand differences in students' minority statuses. He delineates two distinct types of minorities in the U.S. society- voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary minorities are those who willingly migrated to the U.S. Ogbu asserts that

this population may experience some initial difficulties in school due to language and cultural differences, but generally, they enjoy long term academic success as they view schooling and academic achievement as an effective means towards upward mobility. Furthermore, voluntary minorities are less inclined to view the U.S. government and/or its institutions as a threat or adversarial to their cultural identities and are more willing to adopt U.S. cultural norms.

In contrast, involuntary minorities belong to groups who have been captured or conquered by the United States (U.S.) government, like African Americans, Chicano/as and Native Americans. According to Ogbu, this population generally perceives U.S. institutions to be adversarial to their cultural identities and they reject U.S. mainstream culture. Additionally, as they have not been rewarded equally to Whites for their work and educational attainment, they hold skepticism about formal education as a guaranteed means for attaining upward mobility (Ogbu, 1998). He further posits that due to their experiences with racism and discrimination within the U.S., many involuntary minorities have adopted an oppositional identity to white mainstream culture. Therefore, they are reluctant to cross cultural boundaries and embrace "white ways" (p.180) of talking, thinking, and behaving out of fear of being dislocated from their own minority identity and alienated them from their cultural community (Ogbu, 1998). Furthermore, involuntary minorities tend to develop a new sense of social and collective identity that is in direct opposition to the social identity of the dominant group. This group relies on "cultural inversion" (Ogbu, 1992) to negate the negative stereotypes that they perpetually experience. Ogbu posits, "Sometimes they use it as a strategy to manipulate Whites, to get even with Whites,

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or as Holt (1972) puts it for African Americans, 'to turn the tables against whites' "
(Ogbu, 1992, pg. 9). However, much of this literature has been critiqued for seeking
to explain the multi-dimensional and -generational experiences of African Americans
in the U.S., through a singular lens that focuses primarily on role of the individual and
the community rather than on larger systems (i.e. education, judicial, political) as
sights of oppression.

In fact, African American males are described in educational and sociological
discourses from deficit perspectives. Popular messages, in the media and in everyday
discourses, characterize this population as unintelligent, hyper-masculine,
disrespectful and violent. There are two dominant images of African American males
today: one situates his as a criminal and the other categorizes him as an endangered
species. According the Ferguson (2001), "the image of the Black male criminal is
more familiar because its prevalence in the print and electronic media as well as in
scholarly work. The headline of newspaper articles and magazines sound the alarm
dramatically as the presence of Black males in public spaces has come to signify
danger and a threat to personal safely" (pg. 78). In their characterization of African
American men, journalists and social scientist seek to ease their concern for their
victimization and high incarceration rates by categorizing them as endangered.
Ferguson further posits, "[endangered] represents him as being marginalized to the
point of oblivion. While this discourse emanates from a sympathetic perspective, in
the final analysis the focus is all too often on individual maladaptive behavior and
Black mothering practices as the problem rather than on the social structure in which
this endangerments occurs."

Rather than reading African American boys expressions of masculine dispensation as being naturally naughty, schools tend to categorize these behaviors as signs of vicious, aggressive, and insubordinate behavior that needs to be controlled. In stead, according to Ferguson (2001), "what is required from them is a performance of absolute docility that goes against the grain of masculinity" (pg. 78). Davis (2003) further explications this point by stating, "African American males also contribute to how punishments are constructed by their personal responses to a schooling environment perceived as hostile and disruptive. The social construction of young men as troublesome bodies is tied to the idea that Black men are similarly constructed as violent, threatening and menacing" (pg. 297). For instance, males play style and behaviors are often misunderstood by female teachers and seen as defiant, aggressive and intimidating (Davis, 2006). These conceptions can potentially have a negative impact on social policies, educational reforms, and overall schools practices that impact African American boys. (Davis, 2006; Dance, 2002, Ferguson 2001)

As such, our efforts towards finding ways to handle African American boys in schools, has left us ill-equipped to understanding how they construct personal meaning for their social and academic lives (Davis, 2006). For African American males, youth and masculine identity are complex in both its constructions and consequences. As such, culture can be a significant mode of defense, of resistance and recuperation for those with few sources of power in society. According to Davis, "A good illustration of this, which I elaborate on in the text, is the way that African American boys use language brought from home and community as a form of self-protection and asserting a group identification in opposition to school" (pg.20). In

similar ways, African American males use Hip Hop culture as venue where their identities cannot be easily conceptualized or controlled. Furthermore, as this dissertation points out, Hip Hop culture can be used in schools as culturally responsive and libratory framework through which African American youth may become more academically and socially engaged.

Though most cultural explanations focus specifically on non-mainstream behaviors among African American boys, within this research are humanizing theoretical perspectives that highlight the redeeming qualities of all young people, regardless of their dispositions toward school. Despite their "tough fronts," (Dance, 2002), the overwhelming majority of urban youth resist the temptations of engaging in illegal behaviors. She explains that, for many African American males, the expression of 'cool behavior' is merely a coping strategy to manage feelings of rage and stress in the face of prejudice and discrimination (Dance, 2002; Majors et al., 2001). Further, cool poses and/or cultural codes (e.g. walking styles, talking styles, handshakes, and nonverbal aloofnesss), which are performances of black masculinity, are not necessarily school defiance (Dance, 2002; Majors, 2001, Osborne, 1999).

While the above literature has focused more on explaining than developing solutions for educational disparities, it does point to some important considerations for effective schooling for African American boys. As a means of investigating positive educational experiences for these students, the following sections will examine the importance of teachers who have high expectations of their students, who respect their intelligence, and understand their educational experiences and the social conditions under which they live (e.g. racism, poverty, etc.).

Best Practices

In an effort to identify what fosters school success among historically marginalized students, researchers have investigated teachers' pedagogical and personal beliefs about these students. This body of research is particularly important for African American boys given the findings that many of these students experience threats to their confidence, motivation and success in U.S. schools. Majors (2001) contends that teachers must understand these threats and understand how they, through their own attitudes and behaviors, may be complicit in order to better serve African American males within the classroom context. This requires shifts from deficit perspectives to more asset-based and non-traditional ways of thinking about teaching African American students. Such pedagogical approaches would involve learning environments that foster: 1) a sense of identity and feelings of connectedness to the black community and diaspora, 2) social, historical and political understandings that will equip students to overcome racism and other debilitating circumstances; 3) a reverence for the worth and dignity of one's parents and family and community members, 4) a masculine ideal that is pro-family and pro-social, and 5) a philosophy that honors and facilitates continued growth and development (Majors, 2001). When schools ignore the significance of these forms of cultural awareness and pedagogical relevance, black male students can suffer academically, perceiving themselves as abnormal and deviant in relation to dominant society (Davis, 2001; Graff, 2001; Majors et al., 2001).

The lack of attention to these cultural aspects has been connected to the cultural, gendered, and age differences between African American male students and

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the White female teachers who dominate the K-12 teaching profession and these differences can contribute to the academic achievement challenges that many students experience in urban schools (Brown, 2007; Foster, 1990, 1997; Irvine, 2003; Lynn, 2002). Some researchers have attributed the overrepresentation of African American boys in school suspension, expulsion, and special education to teachers who misinterpret these students' cultural codes (i.e. "tough fronts" and "cool poses") as aggressive, defiant, and anti-social behaviors (Allen & Mountain, 1992; Dance, 2002; Lee, 1996b; Noguera, 2003b; Patton, 1998b; Williams, 2005). Further, women are the sole caretakers of many African American boys who do not have positive relationships with African American men who are models of success and well-being. As such, they are vulnerable to the influences of popular media and their similarly disenfranchised peers, in developing views about masculinity and its relationship to schooling (Brown, 1999).

One means for addressing this dearth of role models and creating more effective educational experiences for African American boys is recruiting and retaining African American male teachers. Though there is a paucity of research on African American male teachers, the existing literature suggests that they may possess very specific pedagogical practices that other teaching populations may lack. Lynn (2002) and Brown's (1999) research on African American male teachers sheds some light on the motivations, persistence, and self-perceptions of this under-represented but critically important population. They contend that these teachers tend to be motivated to prepare students to survive in a racialized society and posses a commitment to teaching black children, particularly males who live in difficult

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circumstances, as they see themselves in the students they teach. The teachers in Lynn's (2002) study believed that they had the ability, knowledge, and the responsibility to change the lives of African American youth, particularly those from poor communities. Moreover, their knowledge of and experiences within urban communities were important factors in shaping their identity as teachers. African American male teachers saw themselves as father figures with a responsibility to provide leadership in the lives of young men, and as the protectors of the humanity of African American boys who live in a society that is inherently racist and structured for their demise (Lynn, 2002).

Race emerged as a critical component in the identities of the black male teachers in Lynn's (2002) study. He asserts that,

"The majority of them tended to believe that their identities as Black men provided them with a deeper level of understanding of the needs of their students. Because they were black men with a vast knowledge of the community in which they worked, they could more easily understand the outside problems encountered by their student" (Lynn, 2002, p.126).

These men were committed to the notion of racial uplift and identified themselves as having the ontological perspectives needed to improve the lives and social conditions of their students and the larger community (Lynn, 2002). African American male teachers often have a unique understanding of what it means to live in a society where African American males are deemed as dangerous, uneducable, hyper-sexualize, and endangered. They are more likely (than, particularly White females) to have

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experienced, first hand, the deleterious affects that schooling can have on the personal and emotional development of students of color.

African American male teachers' interrogation of racism as a crucial factor in the educational crises facing African American boys can be situated within a Critical Race Theoretical (CRT) perspective that recognizes the intransigence of racism in American society. African American male teachers, like those in Lynn's study, are passionately committed to teaching students of color using critical and non-traditional theoretical frameworks, as a means to counter the racial oppression endemic in the educational system. Hip Hop has emerged as a pedagogical tool for doing just that.

The educational and social experiences of African American boys in urban schools are grim as the literature outlines their overrepresentation in special education, school exclusion and drop out rates, as only a few of the many challenges they face. Researchers have attempted to explain their stifled achievement from sociological and psychological perspectives, which point to some important considerations for effective schooling for African American boys. One such consideration for addressing, specifically the dearth of role models and positive educational experiences for African American boys, is recruiting and retaining African American male teachers, particularly those who draw upon Hip Hop pedagogy and Critical Race Theory.

Intersections between Hip Hop Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory (CRT)

In the following section I will discuss intersections between CRT and Hip Hop Culture that African American male teachers may be well positioned to draw upon. This is important given the pedagogical orientations of African American male

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teachers, as discussed in the literature, in developing innovative and effective ways to address the educational challenges facing African American boys.

It's time to stand together in unity cause if not then we're soon to be
Self destroyed, unemployed, the rap race will be lost without a trace
Or a clue but what to do is stop the violence and kick the science
Down the road that we call eternity where knowledge is formed and you'll learn to be
Self-sufficient, independent to teach to each is what rap intended
But society wants to invade. So do not walk this path they laid.

-D-Nice in Self Destruction

The above quote reflects the sentiments of MC D-Nice and countless other African American men from the Hip Hop generation who believe that in order to end cycles of self-destruction and unemployment in inner cities, urban youth must reject violence and embrace math and the sciences—not for the benefit of earning good grades, but for their development into self-sufficient and independent people. Embracing Hip Hop as a critical lens through which to teach students about the pervasiveness of racism within the U.S. context and how to effectively and productively resist it, is one way in which African American male teachers may employ non-traditional strategies to teach their students.

It is important to point out that, as with all cultures, Hip Hop is multidimensional and has produced some cultural expressions that are not positive. The popularized and commercialized images and discourses around Hip Hop are often hyper-sexualized, materialistic, and sometimes violent. The present state of Hip Hop, as perpetuated by the media, forces us to seriously interrogate its purpose and function. Does being apart of this community mean that every women's wardrobe is limited to bathing suites and underwear? Are all the men of Hip Hop ballers or

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pimps? Do all Hip Hop artists wear diamonds and platinum jewelry, designer clothes, and have tattooed bodies? Are all of women baby mummas and are all the men baby daddys? And is Hip Hop synonymous with selling and using illegal drugs, gang violence, and senseless murder? Due to a lack of knowledge about the origins of Hip Hop, youth throughout the world see it as a culture rooted in drug abuse, sexism, violence, and greed. Moreover, the media and record companies, which exploit the culture at the expense of the morality and self-esteem of urban youth, have negatively portrayed Hip Hop (KRS-ONE, 2003). This particular representation of Hip Hop is often in contradiction to the goals, values, and responsibilities of its origin. The goal here is not to create a false dichotomy between good and bad Hip Hop as I assert that Hip Hop culture represents the truth of the human experience. Notwithstanding, the cultural forms of Hip Hop emphasized in this paper are those that remain true to the original philosophy of the community-protest, voice, social and political justice and liberation.

This generation of activists recognizes the undeniable gains achieved during the Civil Rights movement, but they too are aware and critical of the unfinished business of the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements. African American males from this generation are particularly critical of traditional school curriculum (Lynn, 2002) which tends to represent Rosa Parks as an elderly woman who was too tired to give up her seat and situates Minister Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as enemies with diametrically opposing ideologies and minimized their profound philosophies into simplistic slogans (i.e. "I have a Dream," and "By Any Means Necessary"). It often elevates Dr. King's dream as the hope of all Black America,

and celebrates Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy as the liberators of African American people. In contrast, many young African American men have learned more positive and accurate lessons about African and African American history from their parents, who were rooted in the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements (KRS-One, 2003). They have also learned these lessons from Hip Hop artists who have delivered socially conscious lyrics and used rap music to teach about the progressive development of people of color in America. Hip Hop artists like Chuck D, KRS-One, Tribe Called Quest, D-Nice, Public Enemy and Poor Righteous Teachers have been powerful teachers of history for urban youth, speaking from the perspectives of African American and Latinos in marginalized communities, emphasizing their activism in social and political movements throughout history and providing counter-narratives to dominant myths about people of color (Hanley, 2007; Hill-Collins, 2006; KRS-One, 2003; Rice, 2003)

Hip Hop music represents the voice of urban youth as a genre and form of cultural expression that was created by and for urban youth. Morrell (2002) argues that "the influence of rap as a voice of resistance for urban youth proliferates through artists who endeavor to bring an accurate yet critical depiction of the urban situation to a Hip Hop generation" (p.73). He positions the use of Hip Hop as a learning tool or a specific content area under the umbrella of Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1994) "culturally responsive pedagogy." The infusion of Hip Hop culture can provide the context for students to approach subject matter in a way that is relevant to their daily lives (Stovall, 2006b). While critical educators are encouraged to envision teaching Hip Hop as appropriate and compatible with traditional curriculum standards, it must

also maintain its social and cultural relevance to youth in urban school and communities (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Morrell, 2002; Nieto, 2003; Rice, 2003; Stovall, 2006b; Taylor & Taylor, 2004). Morrell (2002) contends that Hip Hop culture, which is a movement that emerged out of resistance to the status quo, can help students to deconstruct dominant narratives about youth of color and resist oppressive practices, to achieve a more inclusive society.

Stovall (2006) points out that teachers can use Hip Hop to foster personal and pedagogical connections with students and to provide students with a greater propensity to grasp concepts originally considered foreign or 'uninteresting' (Stovall, 2006). Hip Hop also provides students and teachers with opportunities to critique racism, sexism, homophobia, and class issues through a lens that is familiar to, particularly, students of color living in impoverished communities (Chang & Kerc, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Greenfield, 2007; Hanley, 2007; Hill-Collins, 2006; KRS-One, 2003; Ladson-Bilings, 1992; Morrell, 2002; Nieto, 2003; Rice, 2003; Stovall, 2006b; Taylor & Taylor, 2004). This form of "critical pedagogy" can promote teaching and learning processes in which teachers and students become more engaged as active participants in leaning (Stovall, 2006). Teachers who incorporate critical pedagogy into their curriculum ultimately encourage students to envision a social order that supports their full humanity. The infusion of Hip Hop culture can provide students with a critical lens through which to interrogate subject matter and related curriculum to their daily lives (Chang & Kerc, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Greenfield, 2007; Hanley, 2007; Hill-

Collins, 2006; KRS-One, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Morrell, 2002; Nieto, 2003; Rice, 2003; Stovall, 2006b; Taylor & Taylor, 2004).

Morrell and Andrade (2002) posit that, "whether the power in its message can be used for good or ill, few can dispute the impact of hip hop culture on the lives of working class urban youth" (p.89). They provide a compelling argument for the full inclusion of Hip Hop in school curriculum and contend that, "critical educators must consider elements of popular culture such as hip hop music as a serious site for social knowledge to be discussed, interrogated, and critiqued" (p.89). Since rappers have a large influence on young people and communicate with them in a ways to which they can relate, Hip Hop can encourage critical discourses that focus on the lives of urban youth. As a representative voice of urban youth, it can bridge students' home and school lives, engender a commitment to social action for community empowerment, and through the use of Hip Hop, teachers can engage in critical discussions about contemporary issues facing urban youth (Chang & Kerc, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Greenfield, 2007; Hanley, 2007; Hill-Collins, 2006; KRS-One, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992a; Morrell, 2002; Nieto, 2003; Rice, 2003; Stovall, 2006b; Taylor & Taylor, 2004).

CRT centers racism in its analyses of social, political, educational inequities and argues that racism is endemic to and deeply ingrained in American life. For example, Tate and Ladson-Billings (1995) assert,

> While some might argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in
> school, and that the high proportion of African-American poor contribute to
> their dismal school performance, we argue that the cause of their poverty in

conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism (p.55).

Scholars have identified the key principles in using CRT to examine social and racial inequality. CRT; 1) critiques the U.S. legal system, 2) recognizes racism as an institutional phenomena in U.S. society, 3) interrogates claims of race neutrality and universal treatment of all citizens, (4) relies on counter narratives as a means to highlight the knowledge of people of color, and (5) is intersectional in its analysis as it also critiques sexism and classism (Stovall, 2006a, 2006b).

Lynn's (2002) research on African American male teachers, as well as Stovall's (2006) and Andrade and Morrell's (2002) examinations of Hip Hop in urban classrooms, are aligned with the key principles of CRT. Much of the music and artistic expression within Hip Hop focuses specifically on racism and racist practices within the legal, political and educational systems. In Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," N.W.A.'s "F-the Police," and Dead Prez's "They Schools," listeners are encouraged, urban youth in particular, to resist the hegemonic powers that stifle their educational and personal development and to challenge systems through these oppressive powers are enforced. In addition, both Hip Hop culture and the critical race perspectives that African American male teachers have been found to embody recognize and critique "the centrality of race and intransigence of racism in contemporary American society" (KRS-One, 2003; Lynn, 1999; Stovall, 2006b). African American male teachers use Hip Hop, as well as details from their personal histories, to reject claims of racial neutrality in U.S. society and schools. Moreover, Hip Hop, as a grassroots movement, represents the lives of urban youth as their

struggle for agency in a society that perpetuates their marginalization. As the voice of this generation, Hip Hop represents a counter-narrative to the stories told about them by the dominant group and can be used to teach African American boys how to navigate an unjust society. Thus, the use of Hip Hop culture in education can be situated within a critical race theoretical framework, as it reflects the tenets of CRT, and is an example of critical race praxis – the active use of the core beliefs of CRT in urban schools and communities.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an effective lens through which to understand the participant's social experiences as young African American men in multiple sectors of U.S. society (e.g. work, community, recreation, and school). One of the tenets of CRT is the emphasis on the experiences, knowledge, and voices of people of color. CRT scholars challenge ahistoricism and advocate for the acknowledgement of the perspectives of people and communities that have been historically marginalized (Marvin Lynn *et al.*, 2002; Matsuda, 1991; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Such thinking requires a shift among educators from deficit-oriented theoretical and conceptual frameworks, to a more egalitarian, asset-based, and student-focused approach to teaching, particularly in urban schools. CRT upholds that those who have been discriminated against and treated poorly speak from unique perspectives that shed light on the systemic nature of oppression that is often ignored by the dominant group often ignores. CRT challenges educators to create spaces and to transform curriculum to allow students' personal narratives and voices to be heard.

CRT can be used as a lens through which to situate Hip Hop as a critical cultural movement as the Hip Hop generation embodies a new type of political and social activism recognizes the undeniable gains achieved during the civil rights movement, but they too are aware and critical of the unfinished business of the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements. The Hip Hop generation recognizes the centrality of racism in American life. More specifically, they problematize the deleterious effects of racism on marginalized people and communities. The critique and resistance within Hip Hop culture exposes racist practices within public school systems, law enforcement, and the broader legal system, using critique that emerged during the post Civil Rights Era when dominant legal claims of colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality were common. Hip Hop helped to dismantle those claims and to interrogate racial hypocrisy in U.S. society (Alridge, 2003; Bynoe, 2004; Chang & Kerc, 2005; Decker, 1993).

Seen through a CRT lens, the Hip Hop generation, due of their unique experiences as the benefactors of the Civil Right movement as well as the victims of racist social policies that eroded the gains of that movement, provide a critical analyses of racialized oppression and exhibit a commitment to manifesting positive change in urban communities while transforming urban schools in ways that nurture African American and Latino intellectuals.

The educational influences relate to the participants personal, academic, and social experiences as students in urban schools. Many African American men from the Hip Hop generation have had negative experiences within public schools and may experience a sense of relief in escaping urban schools that treated them poorly.

African American males from the Hip Hop generation, just as their contemporary

counter-parts, have been disproportionately subject to school exclusion (i.e.

overrepresented in special education, suspension and expulsion, dropout and school

failure (Brown, 2007; Davis, 2001; Educational Trust Foundation, 2005; Justice

Policy Institute, 2006; C. C. Lee, 1992, 1996a; Noguera, 1996, 2003a, 2003b; Patton,

1998a; A. W. Williams *et al.*, 2003). These experiences have likely left an indelible

mark on the minds and hearts of these men.

Some African American men from the Hip Hop generation have returned to

the classroom as teachers and attribute this to the potential power and influence of

Hip Hop's evolving agenda, to entertain and teach urban youth simultaneously.

Artists like Kanye West, Common, Most Def, Dead Prez, the Roots, and Talib Kwali

are representatives of this new agenda. These African men, both the artists and the

teachers, embrace the principles CRT as pedagogical and artistic lenses.

In their critique of global racism, particularly against people of color, their

overt rejection of the legal system and law enforcement agencies as colorblind

entities, and their insistent reliance on the knowledge, skills, and resources found in

urban spaces, Hip Hop artist and African American male teachers borrow from CRT.

Additionally, in their emphasis on philosophies and histories of marginalized groups,

and their critique of multiple forms of oppression, both African American male artists

and educators have creatively merged Hip Hop Culture and CRT to create, what I

believe to be, a new social movement—similar to the social movements of the past.

Thus, African American male teachers have recognized Hip Hop's power in

capturing the minds of urban youth, and are intrigued by the idea of using Hip Hop as

a means teach their students (Hanley, 2007; KRS-One, 2003; Marvin Lynn, 2002; Stovall, 2006b). This has superceded the pain and humiliation of their past experiences as students (KRS-One, 2003). Within this new way of thinking, are wonderful opportunities for the educational system to reconnect with African American men who, like their younger counterparts, have rejected school.

The original philosophy of Hip Hop culture reflects CRT's aim to eliminate multiple forms of oppression—racism, sexism, and elitism. More specifically, interrogating lyrics, music videos, popular language and styles of dress that are overtly sexist, degrading, and humiliating to, particularly, women of color, represents CRT in action as it encourages students, especially African American boys, to reconsider their own participation in forms of oppression.

By unpacking and interrogating the social and ecological conditions that promote disease, murder, incarceration, and violence within urban communities, teachers have the power to impress upon their students the need to address these challenges and create opportunities for people to overcome them. In this way, Hip Hop and CRT can be powerful tools in engendering critical awareness of the hegemonic powers that promote violence, sexism and poverty in urban spaces. By addressing both the positive and negative images portrayed in Hip Hop music and videos, teacher can be effective at connecting with their students in ways that traditional curriculum and teaching strategies have failed. Furthermore, African American male teachers who are committed to teaching African American boys and who are passionate about Hip Hop are likely to have a vested interested in the positive development of both their students and their culture (KRS-One, 2003;

Marvin Lynn, 1999, 2002; M. Lynn et al., 2006). Thus, they are well positioned to foster a sense of ownership and engagement within the Hip Hop movement and forms of character, social, and spiritual development that mirrors past social and political movements (i.e. Civil Rights and Black Nationalist Movements).

The three domains examined in this literature review -1) beliefs about teaching among teachers of color, 2) the educational experiences of African American male students and 3) intersections between CRT and Hip Hop Culture that African American male teachers may be well positioned to draw upon- are inter-related in important ways. Each domain borrows from and builds upon the other. The literature on teachers' beliefs about teaching African American students reveals that there are distinct differences in the expectations that teachers of color and white teachers have of African American children. There are also differences in the ways in which they approach their instructional practices. Findings show that teachers of color tend to be more compassionate, caring, empathetic with African American students, but they also expect the best and are demanding. Teachers of color are also more inclined to use instructional practices and adopt a classroom culture that are more closely aligned with students' home culture. With a more likely emphasis on social justice and education empowerment, they tend to teach within the tradition of those African American teachers before them.

In contrast, White women, who represent nearly 90% of the k-12 teaching population, often posses a deficit perspective related to their expectations of and instructional practices for students of color. The research reveals that many White teachers identify the cultural codes and behavioral patters of African American

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students as aggressive, non-compliant, and uncivil. Further, many White pre-services hold negative feelings towards colleges of education that emphasis multicultural education. These teachers sought "normal" student teaching placements rather than those that forced them to work in marginalized schools and communities. This body of literature substantiates research that shows that the age, gender, and cultural difference between White women teachers and African American students, particularly males, can contribute to the dire educational and social conditions that these students face.

The consequences of these conditions, as outlined in the literature, are severe as African American males are over represented in school suspension, expulsion and drop out rates, are more likely to receive special education services, and have disproportionately high rates of homicide, suicide, substance abuse, infant mortality, heart disease, hypertension, and HIV/AIDS infections. Researchers argue that many of these conditions are connected to harsh schooling experiences, which leads many African American male students to reject formal education.

However, literature suggests that African American male teachers, particularly those that draw upon the intersections of CRT and Hip Hop pedagogy, can provide hope for this marginalized population of students. These teachers tend to borrow from their own experiences with racism, in a society with a lasting fear of African American masculinity, to teach students of color. They tend to approach teaching practices through a CRT lens, which interrogates racism and its intersections with classism and sexism, and relies on counter-narratives to represent the voice of people of color. For urban youth, Hip Hop representatives one such counter-narrative.

Therefore, this dissertation study focuses specifically on the life history experiences and pedagogical beliefs of this critical population of educators. I contend that this population is unique as the offspring of the Civil Right era and due to their experiences coming of age during as the Hip Hop generation– Hip Hop representing the voices of urban youth of color that critiqued racism and sexism in the U.S. society. The combination of these collective experiences may give us insights into teaching students of color, which have otherwise been unexplored. As the literature suggests, this critical population of educators may hold a key to reversing the deplorable conditions facing African American males in urban schools and communities.

Chapter 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As research shows, teachers' prior experiences greatly influence their beliefs about teaching, learning, and the students they teach, which, in turn, shaped those students' schooling experiences. Due to the dearth of research on African American male teachers, little is known about the relationships between their experiences and their pedagogical approaches and what little we do know suggests that it has important implications for, particularly, African American boys. The over arching goal of this dissertation study was to understand how the life history experiences of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation influence their pedagogical beliefs and approaches and the implications for social and academic well-being of, particularly, African American boys.

In this study, I viewed life history experiences within the four overlapping and mutually informative realms of social, political, educational and cultural. As depicted in the figure below, these experiences impact teacher pedagogical beliefs which intern impacts the way they interact with students.
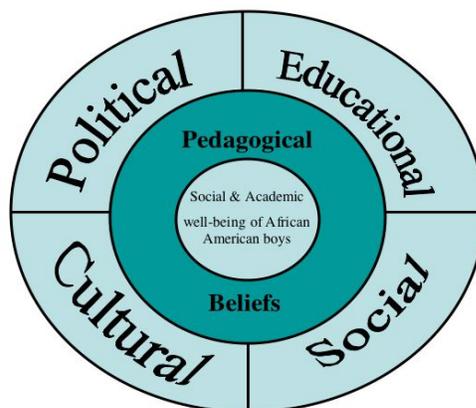
CRT served as a lens through which I will explore the multiple sites of investigation for this study. An examination of each participant's life history narratives connected directly with CRT's counter story-telling. Therefore, I looked for components of their narratives that disrupt conceptions about the life history experiences of African American men.

In examining the social, educational, political and cultural experiences of the participants, I borrowed from CRT by looking specifically for their experiences with and critique of racism as an institutional phenomenon in the U.S. society. More specifically, when exploring their social experiences, I examined the ways that my participants understood and experienced social challenges facing marginalized communities and how those encounters may be connected to a critique of racism. When exploring their educational experiences, I examined the participants schooling encounters, particularly with White teachers and euro-centric curriculum, and how those experiences are connected to their beliefs about racism as endemic in U.S. culture. In examining their political experiences, I investigated their encounters with political movements of the past (i.e. Civil Right and Black Nationalist Movements) and the ways in which they critique the U.S. legal system and interrogate racism. Lastly, through an examination of their cultural experiences, I examined how their cultural encounters, particularly with Hip Hop culture, influence their critique of the U.S. legal system, classism and sexist, and their recognition of racism as an institutional phenomenon.

Further, I used CRT to make connections between those experiences and their pedagogical beliefs. Therefore, I investigated the ways in which their experiences as

members of a socially oppressed group influence their beliefs about and approaches to teaching African American students. I specifically looked for any references to or critique of racism in their personal narratives and explanation of their pedagogical beliefs. Lately, I investigated how the implications of these beliefs and approaches for the well-being of African American boys are connected to race and a critique of racism.

In the spring semester of 2007, I conducted a pilot study with four African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation in the county from which the participants for this study will be drawn. Through this study, I gained a great deal of insight into how their life experiences influenced their pedagogies and beliefs about teaching in urban schools.

For the four participants, coming of age during an era when Hip Hop culture was representative of resistance and artistic expression among urban youth had a large impact on their decisions to return to those communities, as classroom teachers. They also positioned Hip Hop cultural as a lens through which to transform archaic curricular and pedagogical approaches and to challenge stereotypes about African American students' underachievement and low self-efficacy. Furthermore, participants spoke about their commitment to embracing the positive images within Hip Hop culture and critiquing its negative images to heighten students' awareness of their own character development. Lastly, they posited that their own negative experiences as K-12 students discourages many African American males from becoming teachers and proposed that Hip Hop, as a dominating force in their lives, can be used as a tool to recruit and retain more African American male teachers.

Thus, these findings- 1) commitment to urban spaces, 2) transformative pedagogies, 3) character development, and 4) Hip Hop as a motivator, served as preliminary codes and analytic categories in the present study. However, I used my conceptual framework, informed by CRT, as described above, to expand upon what I previously found in the pilot study, while leaving open the possibility for discovering new research findings.

Chapter 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach

In this dissertation study, I drew upon both Life History and Critical Race methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of how African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation explained and understood their political, cultural, social and educational experiences and beliefs, as individuals and as educators. I sought to learn how their beliefs and perceptions about teaching and learning was connected to their individual life histories and experiences with Hip Hop, particularly, as they relate to African American male students, and how their understandings informed their beliefs about and approaches to the academic and social growth, and development of African American youth, particularly boys. Life History Methodology required that I examine how my participants narrated their own lives. Thus, throughout the study I sought to gain a deeper understanding of my participants' experiences and perspectives and how they were shaped social, political, historical, and educational contexts.

Dollard (1949) asserts that Life History allows one to conduct detailed studies of the lives of individuals, particularly those who have been historically marginalized, and to shed light on perspectives that would be otherwise inaccessible to the broader social world. Life History Methodology embraces a multidimensional and holist approach to research (Goodson, 2001) and is an effective tool for exploring the intersections between participants' public and private and cultural, social, and individual lives (Goodson, 2001). Feminist researchers have used life history

methodology to give voice to those whose voices have been hidden, silenced, and not publicly acknowledged (Middleton, 1997; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001; Weiler & Middleton, 1999). Thus, Life History was particularly useful in researching the experiences of African American male teachers who have been historically marginalized within the Eurocentric perspectives that dominate educational research.

Life History Methodology was also utilized in this study to provide for deeper understandings of the historical contexts in which the participants' experiences and beliefs evolved. It fostered in-depth, detailed, and descriptive analyses of the lives of African American male teachers, which have been under theorized and largely ignored. Life History methodology helped me to cull data that allowed me to situates participants' pedagogical beliefs within their early experiences with Hip Hop culture, political movements and activity, their educational and cultural experiences, and their beliefs about teaching.

This study also drew upon Critical Race Methodology (CRM), defined by Solorzano & Yosso (2002) as a research and theorizing methodology that emphasizes the intransigence of race and racism in society, foregrounding intersections between race, class, and gender. CRM interrogates conventional research paradigms used in the study of the lives and histories of people of color and analyzes the racial, class, and gendered experiences of people of color. Through the use of thick description and interviews and data analyses that center the experiences of people of color from their own perspectives, I used CRM to illuminate and document the pervasiveness of race and racism in U.S. society, to challenge traditional research paradigms, and to counter deficit-oriented research on people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

CRM also allowed me to use counter-narratives – the telling and documenting of the stories of people from marginalized groups – to uncover vital information about how teachers of color respond to their public schooling experiences. As Solorzano & Yosso point out, "the counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race and further the struggle for racial freedom" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, pg. 32).

In this study, Life History and CRM provided a critical lens through which to examine the experiences of African American male teachers in U.S. public schools. These methodological approach helped me to (1) explore participants' historical and contemporary experiences as African American males and as teachers in U.S. society and schools, (2) contextualize their lived experiences within the Post Civil Rights and Hip Hop eras, (3) and investigate how participants' early educational experiences and coming of age as the Hip Hop generation influenced their beliefs about and approaches to teaching in urban classrooms, particularly as related to African American boys. As such, I used these methodological approaches to address the following research questions:

1. How do African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation describe and explain their political, cultural, social and educational experiences and beliefs, as individuals and as educators?

2. How do they understand the significance of their experiences and beliefs and the ways in which they may be related to Hip Hop?

3. How do these understandings inform participants' beliefs about and approaches to the academic and social growth, and development of African American youth, particularly boys?

The research questions are directly correlated to the three domains of the aforementioned conceptual framework. Therefore, research question #1 sought to uncover the participants' political, cultural, social and educational life history experiences, which is represented by the outer ring of the conceptual map. Research question #2 revealed the ways that their life history experiences influenced their teaching orientations, which is represented by the second ring of the conceptual map. Lastly, research question #3 helped me to understand the ways in which their life history experiences and pedagogical orientations influenced their belief about the academic and social well being of students of color, particularly African American boys, which is represented the inner ring, or the "bulls eye" of the conceptual map.

The Teachers

This study focused specifically on two historically marginalized, under-represented and poorly served populations – African American male teachers and African American male students. More specifically, I examined the experiences and pedagogical beliefs of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation to gain a deeper understanding of how they influenced the academic and social well being of, particularly, African American boys.

The participants in this study were African American men born between 1965 and 1984, who were either current or former classroom teachers. All demonstrated interest and involvement in Hip Hop culture and used Hip Hop related curriculum in their classrooms. Both Life History and Critical Race methodologies demand in-depth investigation from multiple perspectives and the relatively small sample size allowed me to conduct comprehensive and in-depth analyses of the data.

Due to the relatively small sample size, which reflects the scarcity of African American male teachers, study findings cannot be generalized to this population of men or teachers. However, this study strongly indicates that these teachers possess teaching qualities and beliefs about urban youth that foster positive academic and social outcomes for students of color, particularly African American boys. Thus, even a small-scale study of African American male teachers, about whom we know very little, has much to offer.

Given that Hip Hop is such an influential factor in the lives of men and youth of color, the participants in this study provide vital knowledge regarding the significance of their experiences on the development of their beliefs about teaching and how those beliefs impact the social and educational well being of African American male students.

I used purposeful sampling to identify participants in which, "you choose particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.73). I relied on the social capital of the participants from a pilot study on the same topic to identify participants for the present study. This sampling strategy allowed me to choose participants who had a high level of involvement in Hip Hop culture and used Hip Hop music as a pedagogical tool in their classrooms.

I also employed a snowball-sampling technique in which the researcher asks an already identified participant to recommend another potential participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this study, I asked the participants from the pilot study to recommend other African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation who

fit the outlined criteria. Finally, I developed a screening proto-cal, a 10-question

questionnaire, which allowed me to evaluate the participants levels of involvement

and participation in Hip Hop culture and their commitment to teaching in urban

schools (see Appendix A).

The screening proto-cal was an extremely helpful tool in helping me to identify

teachers with specific characteristics, first of which was coming of age during the Hip

Hop era. It also provided me with the opportunity to assess their views on and level

of involvement in Hip Hop and their use of Hip Hop as a pedagogical tool in their

classrooms. Furthermore, I was able to gain a deeper understanding, prior to the

formal interviews, of their level of commitment to disseminating messages of hope

and prosperity among urban youth through the use of their personal accounts and Hip

Hop culture. As such, I chose nine participants who expressed a high level of interest

and involvement in Hip Hop and those who expressed positive beliefs about the

academic and social well being of African American students, particularly boys, and

marginalized communities.

Site Selection

All of my participants lived and worked in Maryland or Washington, DC

during the time the study was conducted but some had lived and grown up elsewhere.

Furthermore, because my participants were both current and former teachers, several

were not classroom teachers during the time of the study. Thus, I was unable to

identify as specific site for the study. However, the majority of the participants who

were classroom teachers during the study, lived and worked in Prince Georges

County, Maryland. Therefore, I will provide demographic data on African American

students and teachers in this county, in comparison to the nation as a whole, to provide additional context for this study.

Nationally, African Americans represent 7.4% of the teaching population (Dillard, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005-2006). In the State of Maryland, African Americans represent 20.9% of the teaching population and 56.7% in Prince Georges County School District. African American male teachers make up less than 2% of the national teaching population. In Maryland, African American males represent 4.7% of the teaching population and 13% in Prince George's County School District ([MSDE}, 2005; NCES, 2005). Therefore, this district has relatively high concentrations of African American teachers, including men, as compared to Maryland and the national overall.

National, State and Local Percentages of African American/Male Teachers
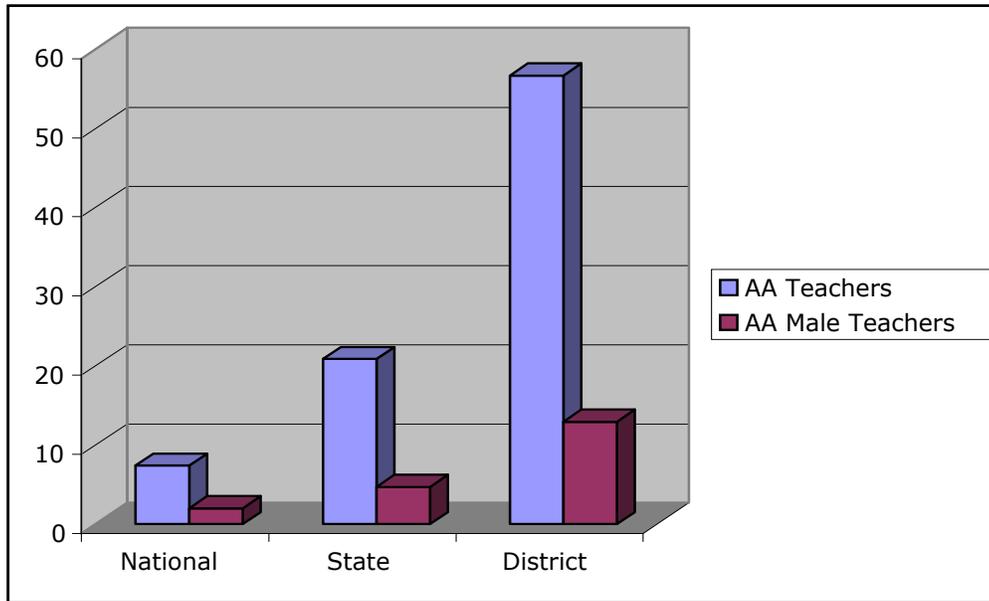
([MSDE}, 2005; NCES, 2005)

African Americans represent over 37% of the K-12 school-age student population in Maryland, but they account for 54% of all school suspensions and 40% of those receiving special education services. They also score significantly below other populations of students on nearly all measures of achievement (M. Lynn *et al.*, 2006). The achievement challenges are more severe for African American males, particularly regarding reading proficiency during the middle school years. In the Prince Georges County School District, where African American students represent over 70% of the student population, only 9% were ranked on an advanced reading level compared to 31.4% of their White counterparts. Over 50% were ranked on a basic level as compared to less than 25% of their white counterparts. The discrepancy between African American males and females is also telling as 11.4% of females were ranked on an advanced reading level and 43.7% were ranked on a basic or less than proficient level. In contrast 6.7% of African American males were identified as advanced while 59.9% of African American males were identified as basic or less than proficient (M. Lynn et al., 2006).

Data regarding African American male achievement in math in the county is equally alarming. According the state's assessment data, 73.5% of African American males were ranked as basic or less than proficient ([MSDE], 2001). This data reveals that African American males, even in a predominantly middle class Black county, are experiencing severe achievement challenges compared to other students in the district. Furthermore, this district, according the State Department of Education, is one of the lowest performing districts in the state.

Data Collection

Participant Interviews

In-depth interviewing was the primary means for data collection. I borrowed from Foster's (1997) research on African American teachers in which she relied on a set of topics to guide her interviews rather than a list of interview questions. This method of interviewing is situated within the Life History Methodology and calls for a more conversational rather than didactic style of interviewing (Dhunpath, 2000; Goodson, 2001). As reflected in my interview protocol for this study, I situated each interview within a specific theme (see Appendix B). Through three "conversations" (explained below), I captured participants' authentic personal narratives from a first person perspective.

I conducted three one-hour in-depth interviews with each participant over several weeks at various locations throughout the Washington, DC and Maryland metropolitan areas- e.g. school sites, libraries, coffee shops, and personal residencies, community centers, and my office at the University of Maryland. The interviews were structured to address each research question. For example, the first one-hour interview examined the ways in which participants explained and understood their political, cultural, social and personal experiences as African American men. The second interview focused on their perceptions about and approaches to teaching and the education of, particularly, African American youth (especially boys) in urban schools. The third interview examined how they understand the significance of their perceptions and experiences and their connections to Hip Hop and their relationships to their pedagogical approaches. As dictated by Critical Race Methodology, in all

interviews I asked participants to expand upon any experiences with race and racism. Before the second and third interviews, I reviewed the audiotapes of the previous interviews to identify topics that merited further clarification or investigation. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

I used pseudonyms to protect the identities of my participants as well as any locations (such as school names) or persons named by the participants in the interviews. To further maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I stored all audiotapes, voice recordings, transcriptions, and analytic memos in a locked drawer in my office at the University of Maryland. All materials will be destroyed five years after the completions of the study.

Prior to the study, a letter of consent was given to each prospective participant and they were invited to move forward with the study only upon receipt of the signed consent form (See Appendix C). The consent form explained in detail the goals, procedures, risks and benefits of the study and what their participation would entail. It also informed them that they were free to discontinue participation at any point and that at that time all data collected from them would be destroyed. Furthermore, at no time during the study were participants asked to collaborate or access any external data. Therefore, they were not informed of the other participants in the study. Nor were they expected to do anything outside of participating in the three in-depth interviews. All aspects of this study were open to full disclosure and no information was intentionally hidden from the participants. I answered all questions regarding the study before, during, and after its implementation, to the best of my ability.

Risk and Benefits

I recognized that the participants could potentially become tired or fatigued after each one-hour interview and that there was a possibility that they may experience frustration or anxiety as they were asked to recall specific experiences from their past that may be uncomfortable or personally painful. I also recognized they may have been uncomfortable with being audio taped and/or having their stories publically analyzed. To address this, I built in time for breaks throughout the interview and ensured that the interview location was quiet and comfortable. I also paid close attention to the participants' reactions and allowed them to move on or skip particular questions that may have been too difficult to answer. During subsequent interviews, however, I attempted to readdress any questions that they may have missed. Research participants were informed that they may ask me questions throughout the duration of the research study and that they may withdraw without penalty at any time during the study. Furthermore, I used member checks to reduce potential anxiety, allowing participants to review their interview transcripts to ensure that their authentic stories were captured.

Both my participants and I benefited from this study. Participation provided participants with a platform to tell their personal stories from first person perspectives and to inform both K-12 schools on effective ways to address the academic social needs of African American male students. Further, they participants were given the opportunity to disseminated information that could expand upon the existing literature on teacher beliefs, which largely excludes the perspectives of African American male educators. Through the examination of participants' life histories I gained insight

into the contexts in which their motivations to teach, experiences within Hip Hop culture, and use of innovative pedagogies emerged. This is useful in identifying teaching dispositions and strategies that can help all teachers to be more effective in teaching African American youth, particularly boys. Study findings helped me to shed light on the diminishing presence of African American male teachers in K-12 education, which I can use to inform school, school districts, and colleges of education about how they might recruit and retain African American men, particularly those from the Hip Hop generation.

Data Analysis

The tenets of Life History methodology require that analyses of life stories reflect the narrative, constructivist, contextualistic, interactionist, and dynamic nature of narratives (Goodson, 2001). Therefore, I examined the subjective and narrative forms of my participants' presentations their experiences. I privileged how the participants construct meaning for themselves and situate their life history experiences within the historical, sociopolitical, educational, and geographic contexts in which they occurred.

I began analysis by reading through interview transcripts to develop initial coding by interview, across participants. First, I examined each participants' first interview, identifying beliefs, perceptions, and experiences that were important to the participants themselves (emic), as well as those that were related to race and gender. I then conducted a second iteration of coding in which I re-examined the transcripts from the first interview, revising and refining codes. Next, I looked across participants and identified ways in which participants' perceptions and experiences

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were similar and different. I repeated this process for the next two sets of transcripts (from the second and then the third interviews).

Throughout process, I kept analytic memos about how I was making sense of the codes. I began to identify patterns among the codes both within and across the participants. For example, one participant spoke about the *Fight the Power* movement within Hip Hop in the late 1980's and how it peaked his interest in studying how racism influenced social policies at the time.   I then looked across interviews to see if participants made similar connections. In this particular case, almost all of my participants identified the song, *Fight the Power,* and social movements resisting oppressive social, educational, and judicial forces that plague African American communities.

I captured patterns among the codes in matrices, arranged in categories. According to Maxwell (2005), "categories may be derived from prior theory or from inductive developed theory" (pg. 97). I used both of these strategies to look for categories that emerged from patterns within the data and I also looked for data related to the four themes identified in my pilot study—(1) commitment to urban spaces, (2) transformative pedagogies, (3) character development, and (4) Hip Hop as a motivator—and arranged them into categories. Many of the categories that emerged from both the inductive and deductive analytic processes fit well into the four previously identified themes and I developed two additional themes based on other categories that I had determined from the data.

 Using the qualitative data analysis software, *Academic Research Premiere*, I was able retrieve quotes attached to particular codes. I selected data by code to

analyze quotes within and across participants and within and across codes and I continually retrieved raw data for a more in-depth examination of how I grouped codes into categories and categories into themes.

To answer research question #1, I examined the codes and emergent categories in relation to their social, cultural, educational, and political significance to the participants. My goal was to understand how the participants' life histories shaped their experiences and pedagogical beliefs as individuals and educators within these four realms. I also looked for evidence in the data that placed participants' experiences in social, historical, geographical contexts. I conducted these analyses within and then across participants, using matrices to look across participants' data and to compare and contrast and to develop broader categories and themes that reflected participants' experiences and beliefs. I found that all of my participants spoke about their life histories in social, cultural, and educational contexts, but rarely did they articulate any experiences related to or connected with political agency or larger political movements of the time.

To answer research question #2, I examined the codes and corresponding data for evidence of how participants made meaning of their experiences and beliefs. In particular, I looked for ways in which their meaning making was connected to Hip Hop. I also looked for evidence in the data that placed participants' experiences in social, historical, geographical contexts. I conducted this analysis within and then across participants, using matrices to look across and to compare and contrast participants' understandings. I looked to identify categories and then broader themes that explained how meaning making was connected to Hip Hop across participants.

Through this process, the following five themes emerged: (1) Endangerment of African American Male, (2) Strength and Potential of African American male youth, (3) Collective Responsibility of African Men, (4) Personalized and Caring Relationships, and (5) Curricular and Educational Transformation.

To answer research question #3, I used my analyses and findings from questions 1 & 2 about how participants understood their experiences, particularly as educators. I connected those findings, conceptually, to what have been deemed as effective pedagogical approaches to promoting academic and social growth, and development among African American youth, particularly boys, as found in research literature. I conducted this analysis within and across participants, using matrices to look across participants to develop larger themes. I looked for evidence of (1) commitment to urban spaces, (2) transformative pedagogies, (3) character development, and (4) Hip Hop as a motivator, to determine their salience in the present study. My analysis necessitated that I develop two additional themes, (5) Hip Hop Culture and Understanding African American Male and (6) Hip Hop and Hope for the Future, to best capture the ways that my participants connected Hip Hop culture and their beliefs about African American male students. The evidence from this research question, in particular, addresses the significance of this study as it connects the participants' beliefs and pedagogical approaches to the social and academic well-being of students of color, particularly African American boys.

Validity

As an African American male researcher, a former classroom teacher, and a product of the Hip Hop generation, I share a number of commonalities with the

participants of this study. I believe that these commonalities provided me with cultural capital that helped me to interpret and analyze the speech and cultural codes portrayed in their personal narratives in authentic ways. However, I also have unique experiences, which separated me from many of my participants in important ways. I was raised as a Muslim and therefore held religious beliefs that differed from my participants'. Further, I had very early and positive experiences in public school, as I was identified as a "gifted" child by the 3rd grade and tracked as a college bound student by middle school. As such, I experienced educational privileges (i.e. accelerated and honors classes, lenient punishments by school administrators and teachers, and financial and academic support for extra-curricular activities) that many of my participants lacked. Also, even though I was raised during the Hip Hop generation and enjoy Hip Hop music, as a classroom teacher, I rarely used Hip Hop as a critical lens through which to interrogate racism and discrimination within U.S. society. Throughout this study, I used analytic memos to reflect on my own beliefs and experiences, in relation to those of my participants, in order ensure that my analyses and interpretations authentically reflected their perspectives.

Triangulation, the processes of comparing and contrasting multiple forms of data to confirm assertions about data, is a common validity-checking practice in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, this study drew from only one type of data – interview transcripts – which is appropriate for a study focused on understanding participants' beliefs and perceptions. One strategy that I used to ensure validity is to look for inconsistencies and contradictions, within and across interviews, in participants' narratives about their experiences, beliefs, and

perspectives. I also conducted member checks (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). That is, I

provided participants with transcripts of their interviews and gave them the

opportunity to clarify or expand upon any statements made in the interviews. I also

addressed, in subsequent interviews, statements that I found confusing or

contradictory. Further, throughout the analysis process, I talked regularly with

colleagues and my dissertation committee members to get feedback on how I was

making sense of the data.

Chapter 5: LIFE HISTORIES

This chapter explores the life histories of nine African American men who are either in-service or former K-12 classroom teachers. They came of age during the Hip Hop generation -born between 1965 and 1884, have identified Hip Hop culture as having a significant influence on their lives as men and on their pedagogical beliefs about marginalized communities and African American male students in particular. They also share a common commitment to fostering academic, social, and personal well being among African American youth in urban schools, particularly boys. However, they are each different in significant ways. Their age ranges from 24-38 years, their socio-economic backgrounds range from very poor to upper middle class, and they have spent much of their formative years in cities and countries throughout the world—(e.g. Barbados, Trinidad, England, and Bronx, New York). This provides for a rich and multi-dimensional examination of the lived experiences of African American male educators from this generation.

In this chapter, I examine these men's life experiences to uncover the ways in which they understand their roles as educators of students of color, while shedding light on the social contexts through which their pedagogies have emerged. In doing so, I employ Life History methodology, conducting in-depth, detailed, and descriptive analyses of their lives and documenting their stories through a first person narrative, while paying particular attention to their educational, social, cultural, and political experiences.

Chuck Giles

My first encounter with Chuck, a 32 year-old engineer, college professor, former classroom teacher, and Hip Hop scholar, was in the summer of 2006. I co-taught a doctoral level course, *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Urban Schools*, at the University of Maryland College Park in which my co-instructor and I invited guest speakers whose work and/or personal experiences connected to the course readings. As instructors, we asserted that the use of Hip Hop music and culture in urban classrooms was a perfect example of culturally responsive teaching in action. The advisor for the course worked with Chuck for many years and was impressed by the ways he used Hip Hop to teach math, technology and engineering courses. Based on her recommendation, I invited Chuck to be a guest lecturer.

Our second encounter was two summers later as I was in search of participants for this study. I remembered the passion with which he spoke about the plight of urban youth in my class. More importantly, I recalled his depth of knowledge about the history of Hip Hop culture and his ability to critically analyze the ways that Hip Hop has influenced people globally. I was astounded by his presentation and amazed at how well versed he was around issues of social justice, culturally responsive teaching, and the impact of education inequities on urban youth. For those reasons, I invited him to be a participant in this study and he gladly accepted.

Chuck was born in Birmingham, England and at the age of 4 he moved to the Bronx, New York where he lived for nearly 14 years in a public housing development. Both of his parents are from originally the Caribbean and moved to

England, where they met. According to Chuck, "there is a lot of Caribbeans in England because of the colonization process." His family relocated from England to the U.S. in search of economic opportunity. Chuck proudly assets, "So me and Slick Rick and Monie Love got the England/U.S. Hip Hop connection," referring to two Hip Hop artists who were able to successfully cross over in the Hip Hop community in the U.S.

Coming from England, however, Chuck struggled initially with connecting closely with from different cultural groups. He stated,

One thing that makes my story different is that I went to an elite high school-Forham Preparatory School which was about 95% white so I didn't know anything about all of these other [African American] folks who lived near me or who was up in the Bronx and I thought that the White people in my school were Spanish. So it started my quest to figure out what was Black, cause I am from England. I mean there is probably a slave somewhere but I don't directly relate to that experience. I directly related to the experiences of the English.

He reflected, "That's when I got into lots of reading about the Harlem Renaissance and Richard Wright shaped me a lot and so I had to figure all that our for myself. But other folks kinda inherited the Black experience, where I had to learn about it." Through reading, Chuck gained a deeper understand of the historical struggles of people of color and an interest in the lives of historical hallmarks such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois. Their life histories challenged Chuck to reflect on the relative ease of his life's experiences.

Chuck began his first interview by talking about the social context of living in the Bronx during the 80's. He spoke a great deal about the negative affects that drug had on the people in his community in the Bronx.

> I never knew why the baking soda would go so fast. I guess I still grew up in a time where the grown ups still kept a lot of that away and it wasn't on T.V. or glorified, but you knew something was going on cause people wasn't looking right. I mean the drugs were big. I seen people get shot, I seen all kinds of stuff in the Bronx and so I see the effects that drugs had on my generation from that point of view.

Growing up surrounded by drugs and violence, Chuck recalled how older peers, whom he referred to as "big brothers," shielded him from dangers present in his community. They helped Chuck to navigate the streets of New York and served as a buffer from violent attacks.

> I had protections you know so I could vividly remember dudes tryin to get after me coming off the bus. [They were] like yo son we wanna fight you and the dudes on the block would be like, 'nah leave him alone you," because they knew my success was there success. It [success] was going to be something that took time, so they protected me.

Chuck's "big brothers" shielded him from the harsh realities of street life. They saw their own potential in him and in many ways invested a great deal of energy in securing his success. According to Chuck, his "brothers" would "whisper in his ear" to tell him to keep going on track, to never give up, and to focus on his education so that he could get out of the Bronx and create a better life for his family. Incidentally,

one of these "brothers" was, himself, murdered over money and drugs. Chuck recalls, "There was one dude named Jason and like if I had to fight someone he would say 'fuck that imma fight for you cause you gone make it'." This phenomena is quite common in urban communities but stories of communities rallying behind the success of promising youth are largely ignored in educational and sociological discourse as well as in popular media.

Chuck asserted,

> But what's interesting is that they don't tell these stories when they talk about what's going on in urban communities. They just talk about drug dealers and violence and gangs. But they [drug dealer] would take care of us too. This is like when I was eleven years old, these cool dudes would be like 'yo shorty you want a juice.' They would buy all the kids in the neighborhood snack and juice. Its like, its family you know. There is humanity in our communities man.

> I also benefited from these same sorts of support systems as my neighborhood friends, all of whom sold and used drugs, literally and emotionally shielded me from external aggressors and provided spaces for me, in a seemingly dangerous community, to focus on academic endeavors so that I could transcend the limited opportunities in the inner city. Therefore, Chuck and I, and countless other African American men, have shared experiences as the beneficiaries of the support, guidance, and encouragement of other black men, whom society deems as degenerate or an endangered species (Payne, 2008). Chuck stated,

It's funny, we actually talked about that yesterday in class. We were looking at some statistics from the 80's actually. There was an article titled 'Hip -Hop turns 30,' that looked at statistics from 1974 to now. It looked at imprisonment, death rates and murder and all that good stuff. It just showed that things were actually worse now than I was when I was coming up.

Chuck reflected on this notion of African American men as an endangered species and expressed distain for the terminology as he said it is used to describe the plight of wild animals. The comparison of African American men to wild animals, for Chuck, was problematic. However, in terms of what is actually going on in urban spaces, namely the rates of imprisonment, death and murder, he argued that it is hard not to think about African American man in this way.

Media portrayals of African American men as an oversexed, hyper masculine, and an endangered species, plays a prominent role in how they are both perceived and received. Chuck stated,

I can't imagine what it would be like to be apart of the unemployed or part of the group that didn't go to college. That's tough. When you walk into a room, that's the label-Endangered! I think it's an uphill battle. If you can't support your child and you don't have a place live, then that's why folks take bad paths. I think that's tough. Then you add the general issues, the violence, where you live, brutality. It is not an easy road [being an African American man].

Even under the protective eyes of his community members, Chuck has faced obstacles that fuel the soaring statistics around the plight of black men. He spoke

about the "survival" mentality that was necessary to live in his childhood community. Having been seconds away from several stray bullets and even help up at gunpoint, he recognized how lucky he is but also how closely connected he is, despite earning multiple degrees from highly selective universities, to the experiences of others in the community where he was reared. According to Chuck, "I am only one mistake away from being a Black male statistic."

However, his connection to the community, commitment to those who guided him, and his relationship with his younger brother, repelled Chuck from making bad personal and academic decisions.

I have a little brother that was born when I was 16. I have a tattoo that says, 'When I was a child, I talked like a child and walked like a child, but when I became a man, I walked like a man, talked like a man. So I put all childish things behind me' and my lil brother helped me become a man at 16 because I had to look out for him and set a good example for him. But for a lot of other brothers, and society does this too, you are allowed to be a teenager until you are 30 and Hip Hop allows you to just be cool too. So raising my brother helped me to think about things early and a lot of the shaping I had came from reading about Black America. That made me realized that I need to be better than what I am doing

Chuck attended private schools in New York and as a result was shielded from much of the external pressures that his peers endured. In addition to having peer support outside of school, in school he didn't experience threats to his masculinity or

African American identity because most of his peers were equally as invested in academics. Chuck reflected,

> So my experiences were real positive. Even in my elementary years I had encyclopedias and no one else did! So I knew a little more information than they did. And I was a brainy kid and I did a lot of reading and people were not necessarily reading. I was running away from poverty. It was real for me and I knew that if I live around this place when I am 25, I would be stuck!

Chuck attributed much of his success to teachers in his life who served as "other mothers" (Irvine, 2002) or surrogate father figures. He reflected on his encounters with his former math teacher, Mrs. Henry, as evidence of that;

> I had her for 3 years of math and she took me from sloppy lazy to organized and methodical and did it by talking to me and by encouraging me. She would talk to me even when I was bad and really bought a method to the way I worked and I think I apply that to a lot of things and she was really structured and I distained teachers who came to class with no structure and that's what I loved most about her.

Chuck interpreted Mrs. Henry's strictness and high expectations as truly promoting his scholarship. He asserted that students are at school to learn, not to be friends with the teacher. He believed that there are times and places, outside of the classroom, where teachers and students can be friendly, but that instructional time should be used for high quality instruction. Chuck pointed out that a lack of structure and academic rigor contributes to students' academic struggles.

Mrs. Henry represented that type of teacher that Chuck respected and would eventually become.

> She was strict and she demanded the best but she set it up for us. She told us to put our foot here, then here, then here- then she would go faster and faster. Then she would take the mold away and then tell us to do it. Too many teachers look for that agreement, like 'you get it?'---and then the students' say-'YEAH!' That's a lie and that's the worst thing you can do because everybody gets it till you take the test

Not all of Chuck's teachers had the same qualities as Mrs. Henry. For example, Chuck reflected on a White female teacher who would simply write notes on the board and demand that her students copy them- a mode of instruction she used in the bulk of her teaching time. She also adopted, what Chuck called, "old school" discipline strategies to manage her classrooms. She would put a mark in a book beside a student's name if he/she was disruptive, then after so many marks the student would have to write hundreds of sentences in a notebook apologizing for past transgressions. Chuck recalled one related incident when, "I figured I needed to get a head start so I started writing and then I got up and looked at her book to see how much I needed to do and she didn't appreciate that and so she threw a book at me and I threw it out of the window and was suspended!"

Due to his suspension, Chuck transitioned to another middle school, and he later found out that, Mr. McKennedy, one of his favorite teachers, was transferred to the same school. They lived in the same community and developed a personal relationship around football. According to Chuck, "He was a White dude from

Canada so he kinda broke the stereotype really early for me. He is a cool White guy! He ain't White he's Canadian."

These examples speak to teacher qualities that positively impacted Chuck as a student. Mrs. Henry demanded the best, challenged her students intellectually, and carefully scaffold their learning while Mr. McKennedy revealed his more personal side as he lived in the same community as Chuck and used their mutual love of sports to make an intimate connection. These qualities are in sharp contrast to the ways in which his English teacher undermined students' intelligence by requiring only that they copy notes from the board and by using writing as a punishment. Furthermore, according to Chuck, her disinterest in the students' family and home lives exacerbated her disconnection from students.

In addition to effective teachers, Chuck referenced his involvement in activities outside of class as significant to his academic and personal development. One such activity was a science program that he attended on Saturdays, which helped to sharpen his skills and exposed him to other science enthusiasts. Also, Chuck's involvement with *Inroads* (an internship program that partners companies and government agencies with promising high school and college students of color)-and the structure it provided, helped him to be a better student. It was through his involvement in these activities where he said he developed an insatiable love of reading.

When asked to recall his top five authors and/or books, Chuck identified Richard Wright, Nathan McCall, Harold Cruise, Malcolm X, and Tic Nick Han as the most influential. He recalled,

Richard Wright I think he was incredible in what he did and he was so descriptive. Nathan McCall's, *Makes You Wanna Holla*, is amazing. I give that book to all my mentees and my little brother is tryin to get thru I now. The dude who wrote the *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruise, is dope. Malcolm X, people don't realize the amount of writing he did versus the lack of writing King did, and Tic Nick Han, who is Buddhist monk who does a lot of writing and I think Buddhism is a nice overlay for the world we live in and I am really digging a lot of those teachings.

Hip Hop culture played a significant role in Chuck's identity as a black male. He borrow from Hip Hop artist, Q-tip's, realism and socially conscious points of view, is his teaching. However, in terms of being a African American man, Hip Hop artist Rakim and 2Pac were pivotal figures in his development because they were close in age and spoke about socio-political subjects in ways that made sense to him. According to Chuck,

It's different when you are listening to an artist who was 10 years into their career. It's hard for me to go back, but once I did that with PAC, I was like - word we going through the same things you know. It made me more genuine. Lots of people are willing to talk right and walk left, but Hip Hop speaks to the duality of human nature. It made me really think a lot about that and be more serious about my time. PAC died early and that's when we should be doing stuff-early. You don't gotta wait till you are 50 to do something, you should be doing it now you know!

Chuck said it was 1986 when he first fell in love with Hip Hop. After hearing KRS One's song, *9 Miller Meter,* and reflecting on the harsh realities of living in the Bronx (i.e. bullet holes in tree, witnessing senseless murder, and drug abuse) he began to see his life's experiences expressed directly through Hip Hop music. Furthermore, he was surrounded by multiple forms of Hip Hop throughout his life. Chuck reflected, "You know I seen graffiti on the trains at four years old and didn't think nothing of it and I am now like-'why wasn't we taking pictures mommy.' The train was right by my house and I could see stuff." Hip Hop was a mainstay in his life as he lived 5 blocks away from the Bronx River, which is where artists at that time practiced and help to promote Hip Hop's agenda.

However, Chuck said that he was too young to fully understand the magnitude of what he was experiencing through Hip Hop as a child. He recalled hearing songs like *Fight the Power* and *911* at about 12 years old, but in retrospect, realized that the lyrics were too sophisticated for someone of his level of maturity and development to fully understand. In Chuck's early life, Hip Hop was just a reflection of every day inner city living. And in its early iteration, Hip Hop was not on the radio and, therefore, fans had to actually buy the albums in order to enjoy the music. According to Chuck, "you want that Rakim album and you wanted that Tribe album and you devoured that you know-we would rewind and rewind."

Hip Hop has in many ways been the sound track for Chuck's life, from his coming of age in the Bronx to his life now as an engineer and college professor. He didn't have brothers, sisters, or extended family to guide him so, as he got older, Hip

Hop became a cousin, uncle, or older brother, who was able to answer questions and guide him through life in ways that his mother could not. He reflected,

> It's kinda been like a sound track and I am kinda non-traditional in the sense cause all my degrees are in engineering (bachelors in computer sciences and masters in engineering and working on my doctorate). I done been in like 2-3 Ph.D. programs along the way and so Hip Hop has been with me along the way. I used to build fighter jets for Boeing to my Hip Hop. And I been in corporate American with my Hip Hop so it's been my teacher. It's been like an uncle.

Artist like 2PAC, Scarface, Outkast, Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One, The Roots, M&M, Common, and Most Def are examples of Hip Hop artists who functioned as positive male role models throughout Chuck's life because they made "thoughtful Hip Hop" that talked about real issues facing people of color in marginalized communities. According to Chuck, they were men who did not waver in their messages of hope and transcendence. Even though they talked about sex, alcohol, and drugs at times, the positive messages throughout their albums were clear. While reflecting on his affinity for KRS-One, Chuck asserted,

> His aggressive style…his thing was you gotta get outta the hood by any means necessary. I don't know if I even digested those words as I did when I studied them, but I remember thinking, 'you know I gotta get outta the hood man I gotta do whatever to get outta the Bronx.

For Chuck, "getting out of the Bronx" did not necessarily mean leaving his loved ones or community behind, but it did represent his drive to venture beyond the

confines of his community to gain a broader range of life experiences. Chuck draws

from his childhood experiences in England and his cultural and personal relationship

with Hip Hop to shape is identity as an African American man. What is particularly

telling about Chuck's story however, was the ways that the men in his community,

especially the drug dealers, rallied together to buffer him from violent threats of other

young men in the neighborhood and to shield him from the temptations of selling and

using drugs. As such, even though they did not represent, what most would deem as,

positive examples of manhood, Chuck seemed to benefit from their beliefs in his

promise and potential as student. Their actions could be representative of, what many

of my participants deemed as, the collective responsibility of African American men.

In chapter six, I will draw from my participants accounts to expand upon their beliefs

about responsibility of African American men in relations to urban youth and

communities.

Asheru Ben

I met Ashuru Ben in 1995 at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA,

in an African American theatre course. Over the course of 13 years, we maintained

loose contact through our mentor through, who was the professor of the course. In

the fall of 2006, Ashuru and I maintained more consistent contact as I began working

as a graduate assistant, on a 2-year PAR project at the high school Asheru was an

administrator and curriculum specialist.

Alongside specializing in special education, curriculum development, and

arts-based instruction. In 2004, he earned a masters degree in education from

National-Louis University. He is the founder of his own community arts organization

and independent music label, he is an administrator, teaching and director of vocational arts at the high school where he teaches. He is mentors and advocate for youth in public schools and juvenile detention centers all over the country.

In 2005, Asheru co-founded an independent publishing company that creates culturally relevant cross-curricular teaching materials. His curriculum consists of a series of supplemental reading workbooks designed to help students of all reading levels, through the innovative use of Hip Hop lyrics, critical analysis, and multicultural relevance, and effective literacy instruction

Asheru was born in Columbia, Maryland, but spent much of his childhood in Mount Pleasant in Washington DC, a largely Latino and West Indian neighborhood. He also spent some of his time living and attending school in Barbados, West Indies, the birthplace of his father. In that context, Asheru explained that under the watchful eyes of his father and extended family members, he had little room for failure. He reflected, "I've been in situation where I could have gotten really caught up but my pops was so hard on me that it was not an option for me to get caught up in to bullshit." For many of his peers in the U.S. during that time, behaviors like dropping out of school were, as he put it, "like a badge of honor." In Barbados, it's a shame to the entire family if a student performs poorly in school. "That's why for me," Asheru explained, "not going to college was never an option for me in my house. My father was never hearing no language like 'naw I wasn't goin to college', get the fuck out of here. My father didn't even go to college but it wasn't an option." So his entire family would proudly say, "That young dude right there is going to college. He's going."

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In sharp contrast, his experiences in Washington, DC were quite different. He recalled a pivotal stage in this life when crack invaded urban cities throughout the U.S. and his community in particular. His story, which is common among my participants who were raised in inner cities (self included), speaks to the devastating impact that drug abuse has had people disenfranchised communities. Asheru recalled, "Umm well you know here in DC man shit crack ravished a lot of shit. A lot of those people was my family, you know I mean? Some of them still on drugs on my mother side of the family, I guess the U.S. side of my family struggled with drugs."

The lingering effects of severe drug abuse in the 80's and 90's are self evident today within urban communities. According to Asheru,

> It could be argued that we suffer from post dramatic stress syndrome. We live in inner city neighborhoods, extreme poverty, unstable family structure, terrible diet, and terrible health habits. So what you think, if I eat 'Cheetos' and 'Now-And-Laters' steady for breakfast for the last three years and my momma was smoking crack when I was in her womb, then you naturally gone have these problem. But I feel like the only people that can work and deal with them effectively is us. Black men specifically are the only ones that can save them.

Here, Asheru provided context to the crack epidemic, which not only negatively affected people and communities, but also produced an entire generation of crack-addicted youth who were born in poverty. This analysis is important as it speaks to

the type of work he does as an educator to meet the specific needs of his student population.

Asheru's schooling experiences in the U.S. and Barbados revealed contrasts reflective of those discussed above. Asheru's perspectives here are very important as he was schooled in two countries and within the context of two cultural, economic, social communities. He was very critical of his educational experiences in the U.S. as he described both his teachers and the curriculum as endemic to a watered down system aimed at brainwashing students to quietly work within "the system." In this system, according to Asheru, both racism and classim are intransigent. He reflected,

> I went to a catholic school here [Washington, DC] right before I moved to Barbados. I remember in one of our assignments we were talking about you know Jesus back in the day and the people that were looking for him to hang him and all that and we had to make a wanted poster. We had to take our selves back in time and draw up a wanted poster with Jesus' face on it and I just remember being like 'we don't know what he looks like' and I remember my teacher being like 'yes we do.' She was like- "sandy brown hair and white skin." Like she was just painting that picture and I just remember drawing the picture and being like, 'This shit ain't right, but whatever.'

This is one of many experiences that led Asheru to question the function and purpose of public education within the U.S. Because he was schooled, off and on, in Barbados, he saw first hand major differences in the ways in which students were taught in each context. Here he reflected on his school readiness as he transitioned back to the U.S. from Barbados.

When I got here [Washington, DC], they put me at the end of my ninth grade

year. I was like a 12 years old finishing up ninth grade trying to go to high

school and over there though I was like in 7th grade so you know it was a

shock on a couple levels cause I'm 12 my class mates 14 –15 years old.

According to Asheru, Barbados, despite being considered a third world nation,

has a literacy rate of roughly 98%. In that nation, the importance of education is

evident. Below, Asher reflected differences between Barbados and the U.S.

Education is free you know I mean but umm here [in the U.S.] it's like u gotta

force em to go to school, know what I mean? So it's just a weird dynamic that

that would be considered third world but their literacy rate is so high. In

Barbados when you are in class and your teacher walks in you stand up. But

when I got to D.C. they had beat the teacher up and I'm sitting there like what

the fuck? I could not, like, I had never seen nothing like that before you know

what I mean and umm that shit just sealed the deal for me like yo. This is a

different world so lemme just go ahead and do what I do and not you know

and not get caught up.

Asheru, a self-proclaimed nerd as a child and teenager, described himself as a

book worm who read non-fiction books on world history, cultures and religions. His

books of choice were reference books like encyclopedia. Because of his educational

training in Barbados, he was several-grades ahead of his peers in the U.S., a dynamic

that did not go unnoticed by his teachers or peers in high school. He reflected

My teachers were just like, 'Damn, he's so young but he's is here doin it.' My

friends would always be like, 'What you skippin grades or something?' So

you know that was always something that they brought up. They would call

me like baby genius or shit like that but it was never malicious it was always

just like, 'That lil muther fucker right there can read, boy.'

His educational experiences are unique on multiple levels, but are particularly

special because his academic aptitude was recognized and supported early in his

academic career. Recognition of scholastic abilities is certainly an uncommon

phenomenon among African American boys, particularly in middle and high school

grades (Ferguson, 2001). Teachers played a significant role supporting Asheru

through these processes. He further reflects,

I went to Garfield my 11th and 12th grade years. There were two White

women that, actually until this day I still go holler at them, that really

motivated me. They were just like 'You gone do it, I don't know what you are

destined for but you got the light' you know what I mean. It was a French

teacher and a science teacher and it was these two white women, it was some

weird shit man but they stuck with me until this day.

These two teachers made a huge positive impact on Asheru as they took the

time provide both academic and emotional support. For them, it was not just about

curriculum or standardized tests. He felt that they sincerely cared about his

development as a person and saw potential in him, unlike countless other educators he

encountered, who critiqued him mostly based on academic outcomes. The teachers

mentioned above took extra time and expressed genuine interest. He said they would

ask, "Are you going to school? What college you going to? You need a letter?" He

felt that they cared more than his other teachers, guidance counselor, and school administrators.

It is important to note that the most significant teachers in his Asheru's life were White women. This is another aspect of his coming of age experiences that is atypical the study sample. The two teachers were memorable because they showed genuine caring, as Asheru articulated, by challenging him academically, being present and consistent, and seeing him as a whole person rather than just a student. These experiences contribute to the ways in which Asheru approaches teaching and shapes his thinking about who can and should teach, particularly students of color. He asserted,

> The thing is when you look at these movies you know how they got them movies like *Freedom Writers* and everybody is like, oh yea this white women comes in and saves the day. Black inner city kids do have this thing with White people where they kinda sometimes give them more defiance than a Black person but if you are a White person and you ain't afraid to teach in Baltimore or to laugh at yourself sometimes. If you just really give a shit about what they doin, you might get emotional and cry sometimes, but kids will love you. You can be a Black teacher and come in there like on the phone all damn class or yell and scream all class. You know what I mean-race doesn't really have a lot to do with it. Kids want to feel love and respect.

Asheru spoke a great deal about the influence that Hip Hop culture had on his emotional and spiritual development outside of the classroom. He recalled that his love for Hip Hop started when he was about nine years old.

When I was in Barbados man I had four tapes. I had Doug E. Fresh's *The Worlds Greatest Entertainer*, I had a Salt n Pepa's album. I had P.E. [Public Enemy], *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* and I think a Big Daddy Cane tape and that's all I knew man. That was all I knew and I used to write the lyrics to all my favorite songs in a notebook and just be spiting that shit on a type writer like all day long.

Asheru studied Hip Hop lyrics relentlessly throughout his middle and high school years. However, it was during his transition to college at 16 that he began to write poems for spoken word forums and open mike events at the University of Virginia. Over time, his poems became lyrics that he would eventually recited to music. To develop his own style, he began to intersect his own voice and vision with Hip Hop legends such as: Big Daddy Kane, Rakim, Public Enemy, NWA, and MC Lite. These experiences mark the beginning of his development into a lyricist, song writer, producer, and Hip Hop scholar.

During that time, Hip Hop shaped his worldview. Listening to NWA, Ice Tee, and Too Short, who are all artists who generally spoke about the social conditions of people of color, made him feel empowered to use music, particularly the microphone, as a venue through which to disseminate messages of hope, healing, progress, and prosperity. Therefore, Hip Hop was not just music, or art, or culture, but a state of consciousness rooted in the tenets of Hip Hop—peace, love, unity, and having fun.

One effect of Hip Hop's growing popularity at that time was that many of its listeners were compelled to study not only the lyrics, but also validity of the lyrical content. For example, artists like Rakim, Kane, Big Daddy Cane, and Tribe Called

Quest, as well as the artist mentioned above, rapped about the influence of African culture, religion, language, and scholarship on the western world. These messages were new to many urban youth at that time and so a love of Hip Hop became synonymous with a heightened appreciation for historical research. According to Asheru,

> Rakim and them made me want to look and to see what Islam was really about and I'm not Muslim but they really made me want to find out a lot of shit when I was young so I researched a lot of shit just off of the off the X brand hearing them talk about Osiris and Isis and that shit. Hip Hop really opened my curiosity up to all that shit. Then Tribe came around and Native Tongues taught me to be myself while everybody else was doing what they were doing and not feel ashamed about it or nothing. So back then I was rocking African medallions, party shirts, doc martins and big tees when everybody else was rocking starter jackets. So it felt like I finally heard a voice of somebody that was talking my language- some intelligent shit that I could relate to.

Asheru's story revealed that he drew from multiple sources for encouragement and motivation during his upbringing. His parents' relentless drive to ensure that he performed well in school significantly influenced his life as a student. He was a self-proclaimed "book worm" (meaning he loved reading) and throughout his adolescence he developed a thirst for knowledge and new information. His early experiences with Hip Hop culture, as is evident in the above quote, provided him a cultural venue through which he began to study African and African American history and began to establish is identity as a man.

For me however, what was particularly interesting was how eagerly he spoke about the two White female high school teachers that showed support and care. During our interview, is face light up in excitement when he spoke about those teachers. For him, they provided genuine displays of love and caring, despite their differences in race. They expressed a vested interest in his development and well-being and took measures, beyond those of his other teachers, to ensure his academic success. Data from this study, particularly his accounts, which are explicated in more detail in later chapters, reveal that his early experiences with teachers that care, played a major role in the ways he shows caring to his current students. As such, in subsequent chapters, I delve deeper into the personalized and caring relationships that my participants share with their students, particularly African American boys.

Gill Yellowtone

My relationship with Mr. Gill Yellowtone developed during the two years that I worked as a research assistant on a PAR (Participatory Action Research) project at a private alternative high school in Washington, DC. Gill, is a digital arts teacher and behavior specialist at that school. For the first years of the project, Gill and I would greet one another and exchange pleasantries in passing during my visits to the school twice a week. Due to limited space, our PAR team met in his classroom during planning period and since we share the same students, we developed a natural relationship as we discussed our students' progress, or lack thereof. What makes this particular school and Gill so unique compared to other schools and teachers serving special needs populations, is that it has a vibrant arts department, of which Gill was a lead teacher. In this department, students were heavily engaged in music

performance and production, graphic and digital arts design, and martial arts. Unlike in most traditional school settings, the arts teachers were among the most revered and respected teachers in the school.

Gill is a Hip Hop MC (Move the Crowd) and digital artist who happens to be a teacher. His connection to teaching is directly connected to Hip Hop. He began his career as a freelance digital artist and he videotaped for a fellow MC's, like Asheru, whom he later found out was a teacher and budding administrator. Through their relationship, Gill found out about the arts instructor position. He admittedly never planned to be a teacher, but took a chance at what he deemed to be a great opportunity. Ironically upon accepting the position, he realized that a number of his friends within Hip Hop were also recent hires at the school. Therefore, the school, according to Gill, has a "Hip Hop vibe," meaning much of the activity and discourse between and among students and teachers is Hip Hop related. These conversations and/or experiences are not limited to music and rapping, but represent an overall disposition—they way they walk, talk, and relate to one another and the world.

Gill was born in the Bronx, New York in 1979 and moved to Washington, DC in the summer of 1989 when the movie, *Do The Right Thing*, and the song *Fight the Power* were released. He grew up during the era when Hip Hop culture and music began experiencing rapid growth and popularity in television and radio.

In New York, Gill lived and went to school in racially and culturally diverse environments—so diverse that schools closed to honor the holidays of many cultural groups. His parents kept him heavily involved and sheltered while in New York so he was protected from, as he states, "the many temptations," in which young people

indulged during that time. He focused most of his energies on school and extra curricular activities. Upon moving to D.C. at age 10, Gill found himself in an all Black environment where, as he stated, "you couldn't find white people anywhere." It was in D.C. that he was first exposed to the negative impact that drugs abuse and poverty had on Black communities. Further, 1989 was the year that D.C. became the murder capital of the nation. In this more dangerous context, Gill and his family again searched for ways to protect him from external influences.

Gill's parents, particularly his mother, played a significant role in protecting him from external influences that could negatively impact his social, personal, and educational development. In an effort to expose him to positive images of Black manhood and to provide him with tangible examples of African American leadership, Gill's mother accompanied him to a number of rallies as well as to cultural and social events throughout D.C. Gill reflected,

> I remember when she took me to see Jesse Jackson speak when he was running for president. By that time I had already seen Farrakhan several times. I way too young to know anything but I would just listen. My mom was definitely in the whole Pan African movement, you know like the whole thing during this time was South African and ending apartheid and things like that. I went with her everywhere.

Gill grandfather also played a significant role in his development. Gill learned from him, even more so than from his father, who was not physically present in his life, the value of hard work and sacrificing for your family. As depicted in the

passages below, he considered his grandfather the ideal man because of his love for his wife, children, and more specifically because of his consistency as a father figure.

> I mean they just don't really make em like that anymore. I'm pretty good but I'm not made like that you know like what he did was I mean he came over as an immigrant from Jamaica but what he did was he worked hard, he worked hard and raised a family and he loved his wife, loved his family, and made sure all of his kids went to school. You know he just handled all of his business well. Even in death, everything was all handled. But the biggest part of it was that he was a great father you know. Like the ideal Black man is a great father, and um being a great father entails all that- raising your family taking care of your kids you know what I'm saying, making sure your kids do better than you and have opportunities that you didn't have, and its also about making sacrifices for your family and um so yeah. That was my grand dad.

Therefore, due to the early intervention of his mother and grandfather, who both were important role models, Gill was provided a very solid foundation which allowed him to focus on, what he calls "the important things," which were related school.

To evade punishment, Gill obeyed his parents and did as much school work as he could. Much of this motivation, or fear, was a result of his father's "extreme" methods to ensure that Gill was a superlative student. He reflected, "Like you know he was the type to be like, 'Okay your homework is not written neat enough. Write it over'." Under those conditions, Gill worked to be an A student throughout elementary school and was at the top of his class throughout most of his early schooling years. Furthermore, his parents made it clear very early that college was

not an option, but a requirement. Gill asserted, "I mean I always wanted to be an artist because my dad was one but I didn't even know that there was such a thing as art school so I had my mind set on college plus I used to watch *A Different World* and be like 'I'm definitely going to college.'"

Because his friends, teachers, and family members considered him to be smart, Gill found himself working to live up to their expectations. He recalled,

Like I would just grab books that were large and just be like oh that's 500 pages, lets start on that you know what I mean. Even if it was Steven King, I would be like lets read that and this was like 4th grade I was reading on a 12th grade level like it was nothing.

However, he also recalled a time in his educational career when things started to shift. He was on the advanced placement track and was presented with the most challenging work that his teachers could offer. Nonetheless, he says he grew increasingly bored with the work and as a result he would finish quickly and talk with his friends. As a result, he started to get reprimanded more frequently because of his talking in class and the declining quality of his work as he grew older in age. But in junior high school he was less focused on academic endeavors and more interested in being cool—for once.

In middle school, Gill noticed that the teachers didn't care as much as they did in elementary school. His grades plummeted to C's and D's but none of his teachers or school administrators took the initiative to meet with his mother to discuss the challenges he faced. In an effort to find more supportive and academically enriching environment, Gill's family transferred him to a new middle school, La Salle. There,

however, he was tracked based solely on his prior "poor" grades. As a C and D student at his former school, the administrators at La Salle assigned him to all, as he put it, "slow" classes. Gill recounted that,

> The year before my grades dropped when I was in the 5th grade, I was a straight A student for like 4 years. Then all of a sudden I was sitting in the slow class and I was not a slow student. I saw how they taught like we was slow. But we were only in the sixth grade and they already wrote us off as the slow kids and nobody was formally testing us.

Much of the instruction involved leisure painting or coloring, flash cards, and crossword puzzles. Gill recalled feeling trapped and disenfranchised as he was well aware of his academic ability, but did not have the resources or power to fight the politics of his new school. As Gill recalled, "luckily" for the entire class, his teacher, fell down a flight of steps and missed six months of work. Mrs. Pratt, the long-term substitute, came with a new and refreshing academic agenda for her students. Gill affectionately described Mrs. Pratt as "an angel" who provided him with an opportunity to recover academically.

> After our teacher fell, we got a substitute and this lady was like, 'I'm not teaching y'all like you are slow. I'm teaching you like I teach every other class.' I was able to just excel because she just taught us and I just remembered being in there like so if this didn't happen, even if I did good in the 6th grade and got straight A's in the slow class, they would put me in the 7th grade slow class and I would just keep going on that track.

By the end of the academic years, Gill and his mother worked relentlessly to remove him from the remedial track. However, rather than test him to get a true measure of his academic ability, the school administrators required that he attend summer school to catch up. His mother also enrolled him in a number of after school programs to scaffold this progress. By the seventh grade, he returned to regular track classes, but he recalled how socially, emotionally, and financially challenging that process was for his entire family.

Even more frustrating for Gill is his realization that if not for his parents' intervention and the resources to which they had access, he could have easily been tracked into remedial classes throughout his middle and high school years.

I see how you can fall through the cracks in the school system. I was only in 6th grade and I realize that I could just really get lost in this system. I came from New York where I was a straight A student, but when I came to D.C, I went to the School Without Walls and I didn't do too good. My mom wasn't checking up on stuff as diligently as she should have or as diligently as my dad would have. I was a bright kid. I was just bored.

For the seventh grade and onto throughout high school, Gill remained focused and was determined to reverse the academic trajectory he had been placed upon the year prior. Gill reflected, "I think I was bored with getting thrown out of class and getting a couple laughs and some jokes. And I didn't necessarily like all of those people in the advanced classes always thinking that they smarter than me so I decided to refocus and prove them wrong."

During his turbulent educational experiences, Gill found solace in art, music, and dance. It was during that same time, the mid to late 80's, when Hip Hop began to make waves in popular media. In New York City, Hip Hop was a way of life for many African American youth and, therefore, through his artistic expression he represented his lived experiences. According to Gill,

> Anybody growing up in New York could see Hip Hop in their neighborhood. People in other cities and like other countries could see Hip Hop through movies like *Beat Street*, or from music video. But growing up in the Bronx, you can just like walk down the street there was graffiti everywhere, graffiti on the train stations graffiti on the trains. So it was nothing just like walking down the street and you just see like a mural going past you or guys with the radios on their shoulders, or people break dancing in the street. Art imitates life.

> The 1980's there were many social struggles (e.g. apartheid in South Africa and police brutality in U.S. cities) and songs about resistance and protest among common people, particularly people of color in urban communities, was being produced and popularized. In reality, Hip Hop emerged as a way to document and to give other communities access to the ways in which people lived in New York City.

Gill's attraction to Hip Hop evolved as it became more popularized in mainstream media. The visual images of Hip Hop legends such as: Kool Mo D and Run DMC mirrored that of the men in his family, church, and neighborhood. Gill states, 'they looked like the people in the hood -they looked like my uncle-they dressed like my uncles-shoot." It was during that era that "the flood gates started to

open" for Gill as artists like Slick Rick, Public Enemy and Salt and Peppa emerged. For him, the opened flood gates represented the time him his life when Hip Hop began to take over. According to Gill, "As soon as I could get a tape it was over. The first cassette I got was Salt and Pepper. I took it home and was like, 'man this is dope.' Then my mother gave me the *Raising Hell* cd for Christmas. It was over then. I had my radio in my bedroom and it was just--WOW-Just like crazy!"

It was during the transition from New York to D.C. that Gill became more aware of Hip Hop and how it differed regionally. It is likely that Hip Hop culture was so present and readily available in New York that Gill, like other participants from that region, simply acknowledged Hip Hop as a way of life, rather than a cultural or musical phenomenon. In D.C., the styles of dress and language were in sharp contrast to New York. Gill argued that Hip Hop was prevalent in DC at that time, in that the music played on the radio was well received, but since Hip Hop music wasn't their own creation, Washingtonians were merely entertained by it rather than involved in it. However, Go-Go music, which is more indigenous to D.C. was and still is very popular.

Gill recalled a pivotal moment when Washingtonians began to embrace "New York's" brand of Hip Hop music and fashion.

> You know so like 89,' that was when like *I'm Gone Get You Sucka* [a movie
> parody of Black exploitations films and the emerging Hip Hop culture] was
> making fun of people wearing so much gold. So people [in DC] started
> wearing medallions and stuff. You know what I mean and they started

making a shift in the music and that was listening to and that trickled down to us you know.

Artists like KRS One and Public Enemy, who were superstars in the northeast, were not necessarily well received in D.C. at that time. Gill further stated that in resistance to the New York brand of Hip Hop [whose messages were largely about resisting white supremacy, fighting poverty, and rebuilding marginalized communities] artists like NWA and Onyx were openly embraced in D.C. Therefore, song like *Fight the Power*, *You Must Learn*, *Self Destruction*, *Be A Father To Your Child*, and *U.N.I.T.Y.* [which all disseminated very positive messages of hope, self respect, and scholarship to urban youth] were eagerly rejected. In contrast, urban youth in Washington, DC embraced songs like *Fuck the Police, Real Niggaz Don't Die, Dope Man,* and *Don't Bite It* (among many others) which were replete with gloried messages of violence, drug abuse, and explicit sex. According to Gill,

> When I moved to DC the kids were just faster. They were fast as far as sex, as
> far as fighting, as far as just being aggressive. I remember I was like 'what is
> this NWA I keep hearing about' and I remember this kid had to be about ten
> and he was like 'nigga, you don't know NWA' and I said 'huh what? I think I
> heard nigga but what did he just call me?

Gill said that these differences in cultural expression contributed to the contextual differences between his social upbringing in New York and D.C. He was forced to adjust quickly by adopting a hard-core exterior (Dance, 2002) and embracing some music that his peer in D.C. enjoyed.

Hip Hop music and culture played a significant role in shaping Gill's thinking about Black masculinity. The voice, diction, and the power with which Boogie Down Productions (BDP) rapped, particularly in the song *You Must Learn,* ignited in Gill the ambition to research the accuracy of the lyrics and to also share that new knowledge with friends. According to Gill, "they were political and street at the same time." The same was true of NAS, one of the first Hip Hop artists to create rap lyrics that sounded like traditional poetry. Gill was and still is attracted to NAS' ability to graphically detail the experiences of people who live in poverty in both authentic and poetic ways, while at the same time selling millions of records. These artists were the first to truly inspire Gill to study the art of being an African American man and an MC. He saw characterized being an African American man in similar ways as he described his grandfather-strong, care-giving, consistent, financially stable. But also artists like NAS and BDP possessed a "swagger" or feeling of coolness that he admired. Thus, began his love affair with Hip Hop.

While in high school Gill participated in weekly rapping workshops called, *Freestyle Union.* In these workshops, the participants (ages ranging from 15-25) would go through exercises or training sessions to improve their rapping and free styling techniques. In addition, the goal of *Free Style Union* was to expose the participants to a more positive form of rap. No one could say "Nigga" in the workshop. As a younger member of *Free Style Union*, Gill was exposed to older Black men with whom he built positive relationships centered around camaraderie, mentorship, and Hip Hop.

Gill's love of Hip Hop and commitment to developing into a highly skilled lyricist and graphic artist [graffiti] diverted Gill from the illicit or illegal activities in which many of his friends were involved.

> Before the rap came I didn't have the focus to reject what my friends were doing in the neighborhood. So rap did it because I would save my money up to buy my equipment, and once I save my money up to buy my 4 track, I would do my recording at home so yeah, I would come home and do my music-and yeah I had friends but some of my best friends were my records.

Gill relied heavily on Hip Hop to shield him from crime and violence that was present in his neighborhood in D.C. As reflected in the above quote, he found refuge in music as a form of artistic expression. Gill articulated in our conversations that the passion with which he engaged in Hip Hop culture and digital arts, was fueled by his middle school experiences where was placed in low track classes. Throughout our interviews, he fervently talked about how lucky he was to have a teacher (his substitute teacher) who saw past his poor grades and taught him, and his classmates, as if he was academically gifted. He felt that if not for her, he would have remained in low tracked classes until graduation or would have grown increasingly disengaged from school and eventually dropped out. This realization was particularly troubling for him as it speaks to the experiences of countless other African American boys who are unnecessarily placed in low tracked classes or in special education. He asserted that these factors contributed to the endangerment of African American boys in U.S. schools and fuels his desire to circumvent these trends, significantly influences his pedagogy and beliefs about African American students. As such, in subsequent

chapters, I provide to deeper analysis of my participants beliefs about the factors

contributing to the endangerment of African American boys in schools and

responsibility towards fighting again them.

Keyote Jones

My relationship with Keyote Jones emerged in similar ways as it did with Mr.

Gill Yellowtone. Keyote is an english and life skills teacher at the high school where

I worked as a research assistant. His classroom was across the hall from our research

class. Therefore, Keyote and I had short but frequent contact during my visits. Much

of our interactions were limited to pleasant greetings and well wishes, but it was

through those encounters and my informal observations of his teaching styles, that I

knew he was a special teacher. I noticed that regardless of where he was in the school

building, there were usually 2-3 students following him or seeking his attention.

Also, class sizes at the school averaged about 3-6 students. Keyote, however, seemed

to have standing room only in most of his classes.

Despite the fact Keyote is a small framed man who looked as young as some

of his students, he appeared to have no discipline problems. This observation alone is

quite telling as all of the students had been expelled from Washington, D.C. public

schools and were under court order to attend this school. Within that context, I never

heard Keyote raise his voice, embarrass a student publicly, or lose his temper in any

way. In contrast, he was one of the most warm, emotionally open, and caring teachers

I had observed in my career as an educator. I was intrigued by his cool demeanor and

resolve to keep his classroom stress free. Knowing that I was in search of participants

for my study, I took a leap of faith and said to him, "Mr. Jones, you are quite

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peculiar." He responded, "I know." From there, we engaged in several short conversations over the course of several months in which I gained a deeper understand of his commitment to teaching, love of learning, his relationship with Hip Hop culture.

Keyote was born and raised in Washington, DC by both parents, whom he proudly explained, "are still married to this day." Keyote further reflected, "My mother was a smoker until the day she found out I was with her and she threw her cigarettes in the trash on the way out and that in itself was a powerful story and it gave me a sense of self worth." He says that as soon as she was aware of her pregnancy, her life changed. She stopped drinking and smoking, and she made an effort to surround herself with joy and laughter, in preparation for her son. His father expressed his love and anticipation in others ways. Keyote stated, "I can remember my father had two or three jobs if not more to make sure he could provide whatever I needed. I'm an only child and in some ways I think I am spoiled in terms of my needs." For Keyote, the realization that his parents went to great lengths, even before he was born, to create a safe, stable, and nurturing home, gave him a sense of belonging and self worth.

Keyote's family moved around a great deal because of his fathers job and his mothers desire to raise him in the safest neighborhood she could find. According to Keyode, "…my mom wanted to remove me from the element of crime and the elements that would lead me down the wrong path. A lot of kids didn't have discipline because the mom or dad was on something [drugs or alcohol] or about something else." At different times in his childhood, they lived in all four corners of

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Washington, DC (NE, NW, SE AND SW), but finally settled in Lanham, MD, which is about fifteen miles outside of DC. At the time, Keyote was the only black child in the neighborhood. The transition was difficult for him as he went from spending most of his time with family and community members who looked like him, to a community where his immediate family were the only people of color.

Keyote resented that fact that he was forced to leave his extended family and acclimate to a neighborhood where there were very few young people. According to Keyote, "There were a lot of older middle class or lower middle class adults who were my parents' age or more without any kids in the house. The only time I saw kids was in school." However, he appreciated his parents' efforts to shield him from many of the challenges facing people in the poor and urban community they had left.

While in Washington, D.C., Keyote recalled the devastating impact that poverty and substance abuse had on people in his community. He asserted that most of his friends and their parents were addicted to drugs or were alcoholics. In an effort to support their habits and feed their families, many (both children and adults) stole cars or anything of value. Keyote asserted,

> The issue is the fear and no discipline and when you combine those two things together you have people sitting around complaining about the problems and not adhering to solutions or holding themselves responsible. You have kids taking care of themselves and adults who are still wanting to be kids and don't want to take care of the responsibilities they had.

This mentality, coupled with minimal resources, according to Keyote, was a lethal combination that still plagues urban communities today.

Keyote's parents were aggressive in protecting him from danger and negative

influences. Keyote stated,

> I saw my mom's face on a daily basis coming home with me from nursery
>
> school. I vividly remember being carried in the house whether I was 5,6, or 7
>
> years old because she don't want to be caught in the middle of something or a
>
> stray bullet or something. I remember my dad wearing an iron face when
>
> coming in the house to make sure that people wouldn't mess with him.

Though extreme, their fear was justified as the treat of violence, burglary, or

being the unintentional victim of a stray bullet was very real. Keyote remembered,

while visiting a cousin's house in D.C., being restricted from entering the rooms in

the front of the house because of bullet holes in the walls. The threat of being shot

while inside the home was so imminent, that the he and his cousins were required, as

he says, to, "lay low to the ground at all the times because if we were standing up,

who would not know what could have happened. So we stayed low."

For Keyote, there was no safety in D.C. and the awareness that at any

moment, he or his loved ones could be injured or killed, forced him to monitor is

behavior and be the best student and child that he could be for as long as he could.

With this mentality he says, "then at least you were doing what you were supposed to

do and not getting caught out there doing things that you weren't supposed to do." As

a result, Keyote spent much of his childhood hidden inside and fearful for his life.

Keyote spent much of his time alone from the 4th grade until high school

graduation. In the 4th grade, he began to struggle academically as he was being

introduced to higher forms of math and vocabulary. In prior grades, where the focus

was on writing and reading comprehension, he excelled academically and his mother drilled him on vocabulary words and required that he read several books a week. According to Keyote,

> My mom had me in the kitchen saying 're-frig-er-rat-or' when I was between three and four years old. So I was already there with those skills but now in order to express myself with my own ideas and thought processes, that's where my drop-off came and that's where I noticed some issues in being able to appropriately show what I knew. I wasn't able to show what I knew as readily as I wanted.

As the only child his parents were very aggressive in ensuring that Keyote received the best education and was an A student. As is evident by their multiple moves throughout his childhood, Keyote's parents were willing to go to great lengths to provide him the best of everything. His poor academic performance strained their relationship and communication. According to Keyote, "…from 4th grade till I was seventeen about to go to college we had a very interesting phase and emotionally a lot went on and I think a lot stemmed from me finding out that I had a learning difference but couldn't put it into words because I couldn't figure it out myself."

What Keyote termed a "learning difference" is commonly understood as a learning disability. Keyote's learning disability went undiagnosed for many years and his parents assumed that his academic challenges resulted from a lack of effort. He was not progressing at the same rate as he was in previous grades and his teachers began to call home to complain that he had too much energy and was never focused. His teachers acknowledged that Keyote had some ability and knew random

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information, but his lack of focus, poor writing, and hyperactivity was too difficult to handle. He remembers, at a parent-teacher conference, his teacher explaining to his parents, "unfortunately it seems that your son can't learn—he is unfocused and unmotivated." Keyote talked about his parents' response saying,

My parents are old school. [They believed] If you put in the time you should get the results and for the times spent I wasn't getting the results. So there was punishment to go along with each one of those let downs and when you have experts, supposed experts who are educators telling you that your son *can't* learn or sit still and stay focused, you've got to do something with him and find him a job where he can work with his hands because he's not gonna make it in school. My parents didn't know how to deal with that.

Because he was not meeting his parents' or teachers' academic expectations, Keyote's parents forced him to study harder and longer until his academic performance improved. He recalls struggling under that pressure and found it difficult to express himself at home and at school. Not only did his teachers label him "uneducable," but he was also the only African American male student in his grade. Therefore, he felt emotionally, socially, and educationally isolated from anyone who could effectively advocate on his behalf.

This stage in his life was demoralizing as he recalled being the only student in class to receive D's and F's on all assignments, despite the many hours of studying and review that his parents forced upon him. He reflected,

I had no assurance that all the studying that I had done the day before or two to three days before, was actually going to be represented on that paper and I

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may have known the material, I could have orally given it verbatim, but I may not have been able to write it on the paper in the way that you wanted it to be. So my grade reflected that and so that meant that the days and preparation that I had spent studying were wasted. See as a young child, your whole identity is wrapped into being a student and if you aren't a good student there may be other things that you can reach out to do like sports, this, that and the other.

Keyote's mother, while randomly listening to the radio, heard about a Lab School for the Arts. The director, Sally Smith, spoke about characteristics that students with learning disabilities exhibit at home and at school, which matched Keyote's student profile and his parents immediately pursued diagnostic testing. His parents realized that he was advanced in some areas, but needed scaffolding in others. Therefore, through the support of the teacher at the Lab School's and the academic tools they provided for home use, he was finally given access to the type of education that highlighted his academic strengths while providing extra support in his areas of weakness.

According to Keyote, the Lab School was a saving grace and was effective in positioning him to do well in high school.

I can't hold grudges or blame because that's a waste of energy at this point in time but I thank my mom, I thank God, I thank Sally Smith, and the rest of those people that intervened. You know my mom ended up finding her on the television or radio, but what if she didn't turn it on that day? I don't know where I would be without the lab school.

He further reflected,

School in general was a blurr until I got to lab school because I don' think I was learning. If I was learning, I was learning by chance. If I got it, I got it on my own and my mom was teaching me at home how to do the multiplication tables, how to do that and how to divide from practice with my parents and practicing outside of school. When I got out of lab school it changed. I was able to tell who was a really good teacher and who really honored the idea of teaching.

Keyote attended a college preparatory technical high school in Washington D.C. where he excelled academically. He was at the top of his class and participated in a number of extra curricular activities that enhanced his marketability for college. He eventually applied to, visited, and was accepted to eight colleges. Keyote reflected,

We visited eight schools and instead of just being like you can go to school because they are gonna give you money, we went and visited eight schools, we applied to eight schools, and we got into eight schools. I said 'we', because we got into those eight schools. Me and my mom and my dad! We got into eight schools!

Keyote's personal victory lies in the realization that the child who was once told that he uneducable and should learn a trade that required him to use his hands instead of his brain, eventually graduated from a highly selective college on a full academic scholarship

Keyote's father was an ex-military man whose political perspectives contrasted with his own. His father was more politically conservation and less willing to be critical of any social, political or educational systems. His efforts were

more geared towards working silently within the system. Though he didn't speak about them often, his level political consciousness was displayed through his actions. That is, the types of music he enjoyed, the political leaders he silently supported, and the ways in which he related to people in the community. On the other hand, his mother was a bit more vocal about her political views, even in an era where women's points of views were deemed as intellectually subordinate. According to Keyote, "My mom is one of those women who was around 19 and 20 years old when a lot of that was going on during the civil rights movement. So she had some footing and wasfairly active and saw the leaders that we see today live and in color."

However, there were few discussions about political ideals and historical socio-cultural movements in Keyote's household and he references Hip Hop Culture as the venue through his political activism was awakened. Keyote recalled one of the first Hip Hop songs that he heard on the radio. *The Message* (1982), by Grand Master Flash talked about many of the socio-political issues of that time. In the interview, Keyote recited the following lyrics from *The Message*,

> Broken glass everywhere, people pissing on the stairs, you know they just
>
> don't care. I can't take the smell, I can't take the noise, got no money to move
>
> out, I guess I got no choice…I tried to get away, but I couldn't go far, cause
>
> the man with the tow-truck repossessed my car.

As one of the first Hip Hop songs to get airtime on the radio, it spoke to the many of the issues that people in impoverished communities throughout the nation experienced on a daily basis.

According to Keyote, Hip Hop is and should remain a culture centered around a socio-political agenda. He argues that politics are the ideas and ideals of the people, and should represented and protected by elected officials. Likewise, art has always represented the reality of everyday people's experiences. Therefore, art is as important as the politics as they both should both be representative of the voices and experiences of the people. Hip Hop is Keyote's political voice.

Keyotes said that he does not remember the moment that he fell in love with Hip Hop, but it seems that his love was always there. As early as the 4th grade, he recalls writing lyrics, making beats and practicing break dancing as often as he could find time. She stated,

I was writing rhymes and dancing even then. I would beg her [his mother] to go to the mall because after I saw the movie Beat Street, I thought that's where break dancers would be and I wanted to battle people. Then I would go to the library and read all day so I could learn how to be a better rapper.

Keyode turned to Hip Hop during that time in his life when school was a challenge. For him, Hip Hop provided the space in which he could excel and express himself without judgment and fear of failure. He says that Hip Hop kept him out of trouble because he spend most of his free time working on art, interpreting lyrics, or stretching—all in preparation for his next free style battle or break dancing competition. He asserts that Hip Hop helped to save his life for it was through Hip Hop that he developed a sense of power, control, and self-esteem. As he practiced, he visualized himself being the best at a particular way of rhyming or dancing. Keyote

reflects, "I was being the best me that I could be." Therefore, these preparation

processes kept him busy and reestablished in confidence. In turn, his parents were

pleased that he was home and safe from the outside world.

> Hip Hop was my individuality and my little bit of space. At the same time I
> was like wow, my mom and dad don't really get it but they are alright with me
> stayin in the house because I'm practicing, I'm writing, im messing with beats,
> I'm sittin home downstairs on the living hours at a time hours of my head—
> 'boy you gone kill yourself.' And after two to three months, they looking at
> me like 'he ain't dead yet but you gone kill yourself. But at least he is safe.'

Randomly, in the middle of our conversation, Keyode began to recite the following

lyrics to MOS Def's song *LOVE*

> It was love for the thing that made me wanna stay out. It was love for the
> thing that made me stay in the house. Spending time, writing rhyms trying to
> find words that describe the vibe that's inside my space, when you close yo'
> eyes and screw yo face.

The "thing" that both Keyote and MOS Def speak about is Hip Hop. He says that

Hip Hop was his tutor, mentor and friend, during a time in his life he felt most alone.

It provided spaces in which his authentic talents, beliefs, and ideals were presented,

and to his delight, challenged.   He stated,

> Hip-hop is a culture that allowed me to resolve the conflicts within myself and
> then resolve the conflicts outside of myself. [I had to resolve] the issues that
> were going on in my world and then outside of that little circle. Then when I
> saw that congruence with people with different nationalities, from other

countries and different places around the planet, knew I was on to something. It [Hip Hop] gave me a sense of peace and a sense of unity and peace unity love and having fun and those things are ever present when you're looking at Hip Hop. Even at the time we got a lot of music that talks about a lot of sad stuff and there are a lot of sad things going on in the neighborhood, we also have the power and opportunity to make things right and better and it may not be over night but we can do the same things in our songs and how we teach and how we relate to one another.

In a recent trip to New York, Keyote met the Zulu Nation (deemed the fathers of hip hop) as well other luminaries within Hip Hop such as African Bambaadaa and KRS-One. He considers them surrogate uncles, brothers, and cousins who significantly impacted his life, particularly at a time when he felt hopeless. Upon meeting these visionaries, he handed them all CD's of his own music—not for the sake of self-promotion, but to provide them with evidence of the fruits of their labor.

They didn't know me by face but the raised me in the terms of ideals that they taught. When Bambaadaa repeated in songs, peace, unity, love and having fun, it changed my life. Those words are the genesis in my bible for my lifestyle and how I live. They didn't just perform as a jam it was almost biblical in a sense because it gave us the commandments for which to treat each other. And that in itself is what kept and will keep Hip-Hop at its best.

Keyote's accounts of his educational history were poignant. His schooling experiences were tenuous as teachers deemed his uneducable and suggested that he invest his energies in learning how to work with his hands rather than in academic

pursuits. As a result, his parents placed him under a great deal of pressure, by enforcing strict rules, to improve his grades. This significantly diminished his self-esteem and feeling of worth. However, he turned to Hip Hop culture in his search for a space where he would not feel like a failure. It was through Hip Hop that Keyote was able to harness his talents and rebuild his self-confidence.

Nonetheless, I was most struck by Keyote's educational history. I often observed, as he reflected on the academic challenges he face as an adolescent, signs of tension (wrinkled brows and deep in and exhales) in his face and body language. He was particularly troubled by his schools' and teachers' failure to properly test and diagnose his learning disability. He asserted that a number of African American boys "fall through the cracks," of a poorly functioning educational system. Though he was blessed to a have a mother who possessed the social and economic capital to provide academic support, he argued that there are countless other students like him who do not. These sorts of education experiences, according to Keyote, contribute to the endangerment of African American students, particularly boys. As such, in subsequent chapters, I further analyze my participants' perceptions of the factors contributing to their endangerment.

Berhane Jacob

I met Berhane Jacob for the first time at the 2008 Annual American Educational Research Association meeting in New York, New York. At that time he was a recent applicant to the graduate program at the University of Maryland College Park, where I am a doctoral candidate. After speaking with him for only a few minutes, I remember being bombarded with questions regarding my experiences as a

graduate student and more specifically, about the types of financial supports he could expect to receive if he enrolled as a full time doctoral student. I am certain that my answers were disappointing. However, it was during that initial meeting that I learned of his experiences as a classroom teacher and youth advocate—particularly in math and the sciences. Based our conversation, it was evident to me that Jacob was committed to exposing marginalized students, particularly African American boys, to advanced math and science curriculum in both the middle and high school grades. He spoke in detail about his work with a state funded math and science collaborative between Prince George County Public Schools and the University of Maryland College Park. This initiative targets youth of color who posses the academic potential to prosper in advanced math and science classes, but lack the support and resources needed to gain access to and to be successful in those courses. Bridging that gap has become the foundation of Jacob's professional life. Consequently, our next encounter, at his office on the University of Maryland's campus, was the first of three interviews for this study.

Berhane is a 28-year-old electrical engineer and former high school teacher. For a large part of his childhood, he grew up in Riverdale, Maryland, which has a long history of being a racially closed community—that is, closed to people of color. In the mid to late 80's, during Berhane's upbringing, Riverdale was a predominantly White section within the predominantly African American Prince Georges County. According to Berhane, "in fact there was a time in the 70's where you couldn't be outside as black person in the county without being arrested!" Stories of severe racial

tensions and unrest in Riverdale were passed down to Berhane through the oral tradition within his family.

Although Berhane spoke little about specific experiences with overt racism in Riverdale; he did reflect on the period of time when "things changed." According to Berhane, Riverdale is now a very different community. Due to white and middle class black flight, Riverdale is now considered an urban community—replete with the social and economic challenges facing urban communities throughout the nation. He spoke specifically about the grips that drug abuse, alcoholism, and gang violence has on his childhood neighborhood. During the time when "things changed" in Riverdale, Berhane's family, like most families who could afford to, relocated to a more affluent community--in his family's case, Beltsville, Maryland.

He attributed his success in avoiding the dangers named above to early family intervention into his personal affairs, particularly that of his mother. According to Berhane, she took a "by any means necessary" approach to ensure that he would be afforded the best opportunities in life, hence the move from Riverdale to Beltsville, MD. Berhane said, "that move is what helped me to escape all of that." The "all of that" largely refers to escaping the lure of selling and abusing drugs, which has had a devastating effects on urban communities throughout the nation from the early 60's to the present.

Berhane's relationship with his mother proved to be important and consistent in his life and one of the keys to his success. Berhane reflected,

> I was born in 1980 and I think the first five years of my life, my father was
> home, but my parents had some issues they were dealing with and he

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ultimately left when I was around 7. My sister left home when I was about 4

years old. She ran away from home actually and she left home to go to

Florida where most of my maternal mother's family is. So for the most part,

my growing up was with my mom and therefore we became very close and

some might say a little too close-like you never wanna be a mumma's boy.

His mother sacrificed her career to secure Berhane's future, which for her meant

doing what ever it took to get him into college. She eventually earned her college

degree only after he was officially enrolled at the University of Maryland in

Baltimore. His mother, like many single African American mothers, pushed him

toward academic success as she viewed education as the gateway to upward mobility.

Berhane stated,

When you hear about a lot of blacks who've done well like Ben Carson etc-

they came from single black women that was pushing them and I remember

her telling me that you'll go to college and you'll go for free-she had all the

faith in the world that I would get a scholarship and she didn't know where it

would come from-that hit home cause I bought into it.

Berhane's mother's faith in his abilities and belief that he would not only

attend college but he would go at no cost significantly shaped his identity and

contributed to the ways in which he approaches teaching in urban schools. According

to Berhane, "it is by any means necessary that my students will succeed." This level

of conviction is likely a direct result of the lessons his mother taught throughout his

life.

Berhane also relies on the wisdom and inspiration of older men in his life. He

spoke about his former Pastor who used to work for the telephone company. Berhane

stated,

> He started off as your typical Black janitor in the 50's and at some point he
>
> moved up to management and at some point he was on the management scale-
>
> you are moving up, but whites tried to put a cap on him-so by putting this
>
> ceiling-he essentially went up the latter and protested at the telephone
>
> company.

He recalls hearing stories about how hard his Pastor had to work to achieve some

level of success at that company and despite his work ethic and apparent ability, he

was still blocked by the glass ceiling that most African American were forced to

confront at that time.

Berhane also spoke of his uncle who he describes as a staunch advocate of

higher education and strong family values. Reflecting on his uncle he said,

> He was actually a running back in high school and would have run in college
>
> and
>
> done well until he got injured, but he always put academics over athletics-I
>
> guess because I saw him as a jock, but yet he was academic-I saw that it was
>
> nothing wrong-there is no disloyalty to being black when you are
>
> academically and athletically inclined.

For Berhane "academics over athletics" became a daily mantra. And even though he

had little interest in sports, Jacob interpreted this message to mean "academics over

EVERYTHING" and he took that literally.

It was through the lives and experiences of these men, as well his dad who fathered at a distance, that he developed an identity as an academically astute African American Americal male student. Because of their encouragement and personal success, he was not subject to the feelings of "selling out" or "acting white" that many African American students struggle with (Ogbu, 1998). Both his uncle and Pastor made it clear it was because of his academic success that he was evolving into a young man that they were proud of.

However, those virtues of Black manhood (hard work, strong academics, commitment to family) were under constant attack during Berhanes' coming of age in Prince Georges County. He recalled being taunted by peers as they questioned his masculinity and connection to the African American community because of his close relationship with his mother and academic achievements. He stated,

> Growing up I struggled with that a lot because people saw me as a guy who is close to his mom-and they think something is wrong with that. That really kinda stuck with me until I was in college then after college I realized that I had to make some transition in that area of my life.

To be labeled a "momma's boy," meaning, to have a seemingly co-dependent relationship with his mother, was deemed by his peers as being soft or not masculine enough. Berhane's struggle to establish a masculine identity was further complicated by attacks on his "blackness" and relationship to the African American community.

Berhane reflected on a significant moment in his life where he realized that all of his friends, most of whom where not African American, revealed their true feelings about his black identity.

They asked this question to me- what's your favorite show? And I said *Living Single* and the Trinidadian kid who is Indian says to me-he yells across the room and says-NO IT'S NOT …YOU NOT BLACK. And I was stunned! Because it was at that point that I realized I wasn't even perceived as a black kid who was in a white group. I wasn't even perceived as black and it threw me so bad that I totally stopped speaking to them. I was angry with them but I was also ashamed at myself because I realized that what I had become in their eyes-was a caricature-and so for the next year or so I was tryin to reinvent myself.

As a result, Berhane pursued membership in a number of organizations that focused on the experiences of African Americans like the Black Students Association and Omega Alpha Psi, which was high school version of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity—a historically African American service fraternity for college men. He characterizes these decisions as acts of rebelling against they ways his former friends characterized him. It was also at this time in his life, when his "Black Manhood" was in question, that he turned to Hip Hop for protection from character attacks and legitimacy as an African American man. Thus, for nearly two years after his Trinidadian peer challenged his racial identity, Berhane dove head first into Hip Hop—seeking to mimic the acts of African American masculinity that were perpetuated in rap songs and videos, even if they were artificial.

Despite his early challenges with African American male identity development, Berhane's overall educational experiences as a K-12 students were positive. In elementary school he remembers being a model student who was

frequently awarded the honor of student of the month as result of making the honor roll and having perfect attendance every marking period. He had a stable elementary school experience at McHenry Elementary School in Lanham, Maryland. Due to his academic performance and overall reputation as a model student, he was considered, what he called, "a big fish in a small pond." His move to Beltsville exposed him to schools that he perceived to be more academically rigorous and he quickly climbed the academic ranks with ease. According to Berhane, his academic effort did not go unnoticed.

> I did so well there that I was recruited into the Black male achievement program-which was run out of Roosevelt High School. The goal of that was to get rising 7th graders prepared for the science and tech entry exam which was at Elmer Rose High school. So for two summers 6th and 7th grades were in a heavy science and math and engineering type program-which is how I got my tip into science and math and engineering-because this program.

Berhane referenced this Black Male Achievement program as having a major impact on his self-esteem, and personal identities as a black male student. This program was academically rigorous, which he loved, and he could finally express his love of science and math while combating threats to the masculinity or cultural identity his association with the program in many ways validated his status as an African American male.

During his time at a magnet middle school, he began to recognize that most of his classes were split racially, about 60% white and 40% black, and this trend became more apparent in high school. He matriculated into a highly selective math and

science cohort at Roosevelt High School. There, roughly 10-20 % of his classmates were black, while the overwhelming majority were White and Asian. Though academically challenged, Berhane was disheartened by the fact that he was one of only few students of color in all of his courses. It was at Roosevelt that recognized how he, along with his circle of friends, which he calls the "United Nations", began to change. He reflected,

> I started realize early that I was becoming less and less among my own and more and more among the majority race and you don't even realize that your speech is starting to change or that you are starting to talk about all the white tv shows. You don't realize that your circle is changed so dramatically until my immediate friends were a Chinese kid, Asian kid, and Hispanic kid, and a Trinadian Indian kid.

Though Berhane's spoke glowingly about his schooling experience, he remains unsettled about his lack of exposure to African American cultural. According to Berhane,

> The only flaw was that it took me years to realize that I was really Black. It took me forever to find my Black self. So I learned all the math, science, and social studies and even the language, but there was no Black consciousness-NONE, IT WAS NILL! I could say there were a few isolated incidents, but really it was an experience that White people had and I happened to be there.

> However, Berhane did reflect on one incident in 1995 that ignited his

awareness of the racism in U.S. public schools. He recalled submitting a paper in one of his advanced placement courses. As an avid reader, Berhane developed an

extensive vocabulary and a writing style that mirrored the types of books he read. According to Berhane, "I wrote a paper using big words. The teacher came to me who was a White woman-middle aged and said to me-I'd like you to take this home and do it in your own words." Even though Berhane was a highly celebrated student with an excellent academic record, his history teacher made an immediate assumption that the paper was plagiarized. "What was so bad," Berhane recounted, "is that because I had this kinda sheltered existence-it didn't occur to me that what she did was as bad as what it was until I went home and told my mom -she flipped out and called the administrator and got the teacher on the phone and let her have it."

Despite these challenges, Berhane flourished at Roosevelt high school. His many accomplishments included president of the National Honor Society, 9th grade Vice President, membership in the Black Gospel Choir, and recognition as the student most likely to succeed. He attributes these successes to his ability to relate to groups from all races and cultures.

It was kinda like the Barak Obama experience where you know White folks but you know Black folks too and you are comfortable in any setting. That's what happened by 12th grade and I was so comfortable with me and it didn't matter that I was taking honors classes and was in the choir at the same time. I just knew who I was and so when I left high school.

Berhane attributes much of his success to teachers who showed a vested interest in his academic progress and personal maturation. He spoke about Mr. Sylvester Conyers, who was the Vice Principle of the high school and the leader of the Black Male Achievement Program, as a significant force in his life. Mr. Conyer,

a native New Yorker, employed an "in your face" approach when working with the men in the achievement program. At times he was so demanding that Berhane found him difficult to work with. Mr. Conyers, like Berhane's mother, uncle, and Paster, adopted a "by any means necessary" approach in his role as teacher and school leader.

> I remember one time we cut up [meaning displayed poor behavior] real bad and he was one of these men that thought if a couple acted out then all of us would suffer. So he knew that we all liked basketball (I didn't but most of us did). So he made up sit on the gym floor and watch everyone else play ball and he told us that we would not get to enjoy sports if our academics were not together. He was hard on us and that was my one Black male teacher that really made an impact in K-12.

However, Berhane later revealed that is was Mr. Conyers' expectation of excellence for all the Black males in that program that motivated him towards continued success. Though Berhane resisted his aggressive approach, he realizes now that, as a man and classroom teacher, Mr. Conyers was so demanding of his Black male students because of his beliefs in their boundless potential. Berhane asserted that, "Mr. Conyer's loved us and that's why he was so hard pressing." He expected the best and accepted very few excuses in an effort to prepare the young men for the harsh realities of life as a black man in the U.S.

Throughout Berhane's life, he experienced challenges in developing a positive self-perception. He was proud of his academic success, but struggled with feeling connected with a cultural community during his adolesence. This largely was fueled

by undermining comments made by his peers, none of whom were African American, which Berhane interpreted as questioning his African American cultural identity.

During that, he developed a relationship with Mr. Conyer's, one of the few African American educators he countered in school. Behane appreciated the personalized and caring relationship that Mr. Conyer developed with students, particularly African American males, and attributes much of his success as a teacher, to the lessons he learned from Mr. Conyer. As such, Berhane borrows heavily from his personal struggles with identity develop and the lessons he learned during that time in his life and the personalized and caring relationship he shared with Mr. Conyer to inform his pedagogy and beliefs about his students' academic potential and personal growth.

Solo Manning

Solo Manning, a 34 years former educator and college administrator, was raised in Trinidad, West Indies and Massachusetts. He received both his undergraduate degree in Communications and his graduate degree in Student Personnel Administration and Family Studies at the University of Rhode Island. He is currently an educator where he teaches undergraduate courses on Hip Hop Culture and the Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Public Relations.

Solo is also the President and co-founder of an Educational Consulting, which uses Hip Hop Culture, to educate poorly motivated students. Using interactive training strategies, Solo company facilitates workshops on topics like academic retention, reluctant-student-motivation, and enabling enthusiasm for learning, diversity education, community development, and civic engagement. He has

appeared as the keynote speaker at conferences and schools throughout the United States.

Solo and I met over three years ago at a reception during my first semester as a doctoral student. It was at this event that we engaged in our first conversation. Since then, we have maintained a loose relationship through email and happenstance encounters on campus.

Solo foreground the academic, personal, and social needs of African American college students. As student, I knew him as a strong advocate for recruiting and retaining African American college students, particularly males. Through our usually brief conversations, our shared interests in African America male student achievement and Hip Hop culture were confirmed. Due to Solo's level of involvement in and commitment to these issues, as well as his international educational experiences, I was convinced that he would be a wonderful addition to this study. He gladly accepted my request for participation and we later engaged in three formal interviews in his office.

Solo spent the first ten years of his life in the Caribbean island of Trinidad. His parents met in graduate school, where they both earned doctorate and eventually married in Trinidad. His parents later divorced when he was ten years old, Solo along with his mother and sisters, moved back to the United States, where his mother lived before meeting is father in graduate school. His family initially moved to what Solo called "an inner city community" in Massachusetts where many members of the community lived in poverty. He said, "It was 99% Black -as we know a lot of inner city cities with dominant color are economically starved at the core, which I like to

call governmentally neglected." According to Solo, many of his friends in that neighborhood were engaged in illicit drug abuse and gang violence and none had consistent parental guidance to discourage them from selling and abusing drugs; thus, criminal activities became normalized. He however, he had positive adult influences, including grandparents, who served as surrogate parents and reinforced his mother's advice or scolding.

In an effort to protect her family from negative external influences, his mother moved the family to a rural community in Massachusetts. It was in this context that Solo was first faced with the harsh realities of American racism. He recalled,

In Massachusetts, there were not too many black folk whatsoever so was the first time I really been up close and personal to American racism. In Trinidad you don't deal with those things whatsoever. The majority the overwhelming majority are people of color of African descent or East Indian descent so that was the first time something so up close and personal.

Racism and classim were manifest in the ways that people of color were treated by law enforcement and the poor quality of education and health care in impoverished communities. Such racial and economic aggressions, which were in sharp contrast to his experiences in Trinidad, were most evident in his public schooling experience.

He argued that the curriculum in Trinidad was academically rigorous, focused on African History, and provided representations of the contributions of African nations to the development and proliferation of the western world. Solo stated, "we celebrated holidays that are not necessarily recognized here in the U.S. We did not

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celebrate holidays of murders and rapist like Columbus, but we got a lot of African history in the school." He called it a "different brand" of education where teachers remained in constant communication with parents and students were held accountable for their actions in school. He said that teachers challenged him every day and had a consistently open line of communication with his parents. Therefore, if he stumbled in any way, his teachers and parents would immediately intervene.

In contrast, he described the neighborhood schools in Massachusetts as deplorable. He recalled unstable physical infrastructure, over crowded classes, and "uncaring teachers" who were assigned to those particular locations. However, one teacher in particular had a significant and negative impact on his academic achievement. According to Solo,

> I would get a C or a C- on a paper where it was arithmetic or whatever I would get sticker or happy faces from my teacher which was all white at that school however my White counterparts when they would get a C it would be something like you can do better or try harder.

He concluded that the lower expectations were representative of the teachers' beliefs about his academic abilities as a black male student. At the times, he didn't understand how these experiences impacted his esteem and efficacy as a student. In Trinidad he was taught to trust all teachers as the stewards of ones education; therefore, he began to assimilate to teachers lowered expectations. Because the standards were so low, after a couple of years in U.S. public schools, Solo began to digress academically and buy into the negative stereotypes of him and between the ages of 10 and 16, both his self worth and work ethic spiraled downward.

His mother however, was one of the few forces that was successful at reversing his feelings of diminished self worth. He said that she was able to make connections between his recreational and study habits to encourage him to reinvest is academic endeavors. He asserted,

> After being grounded so many times it was my mom that was the one that sat me down and was like listen you go out there and you shoot jump shots and jump shot in the hot sun- you have discipline. You sit down there and study the lyrics to everyone from Public Enemy to KRS-1 until you know those lyrics inside out. You can do it and it took her like a good week and a half, two weeks to sell it to me whether I actually believed it -but once I believed it, it was lights out my whole academic career changed from that moment on.

His mother and other adults in his life also introduced him to authors such as W.E.B Dubois, George Jackson, Author Serota, and Jeff Chang. It was through reading books like *Souls of Black Folks*, *World of Africa*, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, *Blood in My Eyes*, and *Can't Stop Won't Stop* that Solo began to develop a political and social consciousness. He said that these books and authors provided him with a sense of pride in African history that his teachers failed to provide. Furthermore, he grew to appreciate the rebellious overtones found in the writings, particularly those who addressed social and political issues. Ultimately, they all awakened in him the desire to work within a socio-political movement where he could exercise his new found agency.

For Solo, Hip Hop became a viable space where his activism could mature. He asserted that through Hip Hop he developed a consciousness about social and

racial injustice. He merits the *Stop the Violence* and *Self Destruction* campaigns, which were spearheaded by early Hip Hop pioneers, as playing a significant role in this process. Solo stated, "you're not conscious about the consciousness you're developing at that age and so that consciousness really started to evolve me and when I got older I would look back I would say wow I really did carry myself a different way." He recalled going to the barber shop and requesting the then popular high top fade hair cut with an outline of the map of African etched in the back of his head, as well as wearing African medallions and paraphernalia covered in Pro-Africa symbolism. Through these expressions of African pride, he said, "you start to carry yourself in a way and there's no way somebody can come up to you and say black is not beautiful." Thus, starting at 13 years old, he borrowed from the lessons he learned through Hip Hop music to refute negative or derogatory stereotypes associated with African and African American culture.

Solo's love of Hip Hop began one day on the basketball court. The politics of the local court were that the young guys could shoot around early in the day until the older guys gathered to play a full court game in the afternoon. Though they were forced to leave the court, Solo and his friends often stayed to sit and watch the older guys play ball. It was during one of those evening games that he first became aware of Hip Hop's significance in his life. He recalled that

> An older guy had a Ghetto Blaster and he had this huge box [radio] with
> buttons everywhere.   I will never forget it man and he was playing radio and
> it was a song by LL Cool J, I can't live without my radio. He was blasting it
> man and I was like 'what is this music man' and I just heard it over and over

again and then the next song that I really got into it was actually LL Cool J again *I'm Bad*. That song like memorized me and I never heard somebody with that kind of vibrato in any kind of music and I was like this brother is bad.

Once this seed of confidence and self-assuredness was planted, Solo said he began a process of maturation and personal growth that led to an obsession with Hip Hop. He remembered at 14 years old, sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night and catching a bus to the local college to attend a Public Enemy album release party. He and his friends snuck into the party and reveled in the Hip Hop related give-aways and party favors. He also recalled being so desperate to the collect Hip Hop tapes and posters that he and his friends went to a local record store in over sized coats and stole as many Hip Hop cassette tapes and posters as they could. During the weeks following, he and his friends spent countless hours studying artists like: Public Enemy, KRS One, Boogie Down Productions, Wu Tang Clan, Chuck D, Tribe Called Quest, and MC Lite, all of whom were artists whose cassette tapes they had stolen.

Solo was impressed by the power and confidence with which LL Cool J spoke about his rapping ability. The song *I'm Bad* begins, "Nobody can rap quit like I can, I'll take a muscle bound man and put his face in the sand." Hip Hop artist Chuck D also left a lasting impression on Solo. He was impressed by the power with which his rapped. Solo reflected, "I don't know man it was crazy it was like he was talking down from like the sky and he was talking about some issues and he really made you feel rebellious man and you felt rebellious." As a young and impressionable boy, the prideful spirit of this song captivated his imagination. He recalled feeling that if he

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committed to his personal goals with the same level of tenacity as LL Cool J, then no one could stop or hinder his development.

Solo relied heavily on the lessons he learned from Hip Hop about personal progress, hard work, and believing one's ability, to shape the way he performed in school, interacted with his peers, and engaged in his community. He stated that Hip Hop artists and the messages they offered, like those mentioned above, provided him with an example of African American manhood and fueled his belief in the collective responsibility they have toward serving their communities. As such, he feels indebted to the culture (Hip Hop) and the community that help shape his identity. It is through teaching and community outreach efforts that he gives back to both of those communities and fulfills, what he deems as, a significant part of his responsibility. Therefore, in the following chapter analyze more closely my participants' beliefs about the collective responsibility of African American men and their connections to African American boys

Victorious Dahij

I met Victorious over two years ago at a symposium on African American male achievement, which was sponsored by the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. He, as a classroom teacher, sat on a panel, along with professors of education, school administrators, and county executives. He discussed his beliefs about and approaches to teaching youth of color, particularly African American boys. I actually did not plan to attend the symposium as I was, at that time, consumed with my own academic endeavors. However, nearly 30 minutes after the symposium commenced, I received a call from a colleague, with whom I

have talked a great deal about my research and he demanded that I stop studying immediately and attend the symposium to meet Victorious. She said that he would be a wonderful addition to my dissertation study. I took her advice and met Mr. Dahij that evening. I was immediately struck by his insight and wisdom into the needs of marginalized youth. In our conversation, he spoke about his students as if they were his own biological children. He also spoke about his inherent connection to and investment in their personal and academic success. Then finally he discussed his reliance on and use of Hip Hop culture in grounding his pedagogical beliefs and in making his curriculum relevant to his students' lives. After that event, he and I remained in contact over the course of two years. During that time, he participated in a pilot study I conducted, which informs my current research. Victorious provided important insights into how coming of age during the age of Hip Hop shaped his world views and beliefs about the function and purpose of public education, particularly for youth of color. Based on those encounters, I was committed to including Victorious in this dissertation study. We meet on three different occasions, all during after school hours, in his 8th grade classroom in Prince Georges County.

Victorious, who is 26 year old, was born in the Bronx, New York, and was raised in both the Bronx and Forestville, Maryland in Prince Georges County. He shared a household with his parents and six siblings-five brothers and one sister. For many years, they all lived in the same two-bedroom apartment. He described his childhood community as about 98% African American and working class, but very progressive in that most of the adults in his community rallied very actively behind the youth as academic, personal, and social supports. He recalled feeling that every

adult was a surrogate parent who demanded that he do well in school and make the entire community proud. This reinforced the love and guidance he received from both parents, which many of his childhood friends lacked. Victorious reflected,

> I had an exceptional childhood. My father was amazing, probably the smartest man I ever met in my life. Mom's was the definition of a strong black woman. My brothers held me down.   So, you know, I grew up in a family atmosphere, my extension of my family actually extended out into the community, and I was reared in that fabric as a young one.

According to Victorious, his father drew heavily from his upbringing in Islam and The Nation of the God and the Earth, (a spiritual and culture offspring of traditional Islam) and built the family's structure around the tenets of peace, love, and community. His mother, named Queen Arabia, is as he describes, "the epitome of a woman." He spoke very highly of her steadfast devotion, commitment, and sacrifice as a wife and mother, all of which are virtues that he now values as the foundation of black womanhood. According to Victorious,

> That's her righteous name, Queen Arabia. So she is just amazing man. Growing up in that fabric, you know, we talk about growing up in that community fabric, we talk about those challenges, but we ate at the table every night, we had breakfast every morning, we would discuss homework every night, homework had to be on the table. So there are certain things, even in all that oppression, even in all that sacrifice and all that struggle, there were always beauties every day that you come home and parents did a wonderful

job of capturing what family really means even in the struggle our family was based in at the time.

Here, Victorious speaks about family values in ways that are in contrast to how marginalized families and communities are often described.   He argued that despite the external challenges facing his community, (e.g. drugs, poverty, alcohol abuse) he was constantly nurtured and provided with the emotional and academic supports to succeed in mainstream society. He further reflected,

If you make a mistake, you aren't out in the streets cursing. You aren't on the streets doing something you got no business doing, because the elders will pull you up. Even if they didn't know then, the elders would pull you up immediately. There were certain things you just could not do. Of course you're a child and you're going to make the mistakes, but everybody held everybody accountable. There were support systems everywhere. Side airbags, front air bags, everywhere around you, so you can't really fall off.

Notably, he said he also received those same sorts of supports from his peers who sold and abused illicit drugs. Victorious recalled being encouraged by young men, who were hustling and selling drugs, to make better choices than they did. One in particular said to Victorious, in a stern and demanding voice, "you don't do this. You do the school thing. You get out of the situation and build your family." Furthermore, these young men, whom society deemed as degenerate and dangerous, protected his neighborhood from abusive police officers and from outsiders who could potentially victimize community members. Thus, hustling was considered an occupation, albeit illegal, for those who otherwise saw very few ways to provide for

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their families.   From their perspective, because Victorious had academic and personal potential, hustling was not an option for him.

His father's strong Islamic and Black nationalist ideals, as well as lessons he learned from his two older brothers, whose legal names are Powerful and Truth respectively, played a significant role in Victorious' identity as a Black male. He said that from an early age, he was taught about his legacy as a member of the "original Black family" that was the first to inhabit the earth. His father told him that his predecessors were the founders of civilization and that they created the knowledge and wisdom that all other nations have duplicated. He recalled being taught such lessons even before being told that he was an African American. Even as a young child, these early lessons contributed to the ways in which he navigated his community and school and now shape how he views his current students.

Victorious was an honor role student not because he loved school but because academic achievement was highly valued in his family. His father taught him to do whatever he had to do to be successful and he learned very on that acquiring knowledge would promote his personal and academic success. As a student, he described himself as a mere player in a game. He was never excited the learning process or in school curriculum. Instead, he did only what was necessary to earn desirable grades.

In high school, however, Victorious began to cultivate the "hustling" (meaning multiple ways to make money) skills he developed in school as well as the lessons he learned from his family, to create opportunities to earn extra money. He started by surrounding himself with students who shared similar goals of

entrepreneurship. Eventually, Victorious and five other friends started a promotion company where they sold t-shirts, food, music and promoted local parties. He reflected,

> We all did generally well in school and we all generally worked well with people, and it changed the whole school. The more and more I'm thinking about, teachers are buying our t-shirts, students are buying our t-shirts, so I think people viewed me and the people I hung around in school as a good group of people, but for the right reasons.

Victorious attributed much of his success in school and in life to influential teachers and he said he relied on lesson from negative and positive schooling experiences to fuel his current teaching style. He recalled teachers like Ms. Cohen, who forced her students to copy notes from the board and Ms. Logan, who cursed at students and called them "niggers."

In contrast, he had very positive experiences with other teachers who showed consistent caring. He was impressed by one teacher in particular, who greeted students at the door everyday with a firm handshake and a smile. Victorious reflected on his experiences with this particular African American male teacher,

> He began class, like 'I am here.' He was always smiling; he was never upset. But, you could not run over him. It was like a balance. He was a strong man and seemed comfortable in his manhood. And because he was comfortable, I was comfortable too.

This teacher reminded Victorious of his father, brothers, and uncles whom he said, "carried themselves with such cool and ease." He described them as rarely excited or

saddened as he remained calm and cool even under tremendous pressure. As such, at an early age, he began to emulate their personal characteristics as well as the implicit and explicit messages they gave him about masculinity, to cultivate his identity as a black man.

He also relied on his experiences with sports to develop a sense of hard work, discipline, determination, and teamwork—all of which are characteristics which he believed were important for black men to posses. Lastly he attributed much of his success and spiritual development to lessons he learned from books and through studying historical social movements. In particular, authors like Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Dubious, as well as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, helped to frame his understandings of the black experiences with the U.S. context. He was particularly impressed with Malcolm X's "by any means necessary" approach to alleviated the social and economic conditions of people of color.

Victorious' first fell in love with Hip Hop when he heard the song *Self Destruction*. He remembered appreciating its lyrics, which spoke about the struggles that people faced in urban communities. This song compelled him to analyze and make sense of the contexts that gave rise the challenges facing his community members which, in turn, encouraged him to define his role for addressing some the challenges people face in urban communities.

> So if I am listening to Self Destruction, I am not picking up a gun, I am not selling drugs because KRS-One and them are teaching me something, they are telling me exactly what I need to do. So hip-Hop was very much inside of my consciousness. I grew up with that.

Artists like Roots, KRS One, Tribe Called Quest, Brand Nubian, Jay-Z, and Dead Prez all appealed to Victorious' desires to hear the authentic stories of people from marginalized communities expressed through Hip Hop. He appreciated that they were, what he called "real men" who promoted a brand of Hip Hop that was less commercialized, sexist, and violent and rooted in "realness" and uncompromised authenticity, saying,

> They weren't Sambos either. It was not commercial. What we were selling was the realness in Hip Hop. So, when I looked on the T.V., KRS-1 was the man. J-Rule the Damager was the man, Brand Nubian were men. A Tribe Called Quest were definitely men. So it was, even if they were talking about women, they never compromised themselves, they never were on the stage with no shirts on, talking about, "kill him...she is this and...he is that..."

Victorious' connections to the qualities that "real men" possessed, was fueled by his relationship with his father and brothers who he asserted were ideal examples of manhood. They taught him how to treat women, how to show love for family and community, and how to be both politically and socially engaged. For Victorious, Hip Hop culture was a means to express his political agency. Therefore, during his adolescent he embraced Hip Hop artists and music that mirrored the characteristics of manhood that his father and brothers possessed and spoke, very aggressively, about the plight of people of color in marginalized communities. As is evident in last chapter, those experiences grounds his love of teaching and shapes his beliefs about the promise and potential of all students of color, but particularly African American males.

Yode Brown

I first encountered Yode Brown, the only African American male student pursing a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, two years ago. Having endured in a similar social circumstance in my masters program, I took on the role as his mentor and friend. As his instructor, I was also struck not only by his presence as a man of color, but also by his confidence and commitment to highlighting the perspectives of K-12 students of colors. He talked freely about racism as an intransigent aspect of U.S. public schooling without alienating his white female counterparts. This skill is one in which I continue work towards, even as a doctoral candidate. Through my academic and personal interactions with Yode I became familiar with his views on teaching and learning in relation to both traditional curriculum and Hip Hop pedagogy. Therefore, his participation in this dissertation study was fitting. Yode and I engaged in three in depth interviews –the first at a Starbucks, the second at my home, and the final interview at my office at UMCP.

Yode is a 24 year old teacher, raised in Riverdale, MD in what he calls, "a real nice community." His mother, who was a school teacher, was home by 4 p.m. every afternoon, while his father, a business man, dedicated much of his time to work. Although his father was not very physically available, Yode said that learned from him the value of hard work and taking care of family—qualities that he came to associate with black manhood. Yode described his childhood as "pleasant and easy" as recalled playing sports at the community park, riding his bike with family and friends throughout the neighborhood, and being nurtured by an environment that promoted middle class values.

Yode attended Riverdale comprehensive Elementary school where he tested into a highly selective gifted and talented program. He attributed his academic success to fear of retribution by his mother, who was a strict advocate for academic success. Yode described approaching school in the same ways he did athletics, as a game in which he was committed to winning. Thus, early in his academic career he learned how to negotiate the culture of school by mastering the art of paying attention and pleasing his teachers. For him, the rules of engagement were to attain "A" grades with the least amount of effort. Pressure from home and his desire to play the academic "game" well, contributed to his early and continued investment in his education, which did not go unnoticed.

Teachers played a significant role in shaping Yode's identity as a student and building his confidence academically. His 8th grade English teacher, Mrs. Jerskie, was one such teacher who demanded that he work hard to meet her expectations. "She was so intense you didn't want to mess with her," he recalled. "She made like the comprehensive kids work, she made the bad kids work, she made everyone work." She had a "no non-sense approach" to teaching that Yode interpreted as love and caring.

Throughout his life, Hip Hop has been a significant influence on Yode's personal development. DMX was the first Hip Hop artist to grab Yode's attention. He recalled being captivated by the raw emotion and authentic stories that DMX shared. His entreé into Hip Hop, through DMX, led him to explore what he called "the Hip Hop classics" like Notorious BIG, Nas, Tupac and Scarface. He argued that

these artists reveal in authentic ways, the struggles facing people in urban communities to provide for their families and community members.

Yode was also attracted to what he perceived as the anger with which Hip Hop artists like Tupac and DMX delivered their lyrics. For him, this reflected the anger and frustration that many men of color, particularly African American men, experience in their daily lives. For him, Hip Hop was the first place he saw these expressions of anger legitimized and even accepted in mainstream society. Yode reflected,

> People perceive the Black male as aggressive so [thru Hip hop] you don't have to go against that stigma on any basis. When you listen to someone like DMX or Tupac, he was mad. He was angry, but of course you'd be angry if someone tried to shoot you or take from you on a daily basis. You'd be mad at the world too. It seemed that the music became an outlet for them.

Yode asserted that many Black men are attracted to Hip Hop Culture because it is a safe place in which their anger and frustrations are legitimized and can be authentically expressed. He believed that underneath this anger are very significant messages and that artists like Tupac and DMX used anger to prompt people of color to come together and to improve their situations.

Yode relied on his love of and commitment to Hip Hop and desire to help improve the lives of urban youth, to ground his beliefs about teaching and learning. In his analysis of Tupac's and DMX's lyrics, he sought to uncover the sources of their anger rather than critique their modes of expressions. In the same way, when working with and teaching urban youth, he seeks to understand the social and

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ecological context within which his students live, rather than reprimanding them for showing signs of aggression or disinterest in school. His perspective on Hip Hop and teaching are linked and moreover, are fuels by his belief in their strength and untapped potential. As such, because of his account, and others like his, in the following chapters I delve deeper in to an analysis of my participants' beliefs about the strength and potential of both Hip Hop culture and African American male students.

Mustafa Isam

Mustafa, who is 30 years old, is the Executive Director of a Hip Hop nonprofit in Washington, D.C. dedicated to transforming individual lives and whole communities through Hip Hop. Programs include an Urban Arts Academy and a Global Journal of Hip Hop.

Like Chuck, I also met Mustafa when he was invited to present to my graduate level course on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, where he talked about the ways in which Hip Hop can be incorporated into traditional curriculum. Mustafa's views on using Hip Hop as a critical curricular approach foreground social justice issues. Because of our shared interests and his critical analysis of Hip Hop and commitment to urban youth, Mustafa's inclusion in this study was fitting.

Mustafa described himself as an "air force brat" whose mother joined the Air Force when he was 2 years old. He lived in Germany from ages 2 to 6 and moved to the U. S when he was in the 4th grade. Mustafa is from a blended family and is the oldest of 5 children—two sisters from his mother and two from his stepfather. Though Mustafa's did live with and or have a consistent personal relationship with

his biological father, he realized later in life they both shared an interest in studying global social issues.

While in Germany, he lived in a predominantly African American community and for most of his upbringing in the Unites States, he lived what he called a "very suburban existence" in a predominantly white community which he felt epitomized a stereotypical middle class existence—meaning he had little experience with violence and crime. Within this context, Mustafa never really embraced a racial identity and he recalled viewing himself and his relationships with friends as neither raced, classed, nor gendered. It was through Hip Hop and a love of reading that Mustafa felt he gained insight into the ways that race, class, and gender shape the experiences of people of color.

Mastafa described himself as a good student while in Germany as he enjoyed school and earned good grades. However, in the U.S. he was placed in remedial classes and despite his best efforts, struggled academically. He also struggled socially in school and was placed in detention and suspended repeatedly throughout elementary school. Mustafa reflected,

> I was the only kid in detention. I had my own desk in the principal's office where I would sit alone. I regularly got suspended and regularly got into fights and I was put in remedial classes -I was definitely one of those kids that acted out.

Due to his academic and social troubles in school, he said that experienced a lot of abuse at home as his parents used physical punishment to deter what they saw as undesirable behavior. It was not until much later in his life that he was diagnosed

as dyslexic, which contributed to the academic and social challenges he faced in school.

Things got progressively worse in middle and high school, when he moved to an all black neighborhood and attended all black schools. He later realized that in an effort to prove his "street credibility" in that new environment, he worked very hard to appear disengaged in school. According to Mustafa, "I didn't think being dumb was cool but certainly didn't want to be smart in school." He maintained a C average in most of his classes, focused on his athletic endeavors, and he did the least amount of work required to pass his classes.

According to Mustafa, teachers played a significant role in shaping how he viewed himself as a student. He recalled that he failed nearly 90% of the tests and quizzes in his science class, but consistently earned a B or better. Despite his poor academic performance, his science teacher kept him in good academic standing so that he could play school sports. Therefore, he said he learned very early to put more effort into relationships with teachers than into academics—a strategy he used throughout high school with relative success. He remembered that his 11th grade English teacher as one of the first teachers to truly hold him academically accountable. To his surprise, he earned a D in her course and despite his efforts to finesse a higher grade, she told him that he worked very hard to earn that D and it was her responsibility to give him the grade he deserved. From that point on, he produced A quality work in that class. According to Mustafa,

> She knew that I was smarter than I was doing and said I am not going to just
> pass you-you will have to work to get grades in my class and from that day

forth I had my work done-I didn't do her work the class before, I had it done

the night before, because she raised the standard and I needed to know I could

reach them.

In contrast, he had very negative encounters with teachers who devalued his

academic potential and social contributions. One teacher in particular told him that,

based on his behavior and poor performance in her class, he "would never accomplish

anything in life" and that school was a waste of time for him. He admitted that his

actions in many ways proved her point, but by his senior year in high school he made

a conscious decision to reverse the direction of his academic life and pursue college.

Mustafa attended UMCP as an undergraduate and began to realize his potential as a

person. He recalled being mentored by African American male leaders on campus

who provided him with the self-confidence, motivation, and resources to be a strong

student and leader on campus.

It was in an African American history course, were he read Trisha Rose's

book, *Black Noise*, that he realized that his story and life experiences were valuable.

Furthermore, in college he also realized that he could pursue his own intellectual

interests through school and he read both required and additional readings in his

courses. He attended lectures, book signings, and conferences that highlighted the

works of his favorite authors like Baramba Ani, Harold Cruz, and Malcolm X.

Mustafa reflected,

So college become the first place where I actually get freedom and access to

resources or where I get to hear new ideas or I could go to panel discussions

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and hear perspective that I've never heard in my life, so college is still a very important time for me.

In was in college that Mustafa began to embrace Hip Hop as a form of cultural expression. Growing up, he didn't have the money to purchase music and his family could not afford cable television, so he had minimal exposure to Hip Hop. During frequent trips to New York to visit family, he recalled seeing graffiti, and people in the community djing and b-boyin, but Hip Hop was not an important component in his personal identity. It was not until college, where he was exposed to literature that historicized Hip Hop as a significant culture, particularly for African Americans, that it became connected to his identity and significant in his life.

The first Hip Hop group Mustafa embraced was the Fat Boys. He said that his early exposure to Hip Hop was primarily through mainstreams movies and the Fat Boys' movies in the mid to late 1980s were commercial successes. He also recalled embracing Hip Hop through fashion as he, like many young people during that time, wore African medallions, tee shirts showcasing the flags of west African countries, and Malcolm X paraphernalia, which was popularized by Hip Hop artists in the early 90's. Although Mustafa connected to Hip Hop through movies and apparel, his exposure to the culture remained minimal.

Mustafa defined Hip Hop as a collective community including nonprofit, consumer, artistic, and production-based entities whose political agenda is centered on freedom and equality. Therefore, he sees Hip Hop as promoting education, racial equity, entreprenuership and as growing more prominent in of the realms of traditional electoral politics and organizational development. In Mustafa's analysis,

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Hip Hop began as an organization when a gang leader sought to promote peace, love, unity, and having fun rather than death and destruction in urban communities. Therefore, he saw organizing and transforming communities as a part of the function of Hip Hop since its inception. This included bringing communities together to have fun, recreating public spaces, and developing programs for urban youth. Mustafa reflected,

> So you get someone like Tupac that gets a Mansion that suddenly becomes a half way home for families that don't have a place to live, you get folks from Digital Underground, whose parents were panthers, suddenly interacting with the new black panther party, you get folks like Chuck D who grew up in the Black Panther Breakfast Program and who promotes the political agenda.

Mustafa critiqued the proliferation of negative images in Hip Hop, which he believed have been used to demonize a culture that has had a tremendously positive impact on marginalized communities. He argued that the positive stories are purposefully left untold and, as a community activist, he sought to insert these stories into the discourse about African American culture.

What is interesting about Mustafa's narrative is that he was not heavily engaged in Hip Hop his coming of age. However, Hip Hop culture is the foundational component of his teaching and youth advocacy efforts. His rationale for investing in Hip Hop like he has is based largely based on his past educational experiences. He recalled feeling disengaged from school due to the curriculum's lack of relevancy to his personal life and uncaring teachers. Actually, during our interviews, he stated repeatedly that it was not until college, when was given the

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opportunity to engaged in texts that were of interest, that he started to become fully

engaged academically. As such, in his current work, he seeks to provide youth of

color, through Hip Hop, assess to curriculum that is exciting, engaging, and provides

opportunities to think about and create solutions to their social and economic

challenges. These efforts are representative of his beliefs in educational and

curricular transformation in U.S. public school, of which I will further analyze in the

following chapters.

As expected, my participants' educational accounts were as diverse as they are

as individuals. They shared stories of their heartbreak over being labeled uneducable,

being placed in low tract classes, and having teachers expected the worse of them.

Likewise, the narratives of their coming of age were replete with instances where they

feared for their lives due to the threat of criminal activities in their neighborhoods.

Keyote's, story in particular, painted an authentic picture of the ways that his parents,

and countless other parent in urban communities, had to protect him from the vestiges

of poverty.

Regarding their cultural encounters, I asked general questions about my

participants' historical cultural ontologies without lending any bias towards a

particular cultural experience. However, they overwhelming identified Hip Hop

culture as having a significant influence on their cultural identities. Their experiences

with Hip Hop materialized in very different ways as some participants engaged in Hip

Hop culture peripherally, while others became, and still are, completely immersed in

nearly all aspects of Hip Hop. Despite their levels of involvement, they all were

grounded in Hip Hop culture and positioned it as a safe space where they could be authentic and vulnerable.

In the following chapter, I synthesized my participants' experiences within the social, educational, and cultural domains outline above, to gain a deeper understanding of how their life history experiences influenced their beliefs about teaching and learning. More specifically, I intersected the details of their personal history accounts as African American males with those of the students they teach. From this analysis emerge five themes: (1) Endangerment of African American Male, (2) Strength and Potential of African American Male Youth, (3) Collective Responsibility of African American Men, (4) Personalized and Caring Relationships, and (5) Cultural and Educational. These themes helped frame my analysis of the ways that my participants understand their beliefs about teaching African American male students.

Chapter 6: BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

In this chapter, I examine participants' beliefs and perceptions about teaching and learning as connected to their individual life histories and experiences with Hip Hop, particularly as they relate to African American male students. More specifically, I analyze participants' beliefs about the challenges facing African American males and the strengths and potential of African American male youth and how these understandings are connected to participants' sense of responsibility to African American youth as African American men and to their practice as teachers. Further, I consider how participants' experiences and perceptions are related to Hip Hop, which they have identified as an important influence on their commitment to teaching and their connections to African American male students.

Endangerment of African American Males

All of my participants contended that the plight of African American males in the U.S. is tenuous. They asserted that African American men, due to the intransigence of racism and negative stereotypes, are viewed as a threat to U.S. mainstream society. They believed, as Victorious asserted, "every system that has been set up in this country has been to ensure that Black men are not successful." Subsequently, Victorious and other participants characterized African American males as an endangered, at risk population due to factors like high homicide and suicide rates, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, and in adequate education. Gill agreed and spoke about the experience of "being scared, driving and seeing police, or going somewhere and being afraid or unsure of your surroundings"

which many African American men share. Gill believed that as African American men, "you are always on your game, always trying to figure out what's going on, scoping out every situation." He suggested that because of the dangers aforementioned, African American men must always be acutely aware of their surroundings and actions. Both he and Victorious described African American males struggle with dangers in their lives as "urban warfare." Solo described it as being "behind enemy lines," and living under constant threat of attack by law enforcement, the court systems, and the public educational system.

Participants' perceptions of African American males as endangered are deeply rooted in the history of race relations in the United States. From the institution of slavery until the late 1960, whites used physical violence against African Americans to maintain racial and social order. As such, Ferguson (2001) argues, "The prevailing wisdom in black communities was that in order to survive, males had to be carefully taught to mask any show of power in confrontations with whites" (pg. 194).

Most participants said that they temper expressions of power and aggressiveness out of fear of being victimized or negatively stereotyped. For example, Yode reflected on a number of incidences in which he was stopped or followed by the police. In those instances he feared being negatively stereotyped as engaging in criminal activities and, therefore, in response, he altered his usual appearance and speech to reflect mainstream cultural codes. He turned the brim of his hat forward, pulled his pants up to his waist line, and conversed with the officer using, what he called "proper English."

Participants argued that society's perceptions of African American males are heavily influenced by images on television in which are overrepresented as perpetrators of crime and violence. This criminalization of African American males in the media, they believed, negatively impacts public perception. Solo offered an example of this, stating,

> So you have an incident like Sean Bell [an African American man who, on his wedding day, died in a hail of 50 bullets fired by a group of five police officers] you know that the criminalization of the Black man being this boogieman. So the cops had a itchy quick trigger finger- because they couldn't take no chances man. And those types of things not only shape us as Black males but they also shape future police officers: black, white, Latino, it shapes their perception of us.

This is not to say that African American men do not commit crimes. However, participants argued that African American male's actions and intentions, even when innocuous, are more likely to be interpreted as threatening due to how they are portrayed in the media.

Both Gill and Asheru asserted that for African American males, the experience of being racially profiled and feared cuts across class, social location, and geography. According to Gill, "You can't understand Black men unless you are a Black man. It's impossible, and I don't care where you are from. You from the suburbs, you are from the hood, we share these experiences." Reflecting this sentiment, Asheru reflected on a conversation with an African American male professor at Virginia State University, who told him "we [Black men] are only one

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bad decision away from prison-even with a with a PhD." Asheru acknowledged the "fine line" that African American men must walk as they are often seen through a deficit lens and criminalized regardless of their social position.

Solo described the endangerment of African American men as having a "target on our backs" and recounted numerous situations where he was unjustifiably considered suspect by police based on his race, gender, large size. In one incident, he said,

> I was in my mother's back yard one night searching in the grass for my dog's dog chain. All of a sudden, three cop cars rushed me man. They was in the ally and on the side of my mom's house with their lights in my face. Over the loud speaker, one dude said, 'What are you doing here? Do you belong here?' I stood up and said, 'the question is do you belong here.'

Chuck likewise recounted an experience in which he and his friends were unjustly harassed by the police for loitering on private property while sitting and chatting on his parents' lawn. The officers demanded that they show proof of residency and because his parents were at work they were forced to leave the property.

Drawing on their own experiences as African American males in the U.S. and in K-12 public schools, my participants related closely to the plight of their students. They articulated a lack of trust in teachers, school administration, and the overall educational system as a significant negative influence on their male students' dispositions towards school. During one interview, Victorious posed the following question, "As a Black boy in America, why would I trust any teacher? Why would I trust teachers in general if teachers put me out of school, put me out of class, get mad

at me because they don't understand me?" This was a common sentiment among participants. Victorious, Mustafa, and Keyote, in particular, recalled moments when they were at their weakest and most vulnerable, and were overlooked and mistreated by teachers. Not surprising, they have heard similar stories from their students. Mustafa compared his past experiences and his student's current experiences with uncaring teacher to African American boys' and men's experiences with abusive police officers, asking,

> Why trust anybody, any grade, any person that is inside of the school
>
> building? That is like Black men trusting the police; it just doesn't happen.
>
> You can be the coolest policeman in the world, but you will have to jump
>
> through a hurdle before I shake your hand, before I say you're cool. Because
>
> my relationship with police, it's like snakes. Once they bite you, and you
>
> come up to a snake, you are going to be real cautious.

Strength and Potential of African American Male Youth

According to Victorious, African American men and boys' negative encounters with U.S. social systems, "reduce[s] us to animals," and is in direct opposition to what he called, "the true nature of Black men." He asserted,

> We are a danger to ourselves, we are the saviors of ourselves, and we are also
>
> the saviors of others. We built this country; we built civilization as we know
>
> it. We are responsible for both the good and the bad out of it.

While acknowledging that they hold some responsibility for their conditions, Victorious believed that African American men have an inherent desire and

responsibility to be pillars of their communities and to take responsibility for their families. In his understanding,

> We [African American men] have responsibility to rebuild the Black family that has been destroyed through the institution of slavery, the institution of Jim Crow, Black Codes. So we have to have responsibility in 2008 to build our Black family. We should be connected to self and connected to the universe, understand our universal purpose as men, and teach our children to do the same. And being humble, always striving to be better, always working to be better, that's major. Understanding that being alive means growth; anything that's not grown is dead.

Solo, also believed strongly in the potential and redemption of African American men, describing the African American boys with whom he worked as the "best generation we have every produced." He described students who were reluctant readers, truant, involved in juvenile court system and considered uneducable, as "creative geniuses," based on their creative abilities, particularly musical and oratory abilities, which are highly valued in Hip Hop culture. "They are artists, rappers, they make beats, they can sing--they have a hustle man," he said. By "hustle" he meant that they harness their natural abilities in ways that can provide them with opportunities to earn money. This "hustle" is also reflected in the ways that Hip Hop moguls like Russell Simons, Sean Combs (Diddy), and Sean Carter (Jay Z), have become leaders in the music, fashion, and movie industries.

Likewise, Yode said that his students never cease to amaze him. He described giving students an exorbitant amount of work every day, which they willingly

accepted because the information and perspectives he presents is relevant to their

daily lives and gives them the opportunity to engage in the curriculum through Hip

Hop. "The biggest thing I learned from my students," he said, "is that I cannot fall

victim to what the media is saying about these youth because they are here, they are

alive, they are ready, and they are brilliant." He believed that the academic potential

of African American male youth has been misunderstood and ignored by educators

who fail to acknowledge Hip Hop culture as a viable educational resource.

Victorious was also amazed at the level of critical thinking his eighth graders

demonstrated. He described how a week prior to the Maryland State Assessments

test, he asked his students, "Why do you think you take standardized test?" One

student, an African American female replied, "They make us take standardized tests

so that they can measure our progress based on our race, our socio-economic status,

and our gender and I think that they are unfair. They are biased." He recalled being

"blown away" by her perspective and willingness to share her believes about

standardized tests. According to Victorious, these kinds of critical discussions were

very common in his class and both boys and girls expressed their beliefs regarding

issues facing marginalized youth. In summary he said,

> They [urban youth] just need people to talk to them, tell what they need, give
>
> them a little bit of guidance, mold them a little bit and let them run. Every
>
> year I am reassured that our youth are phenomenal, even with their
>
> circumstances. So not only are they phenomenal, they are also extremely
>
> resilient.

Keyote talked about how important support and guidance, as Victorious pointed out, is for, particularly, students with troubles in school. Sixteen-year-old Malcolm, who was functionally illiterate, visited Keyote's office in distress after a heated argument with another teacher. Malcolm was violently upset and cursed at the teacher for disrespecting him in class and although Keyote had no direct relationship with the student, he felt obligated to intervene. Prior to the verbal altercation, Malcolm was taking an exam, for which he said he studied diligently but despite his efforts, he found it difficult to answer many test questions. His teacher noticed his lack of activity on the test, accused him of not taking his work seriously, and put him out of class. However, according to Keyote,

> He had read the homework, he had listened and paid attention but couldn't read and write very well. He knew that stuff and he had paid attention in class. So it wasn't obvious to the teacher that he had paid attention and been involved in the lesson. He was taking the test and he was completely frustrated at the fact that he couldn't write.

Keyote took the time to sit Malcolm down to talk and after he calmed down, he told Keyote, "I know that stuff, I know it." Keyote, who recalled his own experiences with teachers who failed to acknowledge his academic abilities and challenges, reflected by saying, "I looked him in the eye and saw myself and said, 'Hey, maybe he's does know it'." He then began to work with Malcolm in the ways that he wished his teachers had worked with him during his adolescence. Keyote recalled telling Malcolm, "You start telling me what you do know and report to me some of the things that were going on in that book, and I will makes notes of what you say."

Keyote took dubious notes that captured Malcolm's thoughts about the content of the chapters he studied. Eventually all of the dry erase boards were filled with facts, dates, and important people that Malcolm recited to Keyote. "That boy knew a lot," Keyote explained, "but his thoughts were unorganized. So, I created a system to help him categorize his thoughts. In the end, all the content was there."

Keyote convinced the other teacher to allow Malcolm to retake the test, which he passed with ease. In this case, the teacher had labeled Malcolm as unmotivated and disengaged from school but in reality he needed help with information management and literacy, which is true for many students his age. According to Keyote, "After he got that test back I couldn't keep him out of my office. I wasn't even teaching, but my office became a classroom by default because he was able to show what he knew in my office." Keyote's success with Malcolm led other students to visit his office for assistance and because of his encounters with those students, Keyote decided to transition from school counseling to classroom teaching. In this case, both Malcolm and Keyote made a substantially positive impact on each other's lives.

As a 7th grade teacher, Chuck, like Keyote, also encountered a student who was not in his class and in need of extra academic help. One day during his planning period, Chuck noticed Keith, an 8th grader, roaming the halls. After passing his door three times, Keith peered into Chuck's classroom and said, "Hello." Chuck, who had himself been repeatedly put out of class for minor infractions as a student, invited Keith in and asked him what had happened and why he was not in class. During this friendly exchange, Chuck learned that Keith had been put out of his English class for

being disruptive and not completing his assignments. Rather than reprimanding

Keith, they sat together while he graded students' work and talked as friends for the

remaining 40 minutes of the planning block. Through their conversation, Chuck

learned that Keith was disengaged from his English class because he found the books

boring and at times too difficult to read. As a result, he focused more on recreational

activities in class, like drawing, telling jokes, and flirting with girls. Chuck told Keith

that underperforming only hurt him and not the teacher; therefore, the best way to

change his situation was to be a top student first and then, if he saw fit, challenge the

teacher to make the content more interesting and relevant to students' lives. Their

relationship also became highly visible and students noticed that Chuck befriended,

supported, and nurtured students' academic and personal needs. His classroom

become the "cool place" to visit, so much so that he would deny students entrance

into his class as a form of punishment for misbehaving in other classes or for earning

below average grades.

Most of my participants noticed that their African American male students

had difficulty trusting teachers and schools administrators whom they [the students]

believed were eager to find ways to exclude them from school. It is due, in part, to

this lack of trust that my participants positioned themselves to be well equipped to

effectively teach and mentor African American male students. Having had difficult

educational experiences themselves, as African American males, participants fostered

symbiotic relationships with, particularly, African American boys—relationships that

teachers of different genders and cultural backgrounds often have difficulty achieving

(Irvine, 2003; Love, 2005). This is what Chuck called a "whole other approach" to

teaching that foregrounds personal relationships to gain students trust and respect. According to Chuck,

> The emphasis is not on a war [e.g. Civil War or American Revolution], or curriculum or even passing a test. What I do as a teacher is that I try my best to relate to the students as a brother, a father, and a mentor. I am a caring adult that is 100% invested in my students and their futures. And I believe that when a student feels that you love them unconditionally, then they'll buy into anything that you introduce.

For my participants, shared experiences as African American males in the U.S. as well as their relationships with Hip Hop were foundational elements in their relationships with African American male students.

Participants characterized African American male students as gifted, talented, and having boundless potential and prospects for happy and healthy lives. This is in stark contradiction to popular perceptions of African American boys and young men as uneducated, violent, and hyper-sexed criminals. They also positioned themselves as having the ability to uncover this potential by rejecting stereotypes and providing students with high levels of guidance and support. For Keyote, this investment in students was connected to seeing them as his own children, which meant both seeing potential and having high expectations for personal and academic achievement. He stated, "If you're in my classroom, you are my son or you are my daughter. So that means they [students] have to hold yourself up in a certain way." Victorious also referred to the parent/child relationship when talking about his students saying, "…that means if you are my son or my daughter and we do reach that level where

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they see me as a dad, then we become responsible for one another." He believed that

students often came to call him "dad" because he is caring and consistent and he

allowed them to call him "dad" because he saw them as his children. Although these

surrogate parental relationships saw moments of both love and contention,

participants felt that they were generally enduring and ultimately effective in helping

students to develop in positive ways.

Collective Responsibility of African American Men

Many of the participants talked about the responsibility of African American

men to Black families, communities, and thus, African American youth. For

example, Keyote believed that an "ideal Black man" is a role model focused on the

health and well being of his family and his community. Victorious described the

ideal African American man as one who is "self aware," and has a connection to his

community, his mate, and his children. In this case, self-awareness means

recognizing one's role as a leader, teacher, and guide who seeks to positively

influence the world. More specifically, the African American man should be a figure

of strength and courage for the African American community. Gill asserted that this

awareness necessitates a deep historical understanding of the rich history of African

American male leadership and spiritual connection to the masses of African

Americans whom they are charged to lead.

According to Asheru,

In my eyes, an ideal Black man is focused on family and the ideal Black man

is focused on history. If he focused on positive healthy development of his

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family, then he's worried about the positive healthy development of his community and if he's worried about it or concerned about it, then his energies are geared towards healthy education- mentally, spiritually and physically. He's [the ideal Black man] is a creator and survivor as he knows when to pick up defense and when he should be defeated because he's a man--and a role model by default, and a positive one at that.

Other participants echoed this sentiment, identifying their desire to be role models to marginalized students, particularly African American boys, as significantly influencing their decision to become an educator.

All of my participants were hopeful that their students saw them as positive examples of African American men who, like them, were heavily engaged in Hip Hop. Asheru reflected, "I rhyme, I do shows and all that shit. I have a career. I'm a teacher, I'm an educated, I have a family, I am a husband-- I wear a lot of different hats but I want them to see, man, that this is what makes a man." He further argued that he worked hard to teach students that there is an alternative to the lifestyles portrayed in the media. As such, he urged his male students to look beyond sports and music and to find ways to make money from their intellect.

Most of my participants saw themselves as representatives of Hip Hop given that their work and service to students is directly connected to Hip Hop culture. As Victorious stated,

…that's why human beings are here. It's to serve each other, and I definitely think that that's what Hip Hop conveyed. And that's what I try to do every day standing in front of the classroom. Whatever you need, I am going to give to

you; I am here because you [students] are here. I can't be here, I wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for you, so I serve you.

Some participants intentionally positioned themselves as educators and mentors to, as Asheru states, "save" African American boys from many of the dangers that African American men face in U.S. society, like racial profiling, gang violence, and drug abuse. In particular, Asheru believed that "saving" his male students included viewing them as younger family members in need of guidance rather than "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995), as previously articulated by other participants. Thus, he says that when he sees, particularly, a male student, he sees a little cousin, younger brother, or nephew hungry for his attention and validation.   He stated,

> I am trying to steer them right and sometimes we might get into a little back and forth and they might get disrespectful but they're young boys, so I'm looking at it like- you don't know no better. But once they see my heart and intentions, I don't ever have no problems even with the wildest youngins. They understand where I'm coming from and I understand where they are coming from.

Chuck asserted,

> …and so when I talk to them [students], I don't talk to them from the perspective of a teacher, I look at my relationship with the kids as more of a big brother than a teacher-because I don't position myself as the authority that they must listen too, but I am an authority and I have a perspective and I have had some experiences.

These participants saw their roles as mentors rather than just teachers as they sought to not only teach standard curriculum but to also help guide students to personal, social and academic success. This speaks to the quality of the relationships they sought to forge with students, made deeper by their mutual interest in and identification with Hip Hop.

Asheru argued that his significance as a "Hip Hop educator," meaning one whose pedagogy and curricular focus is grounded in Hip Hop culture, is related, in large part, to the lack of positive role modeling that African American male youth receive from the Hip Hop artists they adore. Asheru, like Solo, and Mustafa volunteer at various detentions centers through out the Washington, DC metropolitan area and the young men with whom they work, love artists like Plies, Lil Wayne, and 50 Cents, who they see as modeling some of the negative aspects of Hip Hop. The participants argued that their presence in detention centers, as well as in public schools, gives students a more positive and multi-dimentional image of Hip Hop-that is, being fathers, teachers, and husbands. All of my participants saw themselves as positive examples of African American manhood. Because they have navigated the difficulties that their male students will likely face, it was important to them that they help students make the best choices for their futures. They viewed themselves as inherently linked to their students, particularly African American males, reflecting Berhane's belief that,

> What they will see out of me is that thirst to know who and what they are
> about, and to see their best foot forward. I want to see their potential being

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reached, and I want to give them the scaffolding in order to develop that path to reach their goals, whatever it is.

Gill argued that this link between student and teacher, led him to dedicate more time to his students, to meet them after school hours for a meal or to play ball, or to encourage them to engage in extra curricular activities that support their academic needs. He posited, "I am not doing these things because I want them to trust me, I'm doing it because this is how I live—to help guide you [students] through life."

Keyote, as well as most of my participants, viewed teaching as a "calling" rooted in the desire to provide urban youth with the tools and encouragement for survival in the U.S. They believed that, as educators, African American men play a significant role in helping African American male youth to overcome the challenges they face in urban schools and communities and that their presence was a catalyst for change in the public educational system. According to Victorious, "there is no magical curriculum, there is no magic school building. The magic is in you, the people." He encouraged African American men to enter the teaching profession, to be constantly evolving so that they can expose urban youth to cutting edge approaches to curriculum, and to reflect on their purpose on earth so that they will remain committed to alleviating the dire conditions in which youth from disenfranchised communities live. He further encouraged all teachers, but specifically African American men, to model what it means to "have some swagger with you," but also to be intelligent, thoughtful, and calm with students. "Swagger" is a term, often used to describe President Barack Obama, that represents a cool and

easy going personality to which young people can relate. Chuck said that his "swagger" enables him to talk with students about Lil Wayne and Cornel West all in the same lesson.

Victorious also highlighted the dispositions that help teachers to build relationships with students, stating, "If you walk down these hallways and greet a student with the words of peace, they will respond to you, without even knowing you, they will respond with those same words." He said that the most important thing that he wanted students to learn from him is that he lives the life he advocates. If he warns students not to drink, then they should be assured that he would not drink either. If he encourages them to come to class prepared and ready to work, then they should be assured that he is always prepared and ready to teach to the best of his ability. He also hoped that his students are able to see that his good qualities outweigh the bad, saying,

> I want to build good people; I just want them to care, I want them to love, I want them not to want to go see fights. I want them to be able to open doors for their elders when no one is looking or pick up someone's stuff off of the ground when someone may not be as popular in the school. I want them to be genuinely good people. So then I have to be a good person as an example to them.

As teachers and proponents of Hip Hop, participants viewed themselves as servants of their communities and teaching was one venue through which they served. Victorious reflected that serving others is

…what I try to do every day standing in front of the classroom. Whatever the students need, I am going to give to them; I am here because they are here. I can't be here, I wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for them, so I am here to serve."

Victorious' identity as a teacher and African American man was intimately connected to Hip Hop. That is, how he understood the ideals and goals that Hip Hop embodies, as it relates to molding and nurturing urban youth, was congruent with and intimately connected to his intrinsic motivations to teach. Connecting Hip Hop to his pedagogical beliefs, he stated,

The treatment of your brothers, the respect of each other, the respect of community, that's the fabric I was raised up in and that's where Hip Hop started. It was started in the communities, from the communities, for the communities. So, you are treating each other like your family members. That's the same way I approach my students.

Most of my participants identified their coming of age with Hip Hop as, like Mustafa said, a "sound track" to their daily lives that influenced their desires to serve. For them, Hip Hop was a source of strength and a constant inspiration that kept them invested in public education, even though they believed that K-12 public schools are basically "unfit" to served African American children. Mustafa asserted that his love of Hip Hop and the stories exposed through Hip Hop music is naturally linked to his commitment and approaches to teaching urban youth.   He argued,

[As a teacher] You are serving true Hip Hop, you are serving the community because you come from the community. You are exposing the things that are

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happening. You are exposing the things that are going on in your life, and

you are conveying it to other people [students] to give them strength, to give

them hope, to give them some things to wish to for, or a way to get out of it.

Personalized and Caring Relationships

All of my participants spoke a great deal about a "brand of caring," as Chuck

articulated, that was grounded in an emotional and spiritual connection to their

students.   This connection stemmed from the belief that their own lives were

reflected in their students, specifically in African American males. In particular,

Victorious stated,

When I'm teaching, I see their souls. I look in their eyes, and I see me. I

figure out who they are, and I teach them from that vantage point. I think that

if you visited my class, you would see peace. You would see a lot of honesty.

You would see a lot of sharing. You would see a lot of lives being exposed. I

think that you would see what peace really is.

Examples of caring largely reflected the ways in which participants felt that

teachers had failed to nurture them as K-12 students. Mustafa shared an interesting

story about how he showed caring to an African American male student who

struggled both academically and socially in school by telling him "the truth" about

how to navigate the public educational system. He told the student,

You need to understand that they [teachers, school, and school systems] have

set themselves up to insure your failure, either by ganging up on you or not

being qualified to work with you. So if you want to show off to get your

teacher back, you can't do that with a C or D. Get an A in the class first and

then get kicked out if you want.

This was information that Mustafa wished someone had given him during his

adolescence, as he told his students. He believed that having good grades provides

students with credibility if asked by administrators or officials about their troubles

with the school or teachers. He argued that as an African American male student, if

one feels marginalized, they should work within the system, by earning good grades,

while resisting the system by challenging teachers who treat them poorly. This

example represents how my participants borrowed from their personal experiences as

students to address the social and academic needs of their African American male

students through caring

Keyote, in particular, spoke about his classroom as a learning space where

students feel safe, no matter who they are or where they are from. He said that, in

general, his students feel motivated, supported, and they understand that he is fully

invested in their human and academic development. "When they give effort," he

stated, "they know it will rewarded in learning. I want them to feel that learning is its

own reward and that they will be able to use that tool from then on and that it's

relevant. It's relevant to their life and they definitely want to practice it."

Asheru also explained how he showed caring as a teacher and school

administrator, saying that he strove to make his classroom and school a safe place

where students feel secure enough to take risks and stretch beyond their perceived

academic limitations. At the same time, he wanted school to be a place where they

could enjoy themselves in ways that might not be possible at home or in their

community. He recognized the burden, struggles, and personal hardships that many of his students endured, so it was important for him to create a caring environment where students could forget their problems for a while and relax.

In forming relationships, Hip Hop served as a link between my participants and their students, the overwhelming majority of whom identify with Hip Hop on a cultural level. Thus, the participants and their students shared similar musical and cultural interests. According to Mustafa, "the music they [students] listen to, I listen to (though with a more critical ear)-you know the videos they watch, I watch and the lifestyles they live, I live too. We are literally culturally connected." This connection provided participants with opportunities to relate to their African American male students on a personal and cultural level.

Berhane recalled a young man named Nate who struggled with mathematics. He described Nate as a bright student who found abstractions of Geometry too difficult to grasp. Berhane reflected on what he called a moment of "great satisfaction" when, after working with Nate for several weeks, he noticed changes in both his academic outcomes and his personal perceptions about mathematics. According to Berhane, "believing that you can do it is more important than actually doing it." Although, according to Berhane, Nate never became an A student in Geometry, his work ethic and self-esteem surpassed his peers. He would visit Berhane every morning to say "hello" and was more engaged in school overall. According to Berhane, "Nate and his boys would visit me several times a day to just check in…I was like, 'what in the world is going on, I mean it was like you know I am your teacher but you actually want to spend time with me'."

As with Keyote and Malcolm, discussed earlier, Berhane's relationship with Nate became highly visible and as result, students turned to Berhane for academic assistant and personal advice. Berhane said that even though there were several teachers in his high school who taught Geometry and Algebra II, the vast majority of students came to him for tutoring as he was the one who, as his students stated, "made it plain." He recalled,

> I would have children who were taking other geometry classes but who happened to have me for algebra or algebra II. They would leave their geometry teacher after school and see me after school because they say, 'Mr. Berhane, I like how you explained Algebra II. Can you help me with geometry because the other teacher doesn't make it real for us.'

Likewise, Solo explained how he leveraged a relationship with his student Jordon, who was admired and followed by his peers, to develop more positive interactions with other students in his class. He described Jordan and an "effective class clown" and natural leader. After struggling several weeks with classroom management, Solo decided to develop a deeper relationship with Jordon in order to employ more effective ways of capturing and maintaining his students' attention. Solo stated, "He's the one that I talked to on the side and I said, 'You are a leader and I need your to help me. Is there anything that I am not doing well or any way that I can help you or any way that I can help your classmates?'" Jordon told Solo that he was doing everything right and it was up to the students control their behavior. He also reassured Solo that things would change as the semester progressed. He says that from that point, Jordon was one of his best students and his greatest ally. That

encounter was pivotal in Solo's career after which he approached his students as co-learners rather than recipients of knowledge. In doing so, he said he developed more personal relationships with most of his student's and found that even if they were disinterested in the content, they would work hard to please him.

Asheru reflected on his experiences teaching a 10th grade student named Jeff how to read and demonstrated an ethic of caring. Jeff had apparently been socially promoted for several years and by the 10th grade he showed signs of severe academic distress and performed poorly in all of his classes. Asheru realized early on that Jeff could not read based on his performances on diagnostic tests and in class. Although Asheru was teaching U.S. history, he decided to make time in the morning and after school to teach Jeff basic phonics. He recalled,

> I taught him one word at a time, and what we did is that I put on the board the alphabets, and we literally wrote those two words...those two letters. Say the word was 'Bat.' I would say 'B-A-T'." Then I would have Jeff repeat the pronunciation and manipulate the alphabets to create new works like "hat," "cat," or 'rat."

> He further recalled,

> "what ended up happening was that we wrote a rap in the room, and he memorized it. And Jeff is a boy who couldn't read, but he was writing the rap. As soon as that happened, I could not keep him away from me. So those little, small successes from that point on made teaching rewarding for me and that's why I am still teaching—for those small "light" bulb moments.

According to Asheru, GOD brought students like Jeff into his life to ensure the he pursued a masters degree so that he could specialize in literacy and curriculum development and bring those skills back to the students who needed him most.

Most participants viewed Hip Hop as a venue through which to gain a deeper understanding of the mindsets of their students. Yode stated that his students were so invested in Hip Hop because they saw themselves and their stories reflected in the music, they believed the stories, and they believed in the artists who told those stories. Yode strongly believes that through Hip Hop, he has become better able to hear his students' authentic voices and to contextualize their life experiences. For him, Hip Hop provided an explanation for the ways the many African American males "act out."

Solo further argued that Hip Hop provides today's generation of students the type of hope and a collective cause that youth rallied around during the Civil Rights Era. He pointed out that during the Civil Right era, urban youth would gather to write plays and create songs to express their resistance to the social, educational and legal injustices that the Jim Crow system enforced upon African Americans. Similarly, most of my participants and many of their students, particularly African American youth, see Hip Hop as a reflection of their personal experiences and they use Hip Hop music as a sounding board to express their grievances with the challenges they face in urban schools and communities. Specific examples of this are outlined in the next chapter.

Curricular and Educational Transformation

All of the participants talked about the importance of curricular and educational transformation particularly for African American children. Victorious, who is training for National Board Certification, shared a story about his dissatisfaction with the amount of financial and human resources dedicated to closing the achievement gap rather than to students' human development. He believed that the achievement debate was based solely on test scores and grades, which seek to standardize and categorize students. He argued, "So I go through life being standardized; so if go through life passing standardized tests I'm going to be a copy, just like everybody else. I am going to walk around being a copy, and that's definitely not what we want our children to be, especially Black children." This standardization process, he believed, ignores the important process of helping students to develop into loving, caring, self-determined and responsible individuals.

As articulated by Victorious, most of my participants felt particularly constrained by the limits and expectations placed on teachers within the current "high stakes" educational environment. In general they expressed frustration with their schools' mandates to focus all of their teaching on state and national standards. In contrast, their views on personal and professional success were centered around the "whole student." This meant that they wanted to teach students to be aware of their decisions and to be conscious of their outcomes. They wanted students to be resilient, to resist external pressures to disengage from school and disengage from illegal activity, and at the same time to critique the oppressive systems within which they were forced to operate. "I want them to be strong," Solo said, "and not to be caught in the belly of the beast and not to be captured by the wolves."

Victorious called for a "reinvention" of the ways that we approach teaching

students of color. He wanted to continue to develop his skills as an educator and to

create new ways of thinking about how students learn, how teachers approach and

understand students, and to rewrite standard curriculum so that youth of color are

included and engaged academically. In his view, this type of re-creation of public

education would foreground critical consciousness, self-esteem, and community

engagement as the pillars of academic and personal success, using Hip Hop as a vital

tool. Solo substantiated this argument by saying,

> I am telling you there is something about Black men and education and its
>
> gonna liberate this whole shit. I feel like we might be super close to it and we
>
> are near a point were we are going to revolutionize the way education is even
>
> done and the way that it is structured. I'm telling you, Hip Hop is gonna be
>
> the common denominator."

For Solo, transforming education meant that, "it's my time to give back and to

provide experience, and knowledge, and critical consciousness to younger brothers

and try to build them up by any means necessary." For the participants, the paths to

"giving back" were not limited to classroom teaching. They also articulated a desire

to build and rebuild institutions that will provide entrepreneur and scholarly

opportunities and resources for marginalized young people. Yode said, "It is my

purpose in life to build a [educational] model that works for Black people so that

other people can see and steal and recreate to fit their specific needs." Chuck further

stated, "one day I want youth around the world to go to HipHop.com to get tutorials

on math or biology." This educational model would borrow from Hip Hop culture

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and the intellect of people of color, to provide youth throughout the world, academic

support.

> For Mastafa,

> Success is knowing that the world is a better place because I was here. That I
> was able to take the things I cared about, formulate them into ideas, and then
> into a curriculum and then find people that could tweak them and then make
> those things happen.

Mustafs also said that his goal was to take those positive things from his educational

and personal backgrounds, which happened by chance, and create intentional

opportunities for African American male youth today. One such example would be

the work he does through his non- profit organization, which, among other things,

provides urban youth with mentoring, academic, and social activities that provides

safety and academic scaffolding. In his capacity as a mentor, Mustafa said he worked

to intentionally intervene into the lives of his male students to ensure that they

understand that if they get convicted of a crime, then they would be ineligible for

student financial assistance, which could prevent them for going to college one day.

He argued that during his adolescence, he and his friends did not get that kind of

advice and, as a result, many of them lost educational and employment opportunities

because of mistakes they made as teenagers. Mustafa hoped that through these

interventions, students would have more opportunities and options in their lives.

Keyotes supports Mustafa's sentiments, stating,

> I think the most important thing that no one tells kids now a days, is your
> number one priority right now is to make sure they don't ex themselves out of

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opportunities that may come 10 years from now because of what you do today.

Participants asserted that public schools should support their independence and help to develop critical thinkers who are healthy in their mind, body, and spirit. Furthermore, the goal of education should be to develop a generation that can promote public safety, innovations in science, honest politics, and high quality education. However, participants argued that the current public educational system, grounded in capitalist ideals, functions to create and maintain a service-oriented work force for the dominant class. They believed that school is currently working to create another generation of followers and/or consumers who are taught not to question authority or to make meaning for themselves. As such, schools perpetuate the current social order by maintaining a permanent working and poor class. Participants believed that youth of color, particularly African American youth, are targeted to become that population.

According to Asheru, schools are teaching African American youth how to be, what he calls, "workers bees" rather than independent thinkers and entrepreneurs. However, he argued that "our" youth are not meant to be workers so they resist the system. This resistance fuels soaring rates of dropout and school suspension and expulsion among African American boys in particular. Asheru asserted,

I'm saying ya'll trying to build worker bees but these kids ain't built to be worker bees unless they in jail. But if they out here in the world, they not trying follow nobody else. They trying make their own shit, so you gotta show

them how to do it, that's all I'm saying and give them something that makes them feel good about themselves.

All of my participants conceptualized Hip Hop as one thing that can make the young people they teach feel good about themselves. They say Hip Hop is a form of music and culture geared towards giving a voice to the voiceless and assisting in the academic, personal, and personal development of all people, but more specifically, their students. They described Hip Hop as is a venue through which they expose students to the struggles facing people of color throughout the nation. As Gill stated, "Whether it's *Self Destruction*, or Nas' *I Know I Can,* Hip Hop exposes students to what's happening in our communities and how our histories was stripped from us."

Chuck spoke about the ways that urban youth rely on Hip Hop as a source of strength and hope, saying that many of his students' lived experiences mirrored the stories often told in Hip Hop lyrics. Although Hip Hop, for many of its consumers, represents a glamorized "urban" experience, the majority of his students have parents who are drug users and dealers and were themselves born crack addicted. He projected, based on informal conversations, that nearly two-thirds of his students had witnessed murder in their neighborhood and that all of them have seen a dead body. For them, Hip Hop artists provided, through their lyrics, a blueprint of how to escape such harsh realities. For example, Chuck pointed out that artists like Lil Kim, Jay Z, DMX and countless others who are critiqued for violent and sexualized lyrical content, actually provide disenfranchised youth with authentic stories of how they escaped their pasts and "made it out of the hood." Rap artist Q-Tip from A Tribe Called Quest, compared listening to his favorite Hip Hop album to talking on the

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phone with his best friend. Chuck argued that his students gain the same sort of comfort from Hip Hop, saying,

> For a lot of my kids, you know, they got each other, they got their own cliques, but to be honest, when they with each other, they listening to Hip Hop music. They understand it and it gives them identity during their process of trying to make it through their struggles. And without that, you know, what would they be doing?

Therefore, youth who live in conditions similar to those described by these artists, likely study their success stories, seeking the same type of upward financial mobility.

Most of my participants viewed Hip Hop as an effective lens through which to gain a deeper understanding of their students' lives and perspectives on the world and used Hip Hop as a powerful tool for teaching youth of color within traditional K-12 classrooms. These participants believed that education is a significant component of the culture that should co-exist with Hip Hop's existing elements (emceeing, dejaying, beeboying, graffiti art, break dancing). Asheru put this idea into practice, creating a literacy curriculum, to provide students, specifically disenfranchised youth of color, with important curricular and cultural connections to support their literacy development. The curriculum uses lyrics from popular Hip Hop songs in traditional reading activities to help students learn reading comprehension, sentence structure, persuasive writing, and other literacy skills. This curriculum spans K-12 reading levels and provides both teachers and students with supplemental educational support to promote literacy among urban youth.

Both Chuck and Berhane used Hip Hop in mathematics instruction. They drew on students' desires for financial security and interest in Hip Hop to teach a variety of mathematical concepts. For example, Berhane required his students to conduct mathematical analyses on the music industry. One student analyzed demographic trends in Hip Hop consumerism and tracked the top selling Hip Hop songs over the last decade. He identified trends and shifts in consumption and measured the growth rates, based on record sales. He found that White youth are the largest consumers of Hip Hop in the U.S., meaning that they purchase Hip Hop music at a higher rate than other demographic groups. Chuck used Hip Hop in his mathematics, statistics, and digital media courses, recognizing the importance of not only allowing students to analyze Hip Hop, but also to enjoy, engage in, and consume the music while they learn. He encouraged students to bring their favorite music to class, to have critical discussions about the future of Hip Hop, and to use the Hip Hop culture as a backdrop or point of reference for any cultural or historical analysis. Furthermore, he did not apologize for playing Hip Hop music in the background while his students worked, saying,

> My feeling is that as a professional, I work with music myself, so one thing I
> want to see more of in classroom is having the music in the background
> because if that is the language our kids use and they are going to still work,
> then they might work better cause they have their own music playing. So why
> not let them listen to it and why not let them incorporate it.

Most of my participants talked about resistance to their pedagogical approaches from colleagues and school administrators who did not see the benefit of

Hip Hop in the classroom and who believed that Hip Hop music contributed to the problems that students face by glamorizing highly sexualized and violent lifestyles. While participants did not ignore this critique, they recognized the potential of Hip Hop to motivate and inspire an entire generation, regardless of race, class, gender, or socio-economic status. Gill compared the potential of the highly commercialized Hop Hip of today to that of the internet when it was first introduced, stating,

> The majority of people look at what something was created to do as its only functionality or use, but think the internet-the internet was created to help the army or scientist communicate with each other. No one thought about business transactions or social networks. These were innovators who realized we could twist it and like with Hip Hop, obviously it was created to generate money and what they do around that is outlandish, but there is a huge potential to take just the raw instinct within a song or the notion of the video or movies or documentaries, and weave it into an innovative curriculum!

Asheru said that he combines Hip Hop pedagogy with his loud, spontaneous, and entertaining teaching style. He compared his teaching style to a Hip Hop performance and described using a non-traditional and lively educational model to gain full student participation. He uses call and response strategies and stated that it is common for his students to have their hands up constantly in anticipation of being chosen to provide a response or to "blurt out" out responses when they could not restrain their excitement. Chuck said he did a lot of rapping in his classes. "I move around a lot and jump a lot and I speak in rhymes to keep the students on their toes," he said. He also said he used humor and sarcasm to capture students' attention.

Through individual attention, small groups, and whole class discussions, he said he gave his students the freedom to explore the content from their own perspectives and he, as a facilitator, provided support and guidance in that process.

Other participants spoke about proximity to the students as means of maintaining high energy levels in the classroom. For example, Chuck stated, "I'm definitely a 'be around the students' kinda teacher. I think, the more distance, the worse off you are. You'll see thinking taking place." He used proximity to provide students with instant support if they encountered any challenging in his class.

Participants also described their teaching styles, which in Gill's case, he described as "learning through fun." I gotta keep my energy higher than them," he said, "because nobody should be talking more than me you know." Gill believed that if he failed to remain up beat and positive, the students would grow tired of him and his class and become distracted. Likewise, Keyode stated that in his classroom, "you'll see a lot of energy and you'll see a lot of joking and you'll also see a lot of you'll see work going on." He said that the students have so much fun that they often do not realize how much work they've produced. In his digital arts course, he allows students to listen to music and to work collaboratively while working on class projects. He says that at times they laugh, crack jokes, and even have rhyming wars where students challenge one another's rapping abilities. Throughout these processes however, they are also working and developing very impressive digital art portfolios that can be presented to future employers and arts colleges.

My participants sought to encourage students to think critically and to make meaning of the information with which they are presented. They spoke about the

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significance of Hip Hop music in their teaching as a conduit for learning. Gill stated that he, "had Tupac posters up, charts of the latest music, and all that," in his classroom. In his middle school class, Chuck said, "sometimes I'd use quotes and sometimes I'd use rap lyrics. Like when NAS says, 'My rhyme is like a vitamin-health without a capsule'." Chuck used these lyrics to teach students about the positive messages in the Hip Hop music and in school curriculum and "like vitamins," be believed that these messages can help students develop both mentally and spiritually.

Chapter 7: INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN HIP HOP AND THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL WELL BEING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

Bambadda said it best. He said, 'peace, unity, love, and having fun.' Those are the four tenets of Hip Hop and I believe in them till this day. I used it in my teaching and in my rhyming. And if that was what you were about in your songs, and how you act, and how you treated people-I considered you a hip hop artist. And if you were doing that same thing in terms of education-then you were cool with me.

-Keyote

The examination of the social and educational experiences of African American male teachers in this study revealed six themes that reflect ways in which their pedagogical orientations were related to Hip Hop culture. These themes highlight the importance of: 1) commitment to urban spaces, 2) transformative pedagogies, 3) character development, 4) Hip Hop Culture as a means to understand, particularly, African American male youth, 5) hope for the future, and 6) the recruitment and retention of African American male students in the field of education. Following, I describe these themes, explicating the function and utility of Hip Hop culture in urban schools and communities. I will also identify qualities and pedagogical orientations of the African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation that participated in this study, which correspond with the needs of and effective practices for African American male students. The goal is not to essentialize individuals or groups but to deconstruct and better understand approaches to teaching and learning that can be efficacious in fostering social and academic well being among, particularly, African American youth, and especially males, in urban schools.

Hip Hop Culture and Commitment to Urban Spaces

Most of my participants drew heavily from Hip Hop's ideals that foreground a belief in and commitment to urban communities. For example, in the song "Time's Up," the O.C. wrote about Hip Hop artists whose lyrics focused on sex and violence, particularly in inner-city communities. "Instead of putting brain cells to work they abuse it, non-conceptual, non-exceptional, everybody's either crime-related or sexual. I'm here to make a difference, besides all the ruffin." To substantiate this argument, Keyote asserted,

> We need to give support, nurture, and cultivate life and then that life must also
> be pushed to reach and attain greater goals and great successes-healthy
> success-not at the expense of others. I would never say a rhyme or support an
> artist who calls for the murder or abuse of our own people. I don't care if the
> concert only costs 1$ to attend-that is concert that I will not attend!

The O.C.'s and Keyote's messages and perspectives on Hip Hop culture exemplify the lessons that many Hip Hop artists and participants have learned throughout their lives and have applied in their artistry as rappers and educators.

KRS-ONE (2003) argues, "From the very beginning, Hip Hop was about victory over the streets! It was a strategy to beat the street" (p. 181-182). To further explicate this point, study participant Victorious asserted, "I feel indebted to my community because my community has been affected by many perils by the decisions of other people, and I feel indebted that I must assist in the development of minority communities." This idea of gaining victory over the streets (that is, not allowing poverty and the vestiges of street life to compromise or destroy the quality of ones

life) supports Morrell (2002) and Stovall's (2006) analysis of Hip Hop culture as a representative expression of the lived experiences of youth of color in urban communities. Likewise, it reflects the ways in which my participants positioned themselves as change agents for youth of color, particularly those in urban settings, with the goal of encouraging listeners to think critically and to use their intellectual capital to transform urban spaces (Lynn, 2002).

> For example, in the song *Fighting* the Goodie Mob wrote,
>
> We don't even know who we are, but the answer ain't far, matter of fact its right up under our nose, but the system taught us to keep that book closed, see the reason why he gotta lie and deceive is so that we won't act according to get the blessings we supposed to receive.

Likewise, Asheru described speaking with urban youth in detention centers about the importance of knowledge as a means of freeing themselves from their current positions as detainees in the juvenile corrections system. He stated,

> I try to teach them man that they could make money just off of what is in their brains man. Like-people get paid to give speeches where they just talk about what they know. That's why I keep telling them to read man as much as they can so they can get the hell up out this shit, man.

Goodie Mob and Asheru's message here is to encourage urban youth to look within themselves and their communities for strength and to utilize the resources around them to create better lives for themselves despite the public educational and judicial systems that work to perpetuate intellectual and political dormancy.

An analysis of the social, political, and economic challenges facing

marginalized communities can be found Talib Kweli's Hip Hop song *Manifesto*. He

writes,

> Supply and the demand its all capitalism, Niggas don't sell crack cause they
>
> like to see Black smoke, Niggas sell crack cause they broke…don't take a
>
> scholar to see what's going on around you, either you widdit or you ain't is
>
> what it comes down to, have you forgotten? We pickin 100% designer name
>
> brand cotton they still plottiin, my third eye is steady watchin

Here, Kweli highlights some of the ecological barriers that inhibit the spiritual and

intellectual development of urban youth who turn to criminal activity for survival due

to the dire economic conditions in which they live. Kweli's ever present "third eye"

represents his distrust of the U.S. capitalist society and belief that the current

economic and social order works to keep people of color and those who live in

poverty at the bottom of the socioeconomic stratum. Likewise, Keyote and Asheru's

disposition towards nurturing and providing students with the social and intellectual

capital to overcome the vestiges of poverty, represents the paternal instincts that these

African American male teachers bring to teaching youth of color (Lynn, 2002).

Borrowing from Irvine's (2002) research on the culturally responsive teaching

dispositions of African American female educators who view teaching as "other

mothering," I articulate my participants' paternal orientations as "other fathering."

Other fathering speaks to my participants' commitments to, according to Gill,

"making a difference" in urban spaces while encouraging urban youth to be self-

sufficient and intellectual beings as well as providing them with strategies to beat the

streets. The lyrics written by O.C., Goodie Mob, and Kweli—lyrics written by African American men for urban youth—are reminiscent of Lynn's (2002) research on African American male teachers who saw themselves reflected in their students and taught with the goal of making a difference in students' lives. As articulated by study participant, Victorious, "I know this is what I was born to do. Everything I have gone through in my life has prepared me to teach my people and to make a different in my community man. By teaching, I'm doing GOD's work and that is why it is so rewarding for me." For Victorious, as well as most of my other participants, his life's experiences and relationship with Hip Hop culture has engendered in him a commitment to invest the social, intellectual, and human capital into the types of schools and communities that nurtured his personal development as African American men. As such, all of my participants viewed teaching as a means to give back to urban schools and communities.

Hip Hop and Transformative Pedagogies

Carter G. Woodson (1993) defined the function of education as the cultivation of the gifts and talents of individuals through the acquisition of knowledge. He further posited that this cultivation process satiates a child's innate thirst (mind, body, and spirit) for self-discovery and expression. This knowledge, in turn, provides youth with the tools necessary to serve themselves, their families, their communities, and the world (Woodson, 1933). However, as he argues, students of color have been historically marginalized in public schools, as the curriculum has most often failed to teach them about their histories, their heritage, and their function as global citizens

beyond their legacies as the descendents of enslaved or conquered peoples (Harvey, 2001; Lee, 1996; Majors et al., 2001; Noguera, 1996, 2003b; Williams et al., 2003).

Some scholars point to the use of Hip Hop in public schools as a way to challenge this limited curricular scope, to insert the histories of disenfranchised communities, to transform students' negative feelings about school, and to create educational environments that emphasize the contributions of people of color as normative (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Morrell, 2002; Stovall, 2006b). A characterization of curriculum that foregrounds the contributions of people of color can be found in Boogie Down Productions' song *You Must Learn*,

> I believe that if you're teaching history filled with straight up facts no mystery,
> Teach the student what needs to be taught…No one told you about Benjamin
> Banneker, A brilliant Black man that invented the almanac…With Ellie
> Whitney, Holly Selosy, Grand Bill Woods made the walky-talky, Lewis
> Latterman improved on Edison, Charles Drew did a lot for medicine, Garrett
> Morgan made the traffic lights, Harriet Tubman freed the slaves at night,
> Madame CJ Walker made a straightin' comb...The point I'm gettin' at is it
> might be harsh, 'Cause we're just walkin' around brainwashed.

Here, Boogie Down Productions exposes the Eurocentric focus embedded within public K-12 curriculum and "schools" their audience—primarily youth of color—about the contributions of people of color, particularly, African Americans. This song teaches youth that despite being descendants of enslaved peoples, African Americans have accomplished great things throughout history. His goal was to teach

urban youth to resist the structural, ecological, and social systems that marginalize their communities and to envision what they can and will accomplish in the future.

One participant, Solo, stated that Hip Hop artists like KRS One awakened his own critical consciousness—his awareness of social injustices perpetuated against disenfranchised groups and his commitment to redressing those injustices in ways that school did not. He reflected,

> I was conscious about the way I had carried myself. [I developed] the ability to actually analyze current events because artists were talking about that. I remember some artist talking about vigilantes in Bernard Goetz when they shot those young guys in New York City to apartheid in songs, and so that is where I got the most profound education growing up without a doubt and it is a lot of stuff I should have got in the classroom but I did not.

Gill, provided a personal example of how Hip Hop music motivated him, as student, to question his teacher about the intransigence of racism in the school curriculum. He reflected,

> I would listen to Cube and KRS, and I was in catholic school, and you know they would have to explain to me about this white Jesus -cause I needed answers you know because what I heard in Hip Hop contradicted what they were teaching me in school. So I was like, 'Ms. Uhhhhh...is Jesus White?' They would say, 'Gill-GET OUT.' They made me leave. And then you had the rap that was going against authority-Public Enemy, Ice Cube, and KRS.

Hip Hop can also be an effective tool in teaching students about injustices perpetuated against people of color and their responsibility to fight against these injustices. One apt example is the song *Fighting* by Goodie Mob.

I guess that's what I'm writing for to try to shed some light, but we been in the darkness for so long, don't know right from wrong. You'll find a lot of the reason we behind is because the system is designed to keep our third eyes blind, but not blind in the sense that our other two eyes can't see, you just end investing quality time in places you don't even need to be.

Keyote uses these lyrics to teach about capitalism in the U.S. and its effect on people who live in poverty. He stated that he teaches his students that a capitalist society necessitates a working class and that the U.S. economy was built on the enslaved. According to Keyote, he used the lyric to the *Fighting* song, to teach his students about the how chattel slavery and the current prison system are both institutions that benefit from the free labor of mostly people of color. His lesson to the students is that the educational system, in many ways, perpetuates a social order in which people of color and those who live in poverty remain on the bottom as free and/or cheap labor. As such, he teaches his students to recognize this reality and to work hard and smart enough to both benefit from and resist the current educational system, similar to the ways that Mustafa encouraged his students, as described in the previous chapter, to express their discontent with school while not limiting their opportunities.

As significantly, Goodie Mob's lyrics and other lyrics like his that encourage students of color to learn about themselves and their contributions to society, are

delivered by strong, intelligent, and uncompromising African American men as teachers or "Hip Hoppas." KRS-One (2003) identifies, "Hip Hoppas" as those who are committed to and invested in reinserting the political and social movements back into Hip Hop. According to KRS-One (2003) "Hip Hoppas" are those within the Hip Hop community that invest their social, cultural, and human capital in urban spaces and in urban youth and they generally express feelings of nostalgia regarding their coming of age in urban communities and their early experiences with Hip Hop culture. This was reflected in Solo's statement,

> I can remember really thinking that it wasn't just music, but it was more so like the message. I remember *Fight the Power* and *Cant Trust It* especially because of the videos to go along with it. The men were strong and powerful to me man. I was thinking like --man we fighting the power and you really start to carry those medallion and you start to carry yourself with pride man.

The visual imagery of African American male artists teaching youth of color about their histories through rap music can be found in the passion and fervor with which my participants borrowed from Hip Hop to motivate and provide messages of hope to students of color. As Chuck stated,

> I teach to empower. I don't care about the curriculum standards man. Look at what Barack is doing man-he is bucking the system and engaging Hip Hop and the community to win this election. I am trying to teach my kids that they can do what Barack is doing and better.

Likewise Victorious stated,

> …to help our students we gotta transform the way we teach them. Since I am
> Hip Hop and they are Hip Hop, why not teach with Hip Hop? To me it's
> natural. So when I teach, Hip Hop is evident in the way I dress, the way I
> talk, and what I teach about.

Keyote further explicated these points by stating,

> I can't separate what I teach from who I teach. So if I am teaching Black or
> Latino youth from D.C., I have to make my teaching relevant to them. If they
> love Lil Wayne, then I gotta study his music man and bring that in the
> classroom so I can teach using what they love.

These types of pedagogical approaches represent a significant shift away from
traditional and deficit-oriented theoretical and conceptual frameworks, to more
egalitarian, asset-based, and student-focused philosophies on teaching, particularly
with youth of color in urban schools.

Hip Hop and Character Development

Popularized images of men in Hip Hop as thugs, pimps, and ballers, and
characterizations of women in Hip Hop as hoes, and bitches, diminishes its potential
power as a cultural movement and does not represent a commitment to its
development. KRS-One argues that,

> The state of Hip Hop is that Hip Hop is being negatively exploited by the
> recording industries of America who manipulate its public image to sell the fantasy
> of pimpin', thuggin', hoein', flashin', flossin', and ballin', to predominantly young
> White rap fans that are impressed by such behaviors. (KRS-ONE, 2003, pg.176)

If these are the prevailing images of Hip Hop, then the assertion that Hip Hop should be banned from public school classrooms might be valid. However, based on data found in this study, I assert that a deeper analysis may uncover wonderful opportunities to promote positive self-images among urban youth through the use of Hip Hop. Therefore, even within exploitive forms of Hip Hop, there are opportunities for positive learning. So, how might teachers redirect those popularized commercial images and discourses into positive outcomes? How might teachers reframe the art form so that it becomes useful in public schools and helps them to create better lives for themselves, their children and students, and their communities?

Participants recognized the powerful influence that the messages within Hip Hop can have on young people's beliefs and behaviors. For example, Gill reflected on the impact that some of Snoop's lyrics, which characterize women as "bitches" and "hoes," had on his own perceptions and behaviors as an adolescent. He reflected,

> I remember thinking if Snoop don't love em, why should I and what's funny-
> the women responded. I would see the guys who acted like Snoop [treated
> women poorly] and they had success with the women. They were the most
> popular and had all the chicks and they acted just like what they had heard on
> the albums and it worked. And whatever home training I had, only let me be
> influenced up to a certain point. Even if I wanted to be more influenced by
> my home training, I saw those who were 100% influenced by the music have
> had a lot of success with girls. So it would mess with my brain. I knew right
> from wrong, but I am seeing what's wrong being perceived as what's right.

Given the power of Hip Hop music, Gill, like all of the participants, also recognized the importance of "home training" and the role and responsibility of adults to deconstruct negative messages with young people. Therefore, while Hip Hop music is criticized as overly violent, homophobic, sexual, and materialistic, participants used negative images portrayed in Hip Hop to teach students about personal character. For example, Keyote reflected on how Common, a popular Hip Hop artist, transformed his ideas regarding homosexuality—an analysis that he used to help students examine their own beliefs. Keyote stated,

> Common said, 'I remember back in the day when we were little kids we used to go to the club and we used to come outside and mess with girls - then go to this club and bang fags.' He [Common] kept it in that context right then cause that's where he was. But now I can see how Common has grown up, cause 4-5 albums later, he addresses homophobia and that his boy revealed to him that he was gay and he sat there and said, hey you know, I still love you and then he had to come to terms with it on the inside. So to see him grow up from trying to bang hoes and fags to trying to come to terms with being a man. But to see him in some sorta progress and maturity is a great thing and he reveals that in his songs.

Many of my participants stated that they used such examples in Hip Hop to discuss with their students, from both the male and female perspectives, how young men and women treat themselves and each other, as well as to analyze how sexually explicit, homophobic, and misogynist lyrics impact their self image, esteem, beliefs and actions. For example, Berhane stated the he used the lyrics from Queen Latifah's

song *U.N.I.T.Y.,* where she says*,* "Love a Black woman from infinity to infinity (You ain't a bitch or a ho...You gotta let him know)," to introduce and facilitate critical discussions about sexism, misogyny, and racism in urban classrooms*.*

Participants also directly challenged students to imagine sexually and racially explicit songs as directed at the women in their families (e.g. mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers) and to interrogate their feelings about that. Furthermore, they articulated that a rationale could then be developed that if the sentiments in sexually explicit and racially charged lyrics are inappropriate for their female loved-ones, then they are also inappropriate for females in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Further, by unpacking and interrogating the social and ecological conditions that promote criminal behavior within urban communities, my participants also said that they impressed upon their students the need to overcome these challenges and to create economic opportunity.

My participants, analyzing both positive and negative images portrayed in Hip Hop music and videos, connected with their students in ways that teachers who rely solely on traditional curriculum and teaching strategies have historically failed. Further, they expressed a deep commitment to teaching African American male students, a passion for Hip Hop, and a vested interested in the positive development of both their students and their communities. It is through Hip Hop that my participants are have engaged in the character, social, educational and spiritual development of their students.

Hip Hop Culture and Understanding African American Males

Hip Hop culture, like all cultures, is multidimensional and has produced some expressions that are not positive, as described above. The present state of Hip Hop, perpetuated by the media, forces us to seriously interrogate its purpose and function. We have been bombarded with images within Hip Hop culture where men are perpetuated as pimps and ballers and women are treated as woes and prostitutes-both with highly sexualized bodies and clad in diamonds and platinum jewelry and designer clothes. The portrayal of women as sexual conquests with wardrobes limited to bathing suits and underwear, and men as drug dealers, pimps, gangsters who do not need or care about women, are more accessible to urban youth than images of men and women of color as serious intellectual, spiritual, and political partners and leaders within our society. Moreover, the media and record companies perpetuate negative portrayals of Hip Hop and exploit the culture at the expense of the morality and self-esteem of urban youth (KRS-ONE, 2003). This portrayal of Hip Hop is often in contradiction to measures of success and well-being that my participants have articulated throughout this study. Therefore, I sought a deeper understanding of how my participants, who utilize Hip Hop as a pedagogical tool and transformative educational framework, reconciled their hopes and expectations for African American male students and the messages perpetuated in Hip Hop today.

Most of my participants viewed African American students in ways similar to how they viewed Hip Hop culture: as multidimensional and embodying a broad spectrum of both good and bad characteristics. Just as they embraced Hip Hop as a collective culture despite its dimensions with which they disagreed, they saw promise in all African American students even when they made destructive decisions. Like a

parent, their love and respect for and the promise they saw in both Hip Hop and individual African American students was unconditional. According to Ashuru, rejecting a young person because of their troubles (e.g. poor school performance, bad attitude about school, suspensions or expulsions) is "like throwing the baby out with the bath water." By this he meant that every young person has gifts, talents, and the potential to do well and as a teacher it is his responsibility to meet students where they are developmentally and to provide them with support and encouragement.

Regarding the ways that Hip Hop is viewed by and presented to the world, participants articulated a need for balance. Yode stated,

> How do I bring a balance contextually to this whole thing, to Hip Hop. Most aspiring rappers are not household names and these cats are monumentally talented. But they aren't household names because they aren't corporately backed so it's about exposing them [his students] to something different.

This lack of balance refers to a lack of representation of the "positive" music and artists and the over-exposure to the "negative" portrayals of Hip Hop. Gill pointed out that such seemingly contradictory dimensions also exist within individuals, including Hip Hop artists themselves. For example, Tupac's has articulated insightful and progressive critiques about the plight of marginalized people and communities. However, he has also demonstrated sexism, violence, and arrogance. Although this may appear contradictory, in reality, both positive and negative qualities make up the whole of Tupac's character, as is true of all human beings.

In the same way, my participants viewed African American boys as dynamic and multidimensional people with often times conflicting beliefs, perceptions, and

personality traits. For example, students who are gifted artists, astute mathematicians and scientists, or talented writers, can also struggle with anger management, suffer from low esteem, and be poor test takers. Asheru, who teaches at a private alternative special education school for youth who have been expelled from the district's public school stated,

> Man, my kids can be hard to deal with- no doubt. Sometimes they even curse me out. But if you had to go home to hell everyday and your mother spent all the food and rent money on drugs, you would be in a bad mood too. But man these kids are smart too. They are creative, they are resourceful and they know how to survive.

However, popular images of African American boys and young men, as well as Hip Hop culture, tend to be negative and dehumanizing, reflected the imbalance about which Yode spoke. The masses are bombarded with statistics regarding African American males as a criminalized, degenerate population without understanding the conditions under which they live or the fact that many African American males do succeed in school and positively contribute to society.

Some of my participants argued for a more balanced approach to the ways that both Hip Hop and African American male students are viewed. They urged teachers who seek to use Hip Hop to foster student success to create "teachable moments" and to draw from both politically conscious as well as, what Asheru called, "non-conscious" Hip Hop. In fact, Victorious aptly argued that all Hip Hop is conscious as it reflects the authentic experiences of the people. He said,

Hip Hop is a mirror of the hopes and dream of the people. So in the 80's we

was fighting apartheid in Africa and police brutality in America- so Hip Hop

reflected that. Now people are tired of being poor and they wanna make

money, so Hip Hop reflects that.

He stated that rather than rejecting the popular messages in Hip Hop, which are

commonly situated around making money, or as KRS-One (2003) calls it, the "Bling

Bling era," (Bling Bling representing the literal sparkle of jewelry as shows of

material wealth), it is important to interrogate the social conditions that create and

perpetuate poverty and the excessive need for money and material possessions.

Further, many of my participants pointed out that sexism, violence, drugs,

hyper-sexualization, and materialism were not invented by and are by no means

exclusive to Hip Hop culture. They are aspects of American culture and can be found

in all forms of media. Rappers and African American men in general, like everyone,

receive messages from the broader society about what counts. According to KRS-

One,

Even though there are some 'rap fans' that do engage in criminal activity, our

culture is no more criminal than any other culture of our size and influence.

Our artistic performances are simply artistic performances. We are no more

criminal that Al Pacina, Robert DeNiro, Marlon Brando, and/or the characters

on the HBO series *The Sopranos* when they are performing their acts of

fantasy (pg. 180).

Participants felt that it was important for teachers to understand and validate

Hip Hop as a culture that is representative of the condition of the people it represents.

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Therefore, when teachers acknowledge and validate (and in the best case scenario, appreciate) all forms of Hip Hop, they are better equipped to gain students' trust and respect because they will have a deeper understanding of how students live, their fears and concerns, and their dreams and aspirations. This approach, rooted in mutual respect and appreciation, is an effective way to link the positive and negative representations of the Hip Hop culture and ultimately cultivate positive teacher/student relationships, which is a significant factor influencing student success in school. As Victorious asserted,

> So I can't just say to my students, 'you shouldn't listen to LiL Wayne or
> Soulja boy, he's wack, don't listen to him', because it's like somebody coming
> up to me and saying, 'Common is wack, why are you listening to him. His
> beats are wack, he's not saying anything.' As a fan of Common, I would
> reject that because I know deep down in my heart that that's not true, he's off
> the hook. That's the same thing with somebody who loves Lil' Wayne, like,
> listen to him, listen to the way he flows, listen to his beat, they are in love with
> him. I can't just reject Lil Wayne because my students would reject me.

Most of my participants asserted, due to their level of involvement in Hip Hop, that they were well positioned to recognize the ways that urban youth communicate through music and cultural expressions and that they seek to address the causes of what most deem as "the negative" aspects of Hip Hop rather than reject the ways that student react to their social conditions. Keyote argued, "Now, when they see me they say yea, he's Hip Hop, he's old school, they know that I am Hip Hop,

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they realize that there is another alternative to that-to the Hip Hop that they listen to."

Gill substantiated this argument by stating,

> Hip Hop is what you make it. It is a culture. It is based in conflict resolution. So just to mention the conflict alone is not enough. You've got to push for more, you've got to ask for more, you have to demand more of yourself, as I do.

> Thus, my participants presented Hip Hop as a promising culture with a broad spectrum of ideals and expression that represents the social conditioning of the people it represents at a particular time, rather than a culture solely rooted in crime, misogyny, and drug abuse. Participants applied this perspective to the ways in which they approached their students, particularly African American boys, as learners. They asserted that it is a teacher's responsibility to help mold their students in positive ways, which requires accepting both their areas of strength and weakness, recognizing their struggles and providing them with the tools to be academically and personally successful. This, they believed, requires a deeper understand of pressures of being an African American male in the U.S. As Victorious asserted,

> So it's not to say, you're wrong, that's a dumb decision, that's not good, why did you do that. But its understanding why they made certain decisions. Its understanding what made you do that. It's the same thing with Hip Hop and finding that niche, because it's in there, it's in every human being. It's in every human being to be good. It's in every human being to be positive and to be peaceful. You have to find that niche. Find it. Expose it. And once you

expose it, you got to make them live up to it. And that applies my students and Hip Hop.

This is not to make excuses for any poor decisions made by African American male students, but to understand the context that give rise to poor decisions.

Participants pointed out the positive aspects of Hip Hop that can benefit young people. For example, Yode celebrated the "hustle mentality" within Hip Hop culture which reflects productivity and a strong work ethic. He said taught his students that there is nothing inherently wrong with being a hustler as long as one works to create long-term success. According to KRS-One (2003), "True Hip Hop empowers young people to live an alternative reality-one where they are important and accepted, one where they are productive. Where they are appreciated, not rejected, for their uniqueness" (pgs. 180-181). Most of my participants value these characteristics and help young people to translate their desires into something unique, positive, and productive. For example, Chuck introduced his students, many of whom aspire to be rappers, to songwriting and producing which can provide them with ways to make money without necessarily being in the spotlight. Further, Chuck asserted,

They [young people] want to be materialistic and respected, but they do and say disrespectful stuff to get that recognition. I teach them to put their energy into a songwriting realm or production and learn the values of working hard and practice which is something not communicated to the kids.

Chuck further argued that there are many opportunities in Hip Hop that do not involve vulgarity or disrespecting women. Furthermore, there is always a niche within Hip Hop that has yet to be discovered so he encourages students to be hustlers

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if that is what they choose, but to be the type of hustler that makes money while holding a respectful position and positively influencing others.

Ferguson (2001) points out that in public schools African American boys are characterized as either dangerous or endangered. Hip Hop culture is largely characterized in the same ways due to negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media. However, my participants' shared beliefs about the potential and promise of Hip Hop culture and their African American male students provides greater insight into the ways they engaged both communities. In fact, my participants stated that Hip Hop provided them deeper insight into their students' lives, and likewise, their interactions with their students helped them to better understand Hip Hop culture. As such, this reciprocal relationship has help my participants to make personal connections with and better serve their students, particularly African American males.

Hip Hop and Hope for the Future

The above section examines Hip Hop culture and African American boys and young men as both dynamic and multi-dimensional and, thus, they should be represented in more complex, authentic, and balanced ways. Likewise, participants viewed their hopes for African American male students and for the future of Hip Hop as inextricably linked.

All of my participants articulated a desire for their students, particularly African American males, to take more responsibility for their academic lives, to have a better understanding of the effort it takes to do well academically, and to have a thirst for knowledge. Gill argued that, "once you [students] understand the importance of being a student and how it would benefit you, then school is not

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'school.' It is not that hard thing anymore." Gill's believed that much of students'
disinterest in school stems from beliefs that it is too academically challenging and
lacks relevancy to their lives. Therefore, as a teacher, he works to provide students
with academic skills like test taking and study strategies, which he asserted are more
valuable than content knowledge, to improve their grades and self-esteem as learners.
Participants also argued that through formal education youth can gain more
independence and be in a position to make better choices. For example, Mustafa
stated,

> I want my kids to have the option to live whatever life they chose. A lot of
> them are tracked in school to do manual labor—and don't get me wrong, that
> is fine if that is what they want to do. But for me, I want my kids to able to
> make choices instead of being told what they are going to do.

Participants wanted their students to be able to make sound personal and
academic decisions and to have as many personal and professional options as possible
in both their personal and academic lives. Chuck, expressing his desire to provide
students with the knowledge they need to realize their dreams, stated,

> '…10 yrs from now, when you [the student] are making 12 dollars and hour
> and this man over here, is making 78,000 a year, you're gonna be bitter, and
> it's cause you not making good decisions.' I feel like we [teachers] don't tell
> them that, that we haven't interpreted that correctly for them. They feel like,
> 'Ok I graduated and I'm going to college but, oh, I didn't even take the SAT.'
> Berhane stated,

They [students] don't have many positive male influences. If they come in my

room they are gonna get it from me, but its only 50 minutes a day for 5 days a

week. Its like only being able to breath for 50 minutes a day. The rest of the

day you got to hold your breath.

Likewise, Yode said, "I want them to know that the sky is the limit and I am always

there hoping and cheering for them. I am really, really pushing for them." Berhane

and Yode hoped that their presence as teachers would provide students with enough

love, support, and encouragement to sustain them in their absence. They, like other

participants, expressed a deep commitment to ensuring that their African American

male students matured into responsible men and developed a greater love and

adoration for themselves and each other and they viewed Hip Hop as a valuable tool

in that endeavor.

Some participants described Hip Hop as a form of music therapy that would

give disenfranchised students hope, belief in their talents and self worth as human

beings and the ability to live positive and productive lives. In particular, Asheru

shared a story about a troubled 17-year African American male student who had been

suspended from school and arrested a number of times. This student displayed

aggression towards Asheru by storming out of class, cursing at him, and threatening

physical violence. Asheru attributed the students' anger to challenges in his personal

life and decided not to take it personally but to be a consistent and positive example

in his life, using Hip Hop as a tool. Asheru, who is a musician and director of the

school's jazz band, decided to teach classical instrumentation (saxophone, piano,

trumpet, bass, guitar and drums) through Hip Hop. He found that the process of

learning to play the instruments through Hip Hop helped him to connect more deeply

with his students and they, particularly the student mentioned above, developed a

greater interest in learning how to read music and play classical instruments.

According to Asheru,

> I don't just teach music, this is music therapy. And what other teachers fail to
>
> realize is that my class helps set the tone for the rest of their day. My class
>
> helps calm them [the students], then they can forget about what's gone on at
>
> home. If it wasn't for the music class man, this school would be chaotic.

Participants articulated similar hopes for the future of Hip Hop, which they

loved so dearly. Many asserted that Hip Hop is now fueled more by money and

materialism and less by the original tenets of Hip Hop articulated earlier in the

chapter. In turn, urban youth are being inundated with music that does not accurately

represent the whole of Hip Hop culture. My participants, who too engaged in popular

Hip Hop as well as aspects of the cultural that are more apparently rooted in political,

social, and educational activism, rejected the unbalanced use and presentation of Hip

Hop. As Keyote stated,

> I think that some people have taken liberties with the word Hip Hop-with the
>
> use of Hip Hop and with the use of rap and the use of our images, bodies,
>
> minds, spirits, and creativity and use that to exploit us to make money at the
>
> expensive of our culture and at the expense of our collective agenda.

Most participants asserted that even though Hip Hop has a clearly articulated agenda

that speaks to the joys and hardships of their communities, it should work harder to

foreground positive solutions to the problems people face. Therefore, the agenda of

Hip Hop should not only be to give a voice to the voiceless, disenfranchised, and ignored, but to also continue to create opportunities and to build sustainable social educational and political infrastructures for marginalized communities. Solo articulated his role in this process by stating,

> I hope to create a significant sustainable organization that is geared toward mitigating or eradication some social issue and hopefully we will see some progress with a lot of social issues that exist. I would love to be put out of business and not have to do that stuff but I want to ten years to still be very much involved in whatever community I am a part of.

> Solo, in particular, called for a "new day" in Hip Hop, saying that if all the rappers that have been playing on the radio were to say, "We aren't doing this anymore, we are going to talk about something more positive," it would bring about immediate change. He asserted that youth listen to what they think is cool, so if coolness within Hip Hop culture was situated around positivity, critical consciousness, and mutual respect, then those principles would dictate the way that urban youth interact with one another and engage in their school, their communities, and society at large.

> For most of my participants, Hip Hop represented the ambition of their generation to strive towards economic, social, education and personal success. Speaking of educational opportunities afforded by Hip Hop, Chuck said,

> I think of Jimmy Baldwin or Richard Wright and they wrote great books and I don't know if they knew they were great at that time but I think they knew

what they were doing was meaningful. This Hip Hop and education thing has

the potential to bring the streets to the masses in a positive and powerful way.

Asheru envisioned even larger goals for Hip Hop. He articulated a desire to

see Hip Hop recognized by the Unites Nations as a legitimate and valued global

culture. He wanted to see Hip Hop evolve into its own political party that could

represent the voices of marginalized groups. His vision was grounded in the larger

goal of situating Hip Hop as a more balanced culture. By this, he meant that like

human beings, Hip Hop has both positive and negative aspects and an

overrepresentation of those things that are negative paints an uneven picture. Asheru

called for music and cultural expressions that represent multiple facets of Hip Hop

such as entertainment, entrepreneurship, spiritual growth, community development,

and leadership.   Likewise, Victorious asserted that,

> If hip-hop just became conscious, and I am not saying conscious as 'Black
>
> Power and Fight the Power,' that is not necessarily what I am saying. But to
>
> be aware of the circumstances, be aware of the community, be aware of what
>
> you are doing to children, then I think that once you are aware, you make
>
> wiser decisions when you go into the studio. Read a book, you will be a little
>
> bit wiser.

My participants characterized Hip Hop as having powerful potential for

positively influencing how young people engage in political, social, economic and

educational aspects of the global society. As such, to realize their "hope for the

future" of Hip Hop and for their African American male students, they strove to

alleviate of social and economic conditions facing marginalized groups by improving

education, creating legal job opportunities, and providing safe and entertaining spaces for young people to mature.

Hip Hop and Teaching Motivation

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, African American male teachers are extremely scarce K-12 public schools, particularly in the early grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005-2006) and many African American boys' experiences with, usually older white female, teachers and traditional curriculum written from Eurocentric perspectives have often been troubled (Dahouse, 2006; Downey, 2004). These boys' problems with school are often evident in the early elementary grades and contribute to soaring drop-out, suspension, and expulsion rates (Brown, 2007; Noguera, 2003b; Patton, 1998). Researchers suggests that African American male teachers can serve as buffers from these harsh realities, as they see their own lives are inherently connected to the African American boys they teach and tend to be stern advocates for their male students (Lynn, 2002a). Therefore this pressing question remains; Why are there so few African American male teachers in urban public schools?

Many of my participants, and countless other African American male teachers, have had negative experiences within public schools and feel a sense of relief in escaping urban schools that treated them poorly (Lewis, 2006). They, like their contemporary counter-parts, have been disproportionately excluded from and rejected by school in many ways (Brown, 2007). These experiences have likely left an indelible mark on the minds and hearts of these men. In the song *They School,*

Dead Prez articulates the frustrations that many men from this generation feel about the schooling process,

> School is like a 12 step brainwash camp. They make you think if you drop out you ain't got a chance…When they beat us in the head with them books, it don't reach us…You either get paid or locked up, the principal is like a warden in a four year sentence, mad niggas never finish.

Despite the fact that school can be a hostile environment for African American boys and adolescents, all participants in this study returned to K-12 classrooms as teachers, a decision they connect to the potential power and influence of Hip Hop to promote peace, unity, love, and having fun (KRS-One, 2006). Explaining his motivations to be come to a teacher, Yode said,

> I knew that I wanted to do something in teaching-I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do-I just knew somehow I wanted to at least address the fact of how students were treated. The reason why I wanted to teach students of color, or to teach students like this or to teach here is because-when I graduated from college, the main thing I wanted to do was that I wanted to bring this back to the hood-you know-bring this back to the neighborhood cause out of all my friends, I was only one who got this information. I don't even know why it was such a big deal for me but I wanted to come back to DC and bring some of this knowledge.

Findings suggests that African American male teachers, particularly those from the Hip Hop generation, who serve as advocates for their students, are committed to help mitigate some of the harsh realities that youth of color face in

urban schools. All of my participants recognized the power of Hip Hop, in concert with other factors like their ties to local communities, to capture the minds of urban youth have used this, both directly and indirectly, as a means to teach their students. The commitment to and identification with urban youth appears to foster, among African American male teachers, a willingness to utilize innovative and ground-breaking pedagogical practices to level the educational playing field. Examples of this, as highlighted in this study, can be drawn directly from Hip Hop lyrics as well as from scholars who have written extensively on this subject.

According to researchers, African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation generally believe that the function of Hip Hop culture as a representative voice of urban youth, and the purpose of education as the venue through which to cultivate the hearts and minds of young people, are inherently connected (Kitwana, 2002). Thus, they seek to engender a sense of agency, transformation and critical consciousness among those who are most in need (Bynoe, 2004; Hill-Collins, 2006; Rose, 1994; Stovall, 2006b; Taylor & Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, they have accepted the responsibility of ensuring that another generation of urban youth will not be relegated to the "back doors" of education or endure the educational, racial, social, and political injustices that have long been historically perpetuated against African American children in public schools (Kitwana, 2002; KRS-One, 2003). Given this, in combination with the findings of the present study, it is not unreasonable to speculate that African American male teachers, particularly those from the Hip Hop generation, may be particularly committed to embodying and putting into practice the types of pedagogical orientations foster success among, particularly, African American male

students. Therefore, my participants embrace Hip Hop as pedagogical tool, to validate their personal experiences and ameliorate the pain and humiliation that they and their African American male students have experienced in the past (Hanley, 2007; KRS-One, 2003; Lynn, 2002; Stovall, 2006b). This presents wonderful opportunities for school systems, colleges of education, and alternative certification programs to reconnect with African American men who, like many of their younger counterparts, have rejected school.

My participants made personal connections with the original tenets of Hip Hop culture (Peace, Love, Unity and Having Fun) in explaining their commitments and motivations to teach in urban schools, their use of innovative pedagogies when teaching youth of color, and the ways that they understand and relate to both Hip Hop and their African American male students. These tenets ground their humanizing teaching orientations and serve as a framework for how they engage Hip Hop and promote the academic and social well-being of African American male students. As such, they shared similar hopes for both Hip Hop and their students- that is to spread peace, to express love, to promote unity, and to make learning fun.

Chapter 8: CONCLUSION

Conclusion and Implications

In this dissertation study, I drew upon both Life History and Critical Race Methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of how nine African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation understood their political, cultural, social and educational experiences and beliefs, as individuals and as educators. I sought to learn how their beliefs and perceptions about teaching and learning were connected to their individual life histories and experiences with Hip Hop, as well as how their understandings inform their beliefs about and approaches to the academic and social growth, and development of African American youth, particularly boys. Life History Methodology required that I examine the ways that my participants narrated their own lives. Throughout the study I sought to both gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences as situated within their historical, social, political, and educational contexts.

I also drew upon Critical Race Methodology (CRM), using thick description, in-dept interviews and analysis that centered the experiences of people of color to document and illuminate the pervasiveness of race and racism in U.S. society, to challenge traditional research paradigms, and to counter deficit-oriented research on African American males (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Further, through the use of counter-narratives – the telling and documenting of the stories of people from marginalized groups – I used CRM to uncover vital information about how students and teachers of color respond to their experiences with the public educational system.

As depicted in this study, my participants' coming of age experiences with Hip Hop culture had significant implications for shaping their beliefs about and commitments to ensuring the social, academic, and personal well-being of their African American male students. For almost all of my participants, early life history experiences during what KRS-One (2003) calls " the golden age of Hip Hop," significantly influenced their level of interest in and commitment to urban schools and communities. This was a time when Hip Hop music and cultural expressions reflected, in large part, resistance to and critique of the socio-political issues facing disenfranchised people at that time, such as apartheid in South Africa, police brutality, the proliferation of crack-cocaine, HIV/AIDS infection, racial profiling, gang violence, and extreme poverty.

Participants expressed particular interest in foregrounding the plight of African American males in the U.S. The belief that the intransigence of racism and negative stereotyping contributes to mainstream society's fear African American men, was also consistent across all participants'. They further contended that high homicide and suicide rates, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, and inadequate education, contributes significantly to "endangerment" of African American boys and men within the U.S. context. Despite this, however, participants characterized their African American male students as having boundless promise and potential for productive lives. Their belief in African American boys as extremely talented and possessing often untapped gifts is in stark contradiction to popular perceptions of these boys as uneducated, violent, and hyper-sexed criminals. As such, my participants can be seen as well positioned to reject those stereotypes and to

uncover the potential of African American male students by providing them with the skills and tools they to succeed academically.

All of my participants identified being a role model to African American boys as an important aspect of fulfilling what they saw as their personal responsibility as men and this significantly influenced their decisions to become educators. They expressed hope that their students saw them as the positive examples of African American manhood that they strove to be. Some articulated their motivation to teach as grounded by a desire to "save" African American boys from the social conditions that contribute to their endangerment. They asserted that their brand of caring, which I describe as "other fathering" and is governed by their belief that their lives are reflected in their students, is representative of a deep emotional and spiritual connection to African American boys.

Participants' views on personal and professional success were centered-around educating the "whole student." They expressed a desire to teach students to be academically astute and to be aware of the implications of their personal and educational decisions. Likewise, they wanted their students to be resilient so that they could defend themselves against negative external influences that might hinder their academic growth (i.e. drugs, crime, and violence) and they spoke consistently about encouraging students to resist any form of oppression they might experience from peers, teachers and/or school administrators.

Their beliefs about teaching and learning, though in some ways inclusive of traditional curricular standards and models of instruction, can be seen as a "reinvention" or new ways of thinking about how and what students should learn and

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how teachers should approach and understand students in order to ensure their academic success. All of my participants positioned Hip Hop culture as valuable means for recapturing the attention of youth of color in public schools. Borrowing from the tenets of Hip Hop, which are peace, love unity and having fun, in general, they sought to engage students in curriculum that was enjoyable and relevant to their daily lives. Furthermore, their pedagogies, through the use of Hip Hop music, focused largely on character development, community activism, and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities, rather than solely on traditional curriculum that foregrounds content knowledge and test taking strategies as most important. My participants articulated that their transformative pedagogies were motivated by a mutual love of Hip Hop culture and their African American male students, both of which have been represented in negatively imbalanced ways in mainstream U.S. society.

Participants' believed in the inherent connection between Hip Hop culture and African American male students and were engaged both in respectful and humanizing ways. They understood both the negative dimensions of Hip Hop and African American boys and men as reflecting the dire social conditions facing disenfranchised groups in the U.S. rather than merely as individual expressions of antisocial or "bad" behavior. All of this speaks to the perspectives and pedagogical orientations that participants brought to their classrooms, which reflected the principles of CRT.

As educators and activists, participants critiqued global racism, particularly against people of color, rejected the notion that the legal system and law enforcement agencies are colorblind entities, and fore grounded the knowledge, skills, and

resources found within urban spaces. Additionally, in their emphasis on the philosophies and histories of marginalized groups and their critique of multiple forms of oppression, they merged tenets of both Hip Hop culture and CRT, in hopes of pioneering a neo socio-political movement similar to what President Barack Obama has done. Several participants asserted that President Obama has engaged urban youth and Hip Hop in ways unmatched by any former president. Furthermore, much of his success is a result of the support and financial contributions of youth of all races who, for the first time, felt that their voices and perspective were being heard. For my participants, embracing Hip Hop as a cultural orientation and pedagogical tool has that same potential to encourage youth to be engaged in and excited about their academic success in ways that past political efforts, social movements, and educational reforms have not.

CRT can be used as a lens through which to situate Hip Hop as a critical cultural movement committed to improving the lives of those who live in urban America. Hip Hop's social critiques follow the tradition of the Civil Rights Movement, which sought to discredit claims of colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality on the part of the legal system and other social institutions. Furthermore, Hip Hop continues to interrogate claims of race neutrality and to illuminate socio-racial injustices within U.S. society (Alridge, 2003; Bynoe, 2004; Chang & Kerc, 2005; Decker, 1993).

CRT scholars challenge ahistoricism and advocate for acknowledging the perspectives of people and communities that have been historically marginalized (Marvin Lynn *et al.*, 2002; Matsuda, 1991; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Smith-Maddox &

Solorzano, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). They uphold that those who have been discriminated against and treated poorly speak from unique perspectives that shed light on the systemic nature of oppression that is often ignored by the dominant group. They challenge educators to create spaces and to transform curriculum to allow students' personal narratives and voices to be heard. Boogie Down Productions, Goodie Mob, as well as other Hip Hop artists espouse similar ideas and perspectives and strive to elevate the experiences, knowledge, and voices of people of color. Boogie Down Production's lyrics reflect CRT's "counter-narratives," as they foreground the accomplishments of African American people. Likewise, Goodie Mob highlights the intransigence of racism and classism within U.S. society.

Like Hip Hop music, my participants provided important critiques of and responses to racialized oppression as both the benefactors of the Civil Right Movement and victims of racist social policies that eroded the gains of that movement. They exhibited a commitment to creating positive change in urban communities while transforming urban schools in ways that nurture the intellectual and social development of African American youth in urban areas. They work to create spaces in which urban youth of color can discover authentic truths about themselves and their communities and create narratives about themselves that counter popular hegemonic beliefs—all of which are consistent with the tenets of CRT.

In the tradition of CRT, the participants in this study used Hip Hop to engender, among students, a critical awareness of the hegemonic powers that promote violence, sexism, and poverty in urban spaces. Furthermore, findings suggest that my participants recognized the power of Hip Hop, in concert with other factors like their

ties to local communities, to capture the minds of urban youth have used this, both directly and indirectly, as a means to teach their students. Therefore, this study suggests a humanizing pedagogical approach that can ameliorate the pain and humiliation that African American male students have experienced in the past (Hanley, 2007; KRS-One, 2003; Lynn, 2002; Stovall, 2006b). This provides insight for school systems, colleges of education, and alternative certification programs into ways to reconnect with African American men who, like many of their younger counterparts, have rejected school and to draw them into the field of education and the teaching profession.

Lewis' (2006) research on African American male teachers supports findings from this study, detailing specific strategies that may alleviate this "educational predicament," (pg. 229) -their scarcity in the teaching workforce. Lewis urges teacher education programs and K-12 school systems to explore resources and collaborate with community organizations to gain access to prospective African American male teachers (e.g. historically Black service fraternities, NAACP, and the like). Providing faculty mentors to African American male teachers, who share similar beliefs about the needs of students of color as well as academic support for standardized examination and entrance requirements, may also broaden the pool of likely African American male teachers while offering them the resources and support to remain in the profession. Exploring alternative routes to certification as well as increasing collaborative efforts with community colleges can give teacher education programs and K-12 schools access to African American men who may have been overlooked and those who ruled out teaching as a professional option (Lewis, 2006).

These approaches are aligned with the goals of Hip Hop--which are to promote community involvement and activism, to teach and mentor urban youth, to provide outlets for people of color to legitimize their perspectives, and to provide opportunities for community members to be upwardly mobile. Therefore in keeping with Lewis' argument, efforts to find, recruit, and retain African American male teachers in spaces where they feel most empowered (e.g. Hip Hop summits, community centers, youth outreach programs, culture centered symposiums/conferences, and recreational facilities) are important strategies to addressing the disproportionately low numbers of African American male teachers U.S. K-12 public schools.

Furthermore, a vigorous analysis of the educational and cultural experiences of African American male teachers, particularly from the Hip Hop generation, will inform our collective thinking about who can and should teach and heighten our awareness of the influences of prior schooling experiences on the motivations and pedagogical beliefs of this population of educators. This analysis could shed light on the relationship between their experiences with Hip Hop and their personal and professional commitments to securing the academic and social well being of African American male students (Lynn, 2002, Morrell, 2002, Stovall, 2006). A working relationship between the Hip Hop community, African American males from the Hip Hop generation, and formal public educational systems would attract African American male teachers who are passionately committed to teaching and nurturing youth of color, particularly African American boys.

Carter G. Woodson (1933) argued that educators must develop a new system of public education that will meet the academic, social, and personal needs of African American children. He asserts,

> They [African American teachers] should direct their attention also to the folklore of the African, to the philosophy in his proverbs, to the development of the Negro in the use of modern language, and to the works of Negro writers… Instead of cramming the Negro's mind with what others have shown that they can do, we should develop his latent powers that he may perform in society a part of which others are not capable (p. 150).

This study and others suggest that educational equity and excellence can be realized in urban public schools through a more progressive educational agenda that addresses the concerns and needs of, particularly, low-income communities of color. Educators can draw upon the original socio-political goals and ideals of Hip Hop to foster a new educational program that awakens a sense of critical consciousness, agency, transformation, and educational empowerment, especially among African American male students. This new educational program can grow as greater numbers of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation enter the teaching workforce, providing African American students with learning environments that interrogate the racism, sexism, and elitism that is endemic to American society.

Hip Hop is now a global classroom and students are enrolling at exciting rates (Bynoe, 2004; Chang & Kerc, 2005; Decker, 1993; Kitwana, 2002; KRS-One, 2003; Rice, 2003; Rose, 1994; Stovall, 2006b; Taylor & Taylor, 2004). As the voice of urban youth of color and many African American men who teach urban youth, Hip Hop is an important component of this new educational program. DJ Kool Herc, who is recognized as the father of Hip Hop,

says, "Even if you don't grow up in the Bronx in the 70's, Hip Hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip Hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together" (DJ Kool Herc in Chang, 2005, pg. xii).

Therefore, if the function of education is to cultivate students' talents, skills and knowledge while teaching them about themselves in relation to their local, national and global communities, then, as DJ Kool Herc says, Hip Hop is there is for YOU. Hip Hop has the power to develop, particularly among marginalized groups, an awareness of political, racial and social inequalities and the motivation to resist them. Such awareness help to reverse the mis-education (Woodson, 1933) that students of color have endured in urban schools and ultimately represent the beginnings of a new and more just, educational order.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

1. Community School Model

    The data from this study reveals that my participants are heavily invested in and connected to not only their students but also the surrounding communities from which they come. For K-12 schools to increase the presence of African American male teachers from the Hip Hop generation, they could draw from resources that are available in the schools' community. For example, they could collaborate and create partnerships with the local Boys and Girls Clubs, religious organizations (churches and mosques), park and recreational centers, youth and community centers, fitness facilities, and local barbershops. These are places where African American males often

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invest a lot of time and feel comfortable in being their authentic selves.   As such, a heightened school presence in these locations could diminished tensions and resentments that many African American men feel toward public school (due to their past negative encounters). Furthermore, by tapping into the ideals of "hope for the future," that my participants articulated as significantly influencing their decisions teachers, K-12 schools could potentially create opportunities for more African American men to see teaching as a professional option.

2. Same Sex Classrooms

My participants expressed a particular interest in securing the social and academic well being of African American male students. More specifically, they saw their lives reflected in their students and drew from their life experiences to help "save" them from vestiges of poverty that contribute to their endangerment. As such, K-12 schools could attract more African American male teachers by providing space for prospective male teachers to exercise their own "brand of caring," which many participants articulated as a significant aspect of their teaching styles.   Same sex classrooms, where African American men and boys can engage in both traditional curriculum and address some of the social and personal challenges they face, could increase both African male teacher presence and African American male student interest in K-12 schools.

3. Embrace Hip Hop Curriculum

All of my participants embrace the use of Hip Hop lyrics and traditions as tools to support conventional instruction across all disciplines. In fact, they asserted that their use of Hip Hop helped them to make personal connections with their students in ways that traditional curriculum standards did not allow for. Furthermore, the use of Hip Hop made teaching and learning fun, engaging, and relevant to the lives of both the teachers and students. Schools could benefit from the excitement and innovation around the use of Hip Hop curriculum to increase the presence of African American male teachers and improve the academic outcomes of African American male students.

4. Media and Digital Arts Classes

Many of the study's participants embraced media and digital arts. In fact, one participant worked as a fulltime digital artist prior to being recruited into teaching. Likewise, many African American male students are interested in media and digital arts, which allow them to make music, create videos, record raps, and digitize their graphic designs. Schools could not only recruit African American male students from the digital and media arts communities, but also increase both student and teacher interest in school by offering classes that reflect their artistic interests.

5. Music Classes

Most of the participants in this study were musicians and all but one were heavily engaged in the Hip Hop community as either rappers, music producers, song writers, vocalists, and/or instrumentalists. Likewise, many of their African American male students were either active or aspiring musicians.

Participants asserted that a shared love of and respect for music, particularly Hip Hop, as well as their level of involvement in Hip Hop culture, positively influenced how they taught and interacted with their students. Gill called it a "Hip Hop vibe" that he and his students shared. In the same way, my participants used music as therapy for his troubled students. Therefore, K-12 schools could benefit from increasing music classes in their schools as they may attract more African American men, like my participants, and engage more African American male students, many of who are engaged and interested in music production as an art form and profession.

6. Teacher/Pupil Mentorship

Most participants articulated a commitment to not only teach, but also mentor African American males. They saw themselves as "other fathers" to their male students who lacked positive examples of manhood. They found great reward in helping to shape their male students' into active productive citizens, responsible students, and positive leaders in their school and local communities, all of which they believed are fundamental characteristics of manhood. My participants actively sought opportunities to talk with their students about the realities they may face as Africa American males and relied heavily on those mentoring opportunities to maintain their interest in and motivations to teach. As such, K-12 school could attract and keep the interest of in-service and pre-service African American male teachers by providing them opportunities to mentor students. Furthermore, through group mentoring, African American male teachers could also facilitate peer mediation and

conflict resolution, which may decrease the soaring numbers of African American boys who are excluded from public schools due to suspension and expulsion.

7. Salary Increase

The present troubled economic climate coupled with poor teaching salaries were of particular concern for many of my participants. As husbands and fathers, some expressed anxiety about their financial security and were forced to find additional ways to support their families. They argued that money did not significantly influence their decisions to become teachers; however, a lack of financial security could contribute to their decisions to leave the profession. Therefore, K-12 schools and school districts, which compete with other more high-paying industries, would be better equipped to recruit and retain African American men if they found ways to increase teacher salaries or provided opportunities for teachers to subsidize their incomes.

8. Recruitment

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's), community colleges, and alternative certification programs could provide K-12 schools access to a number of African American males who may have otherwise overlooked teaching as a viable profession. Furthermore, Hip Hop summits, historically black fraternity conventions, and religious conferences attract large numbers of African American men who are formally educated and concerned with socio-economic challenges facing the urban communities.

Heightened recruitment efforts in these communities could yield an increased presence of African American teachers in K-12 classrooms.

Recommendation for Research

1. This study relied on the personal accounts of the participants who shared stories about their history, their commitment to Hip Hop culture, and their beliefs about and pedagogical practices related to African American boys. Classroom observations of teachers like these could provide a deeper analysis of the effectiveness of Hip Hop pedagogy and a more nuanced understanding of the personal and academic relationship that African American male teachers develop with their students to promote school success.

2. The small sample size in this study is representative of the small number of African American men from the Hip Hop generation who are classroom teachers. An increased number of participants could yield a more comprehensive account of the experiences of the population and deeper understandings of how they benefit K-12 students, particularly African American boys and young men. Additionally, an analysis of the personal experiences and academic records of the students themselves could shed further light on the effectiveness of teacher-participants pedagogical orientations, including those directly related to Hip Hop.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Screening Survey

1. Where you were born between 1965 and 1984?

2. How often do you listen to Hip Hop music?

3. What specific Hip Hop artist/ album to you listen you most frequently?

4. How significant is Hip Hop culture in influencing youth of color?

5. What % age of you students receive FARMS benefits?

6. Where were you raised? Provide demographic details? What are your parents

    occupations?

7. What role do you play in disseminating messages of hope and progression to

   urban youth through Hip Hop music?

8. Do you considered yourself to be a Hip Hoppa? Hip Hoppas are those who
   are

committed to and invested in reinserting the political and social movements back

into Hip Hop (KRS-ONE, 2003)

9. What is your level of involvement in Hip Hop?

10.   Do you use Hip Hop music/ culture your classroom?

Appendix B

Life History

Where were you raised? Describe the community (ies) where you grow up? What were the racial/class demographics of your community?
What were some of the challenges facing your community? (i.e. crack/ HIV/ welfare)
What impact, if any, did those challenges have on the people in your family/community?
What type of involvement did your parents/ guardians have with social movements of the past (i.e. civil rights movement, national movement)?
What was your level of exposure/experiences with those past movements?
What influence did your parent/guardian experiences have you on coming of age during the Hip Hop (Post Civil Rights/Black Panther) era?

Tell about your educational history: Why type of schools did you attend?
What type of student were you?
How did you perceive yourself as a student?
How did your peers perceive you as a student?
How did your teachers perceive you as student?
How would you describe your educational experience? Explain?
Did it change over time?
How did your teachers treat you in school?
Were there differences in that ways in which teachers of color treated you compared to white teachers?
Were there differences in the ways in which male teachers, particularly teachers of color, treated and female teachers?
Generally, what did your teachers believe about you academic potential?
Who was your favorite/most memorable teacher growing up? Explain why?
Were these educational experiences different for you as a black boy in public than they were for the black girls?
In what ways did your experiences growing up as student influence your beliefs about public education for students of color, particularly boys.
In what ways did your experiences growing up as a student influence your (1) desire to teach in an urban school, (2) your approaches to teaching black boys in classroom?
Which teacher, if any, do you model your pedagogical approaches after most closely? Explain why?
Is there a difference between schooling and education?
If so, where and where were you schooled and educated?

Reflections on Hip Hop Culture

What is your Hip Hop story? When did you fall in love with Hip Hop? Where were you? How old were you? Where did you live?

What song/artist, in particular, do you remember that impacted your identity as a black man?

How did your first encounters with Hip Hop make u feel about black manhood in the U.S.?

Describe your relationship with Hip Hop culture. What does it mean to you?

Detail your level of involvement/participation in Hip Hop culture.

What was the first Hip Hop album you purchased? Why did you buy that particular album?

What are your top 5 favorite Hip Hop albums/Artists? Explain why?

Does/should Hip Hop have an agenda? If so, what is it?

Is Hip Hop political? Should Hip Hop be political?

Is Hip Hop a cultural movement?

Should Hip Hop be a cultural movement?

Who do you listen to?

Who did you listen to"

Why do you listen to them?

How did these artists and this music influence your political, intellectual, social, and personal development?

How has Hip Hop changed/stayed the same since its early iteration?

What is your vision for Hip Hop's future?

Has your experiences with Hip Hop culture in any way, influenced your decisions to become an educator? Please explain.

Has your experiences with Hip Hop culture in any way, influenced your decisions to teach your particular demographic of students? Please explain.

How, if at all, has Hip Hop culture influenced your beliefs about students of color?

How, if at all, has Hip Hop culture influenced your beliefs about marginalized communities?

Has Hip Hop in anyway influenced your beliefs about the educational and social well-being of African American boys?

How, if at all, has Hip Hop, influenced your teaching philosophy?

What are some of the dominant messages in Hip Hop music of the past? Today?

School Practices

What grade(s)/ subject(s) do you teach?

Why did you choose to become an educator?

Describe your classroom environment. If I were to walk into your classroom today, what would I see? Hear? Smell? Feel?

How would you describe your work life? How important is your work, as a teacher, to your well being as a person?

What percentage of your students receive FARMS benefits?

Why did you choose to teach at this particular school in this particular district with this particular population of students?

How would you describe your kids? What are some of their general educational and social strengths? What are some the challenges they face?

What specific types of things do you do as a teacher, to help them further develop in areas where they excel? What specific types of things do you do to help scaffold students in areas where they struggle?

How would your students describe you as a teachers/ as a person?

How would your teacher colleagues describe you as a teacher/ as a person?

What role has Hip Hop/your experiences with Hip Hop played in your teaching approach/practices?

Is Hip Hop culture evident within your classroom culture? If so, in what ways?

What influence does Hip Hop culture have on your classroom practices?

In what ways do you borrow from Hip Hop to teach your students?

What type/form/genre of Hip Hop do you listen to?

What type/form/genre of Hip Hop do you borrow from when teaching students? Why?

How significant is this type of music in influencing youth of color?

Masculinity (Males working with other males)

What are the special challenges that black boys in your classroom bring to the schooling experience?

Do you think black boys have special needs? Please explain

How are black boys treated at your school?

What are some of the challenges facing black boys in public school? in the U.S. society?

What role do you play in addressing some of these challenges?

What are your thoughts about the treatment of black boys in schools?

What about your experiences as a black man, if any, have helped you to work with the boys in your classroom?

How has coming of age as a black man during the Hip Hop generation, helped you to work with the boys in your classroom?

What are your thoughts about black men as an "endangered species?"

What are your ideas about black masculinity?

What is an ideal black man?

Is Hip Hop is a male centered culture? How or how not?

What messages does Hip Hop portray about black manhood?

What are some of the challenges facing black male teachers?

What are the challenges facing black men in this society?

What was life like for you growing up as a Black male?

How are those experiences difference different from the black women in your life?

What differences do you see between black boys in your class and black girls in your class?

Do you approach them, boys and girls, differently pedagogically with Hip Hop?

What are you hopes for the black boys in your class?

Where do you want to see them, black boys, in the next 5-10 years

Success

What is the purpose of public education?
What role should education play in the lives of students of color?
What is the gateway to upward social mobility?
How do you define personal success for yourself as a black man in the U.S.?
What do you consider success for your students?
Are these definitions for success different for Black boys and Black girls?
How will you know if you have been successful with students? What does this look like for your students?
How do you think your students define success for themselves?
How will students know if they are successful?
What vision do you have for boys in terms of being successful black men?
Describe the ways in which students should attain upward mobility.
Do the messages in Hip Hop support or negate your visions of success for the black boys in your class?
If the messages are different, how do you reconcile that as a supporter of Hip Hop and its uses in urban classrooms?
What roles does Hip Hop play in fostering these types of successes you mentioned earlier?

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research

Dear Mr.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Thurman Bridges, a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. This study investigates the pedagogical beliefs of African American male K-12 teachers from the Hip Hop Generation – i.e. born between 1965 and 1984 and feels closely connected to Hip Hop music and culture. More specifically, it examines their social, political, educational and cultural experiences [e.g. coming of age during the crack and HIV epidemics, their connections to political movements (i.e. Civil Rights and Black Nationalist Movements), their schooling experiences, and their experiences and involvement with Hip Hop culture] and how these experiences have influenced their pedagogical beliefs. You were selected based on your responses to six-question questionnaire designed to evaluate your level of involvement and participation in Hip Hop culture and their commitment to teaching in urban schools. If you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to allow me to conduct at least three indepth interviews with your over the course of the next several months.

The results from this study will contribute to the development of my doctoral dissertation that focuses on the pedagogical beliefs of African American educators from the Hip Hop generation, who teach in urban schools. This research will shed led on under theorized population of teachers while providing you the opportunity reflect upon and insert your life story, historical perspective, and teaching beliefs in education research on this subject.

The information obtained from this study that can be identified with you will remain completely confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission. As the principal investigator, I am the only person, beside my academic advisor, who will have access to the information your provide. In addition, your name will not be published in the final dissertation without your approval.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Therefore, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the research, please feel free to contact:

Thurman Bridges, Principal Investigator, at 804-370-7266.

Sincerely,

Thurman Bridges,
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Maryland, College Park

Appendix D

Consent Signature Form

I agree to participate in a dissertation research study by Thurman Bridges. I have been provided with written information regarding the nature of the study. I understand the procedures described in the consent letter and I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Participant

_____
_____
Signature of Participant   Date

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix E

<div align="center">Teacher Consent Form</div>

Project Title	Hip Hop or Hip Hope: An examination of the life histories and pedagogical beliefs of African American Male teachers from the Hip Hop Generation.
Why is this research being done?	*This research project is being conducted by Thurman L. Bridges, III at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an African American male born between 1965 and 1984. You are either current or former classroom teacher, have demonstrated interest in and heavy involvement in Hip Hop culture, and use or have used Hip Hop related curriculum in their classrooms. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the life histories and pedagogical beliefs of African American Male K-12 teachers from the Hip Hop Generation who feel a close connection to Hip Hop music and culture. More specifically, it examines the social, political, educational and cultural life history influences on their pedagogical beliefs.*
What will I be asked to do?	*I will be interviewing you three times, for one-hour, over the course of several weeks at locations that are convenient for you - e.g. school sites, libraries, coffee shops, and personal residence. The first one-hour interview will focus on your political, cultural, social and personal experiences. The second interview will focus on your perceptions about and approaches to teaching and the education of, particularly, African American youth (especially boys) in urban schools. The third interview will examine how you understand the significance of your perceptions and experiences, including how it relates to Hip Hop. As dictated by Critical Race Methodology, in all interviews I will ask you to expand upon their experiences with race and racism.*

Initials _____ Date

_____

Project Title	*[This title should be the same as the project title used in the IRB application.]*
What about confidentiality?	*I (Thurman Bridges) will do my best to keep your identity and personal information confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and for any schools, geographic locations, and individuals mentioned in the interviews. Only non-specific regional information will be used in any representations of this study. To further maintain your confidentiality, I will store all audio tapes, voice recordings, transcriptions, and analytic memos in a locked drawer in the principle investigators office at the University of Maryland. All materials will be destroyed after five years. If you choose to withdraw at any time during the study, any information collected from you will be destroyed and will not be used in the study, if you so choose.* *In any reports or articles about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.* This dissertation study involves making digital audio recording of my interviews with you. These data files will be stored on a password-protected computer to insure personal access only. The recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after five years. The recordings will be used for research only and will help the researcher understand how Hip Hop culture influences the pedagogical beliefs of African American teachers from the Hip Hop generation. _____ *I do agree to be audio taped during m participation in this study* _____ *I do not agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study*
What are the risks of this research?	*There may be some risks from participating in this research study. You could potentially become tired or fatigued after each one hour interview. Furthermore, you could experience frustration or anxiety as you may be asked to recall specific experiences from your past that are uncomfortable or personally painful. In addition, you may be uncomfortable with being audio taped and/or having your*

	stories analyzed by the principle investigator. To address this, I will build in time for breaks throughout the interview and ensure that the interview location is quiet and comfortable. I will also be very aware of the your' reactions and allow you to move on or skip particular questions that may be too difficult to answer. During subsequent interviews, however, I will attempt to readdress those questions. You will be informed that you may ask the me questions throughout the duration of the research study and that you may withdraw without penalty at any time during the study. Furthermore, I will use member checks to reduce potential anxiety. This will allow you to review their interview transcripts.

Initials _____ Date

_____

Project Title	*[This title should be the same as the project title used in the IRB application.]*
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the ontologies, epistemologies, and pedagogies of African American male educators. Through an examination of how the life histories of African American teachers from the Hip Hop Generation have influenced their pedagogical beliefs, this study will shed light on cultural contexts in which their motivations to teach, experiences within Hip Hop culture, and use of innovative pedagogies emerged. The findings from this study will likely help to explain the diminishing presence of African American male teachers in K-12 education and can be used to inform school, school districts, and colleges of education on they can recruit and retain African American men. Additionally, what is learned about yourr pedagogical beliefs may be useful in identifying dispositions and strategies that would help all teachers to be more effective, particularly with African American boys.
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time without penalty. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.*
What if I have questions?	*This research is being conducted by Thurman L. Bridges, II EDCI, at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please Thurman L. Bridges, III at: 2311 G Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Phone: (301) 405-3324 Email: tbridges@umd.edu or Tara M. Brown, Ed.D. at: 2311 G Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Phone: (301) 405-0410 Fax: (301) 314-9055 Email: tmbrown@umd.edu.* *If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland,

	College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678 *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*

Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	*[This title should be the same as the project title used in the IRB application.]*	

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent [*Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.*]	*Your signature indicates that:*
	  you are at least 18 years of age;,
	  the research has been explained to you;
	  your questions have been fully answered; and
	 you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.	

Signature and Date [*Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form*]	NAME OF SUBJECT	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

Appendix F

Sample Letter of Request to School District

Date
School Name
School Address

Prince Georges County Research Office:

My name is Thurman Bridges and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (EDCI) at the University of Maryland, College Park. My supervising professor is Dr. Tara M. Brown, Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am writing to request your permission to work with 16-20 teachers in your school district. More specifically, through my dissertation study, I will use life history methodology to examine how the teachers make meaning of their social, political, education, and cultural life history experiences. I will also explore any connection between their life history experiences and Hip Hop culture. And finally, I will explore connections between their life history experiences and Hip Hop culture, and their beliefs about the academic and social well being of students of color. I intend to adhere to all social science research guidelines involving human subjects established by the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB), the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

This research is motivated by a desire to address the diminishing presence of African American male teachers in U.S. schools and the significance of this study is multifold. First, through an examination of the life histories of African American teachers from the Hip Hop Generation and their pedagogical beliefs, this study will shed light on cultural contexts in which their experiences with Hip Hop culture, their motivations to teach, and their pedagogical approaches emerged. In doing so, this study seeks to expand upon the existing literature on teacher beliefs, which all but excludes the ontologies, epistemologies, and pedagogies of African American male educators.

This study focuses on African American male K-12 teachers who were born between 1965 and 1984 and feel closely connected to Hip Hop music and culture. It examines their social, political, educational and cultural experiences [e.g. coming of age during the crack and HIV/AIDs epidemics, their connections to political movements (i.e. Civil Rights and Black Nationalist Movements), their schooling experiences, and their experiences and involvement with Hip Hop culture] and how these experiences have influenced their pedagogical beliefs.

The participants, who will be selected using 10 question screening survey which measures their commitment to and involvement with Hip Hop, rely on Hip Hop culture to support their daily instruction, and view the intersections of Hip Hop culture and traditional curriculum as a powerful tool in alleviating achievement challenges facing students of color, while producing positive academic outcomes for, particularly African American boys in urban schools. Research participants will be informed that they may ask the researcher questions through out the duration of the research study and that they may withdraw without penalty at any time during the study.

I will work closely with the classroom teachers in scheduling to ensure that thier participation does not take away from thier other important academic and administrative duties. Confidentiality will be maintained at every level of the study. I will not identify the school or the individual teacher. To further maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I will store all audio-tapes, voice recordings, transcriptions, and analytic memos in a locked drawer in the principal investigators office at the University of Maryland. All research data will be stored for five (5) years in my advisor's office at the University of Maryland and then destroyed. Prior to the study, letters of consent will be given to the participants. I (Thurman Bridges) will explain in detail the rationale and objectives of the study and what participation will entail. In that process, and throughout the study, I will address any questions or concerns about the study. At no time during the study will participants be asked to collaborate or access any external data; therefore, they will not be informed of the other participants in the study nor will they need to rely on any outside sources of data to participate in the study.

I will provide the research participants with information about the goals, procedures, risks and benefits of the dissertation study. This dissertation will be fully disclosed and no information will be intentionally hidden. Any and all questions about the dissertation study will be answered before, during, and after its implementation. These questions will be answered to the best of the researcher's ability. In addition, the researchers will provide each participant a consent form to explain the purpose of the study, their expectations, and risks and benefits. Participants will be invited to move forward with the study upon receipt of the consent forms.

I hope you will consider my request to work with teachers in your school district. I will contact you within the next two weeks regarding this request. If you have any questions prior to this time, please feel free to call either me or my advisor, Dr. Brown (301.405.3324) at any time.

Sincerely,

Thurman L. Bridges, III
Doctoral Condidate
University of Maryland, College Park
Phone: 804-370-7266
Email: tbridges@umd.edu

Appendix G

Life History Review Letter

Dear Mr.

Thank you for participating in the dissertation study entitled, <u>Hip Hop or Hip Hope: An examination of the life histories and pedagogical beliefs of African American Male teachers from the Hip Hop Generation.</u> As a result of your generosity, I will be completing the final dissertation by _____. Before submitting a final draft to the University of Maryland, I would like to get your feedback on the part of the dissertation that attempts to chronicle your life history experiences. For that reason, I have enclosed a rough draft of your life history that will be included in the final paper.

Please take some time to carefully review the portrait in the next couple of weeks. In doing so, it would be great if you could consider the following questions:
1. Does this portrait accurately represent you and your life history experiences? And
2. Are there ways in which this could be made more authentic?

I will be contacting you in the soon to arrange for a time to meet with you to get your feedback. Thank you so much for you participation and cooperation. Please feel free to contact me at anytime at tbridges@umd.edu or (804) 370-7266.

Sincerely,

Thurman Bridges
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Maryland, College Park

Appendix H

Letter to Schedule an Interview

As you may know, I am in the process of conducting a dissertation research study

that focuses on the experiences and beliefs of African American male teachers from

the Hip Hop generation. The purpose of this letter is to access your availability for an

interview. Are you available for a possible interview on _____

(day) between _____ and _____ (time). If there is a more

convenient time please call or email me at (804) 370-7266 or tbridges@umd.edu. I

look forward to our future meeting. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Thurman Bridges
Doctoral Candidate
University of Maryland, College Park
Curriculum & Instruction

Appendix I

Planning Matrix

	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
Proposal Defense	X											
IRB Submission	X	X										
1ST Interview		X	X									
2nd Interview			X	X								
3rd Interview				X	X							
Data Description					X	X						
Data Analysis		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Writing Chapters								X	X	X	X	X
Dissertation Defense												X

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