

**“CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?”: HIP-HOP, IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, AND
PERSONAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL WORLDVIEWS OF BLACK GIRLS**

by

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Dedication

It is not easy being a first-generation college student because you not only carry your name with you, but your entire family. This doctoral journey was one that was not only taken for myself, but for my entire Richmond-Payne family. To my mother, Mamie, who has been my all-around support throughout this process and my life. You knew this wasn't easy, but you always knew that I could it, and you did not hesitate to let me know that every day. I am forever grateful for your love, encouragement and support. To my father, Marvin, who also knew the importance of this journey. Thank you for being my listening ear and encourager, without my parents, I would not have been able to make it this far. To my little sister, Brittany, thank you for being the sunshine in the midst of the storm. We have been through so much, but we have been inseparable through it all. To the rest of the Richmond-Payne family, THANK YOU! I didn't do this for me, I did this for us!

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Abstract

Hip-hop has been shown to be a significant force of identity, knowledge, and cultural development, particularly for Black youth (Brown, 2009; Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Love, 2012). Building on research surrounding identity and knowledge development within hip-hop, this Black/hip-hop feminist research study seeks to understand the role that hip-hop plays in the lives, identity and personal epistemology of Black adolescent girls. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What role does hip-hop (i.e., rap, dance, and graffiti) play in the lives of Black girls? (2) How does hip-hop inform racial and gendered identity for Black girls? (3) How do Black girls negotiate their racial and gender identities through hip-hop? (4) How does hip-hop inform Black girls' personal epistemologies and worldviews? 6 Black girls from an urban city in the mid-southern region of the United States participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and researcher journals were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis (Saldana, 2016) to understand how these cultural mechanisms influence identity, worldview, and knowledge for Black girls. Results showed the following themes: hip-hop as a coping mechanism, hip-hop as a critique of hegemonic ideologies of Blackness and Black girl/womanness, hip-hop as community, and hip-hop as negotiating knowledges. This research study demonstrates the importance of hip-hop in promoting resiliency, challenging/critiquing/creating racial and gender identities, and using hip-hop as a community for learning. This study also demonstrates the importance of identity development in the epistemic process.

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Introduction

Recent research in the education of Black youth has been investigating methods of instruction that encompass their surrounding culture, a framework called culturally relevant pedagogy (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 2014). This framework borrows from the tenets of critical race theory and Black feminism and recognizes that historically and presently, students of color have been marginalized and viewed as deficient in their educational settings because their cultural practices, beliefs, and ideologies do not reflect the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Love, 2004; Love, 2015). Culturally relevant pedagogy attempts to combat the marginalization and deficiency ideologies by bringing students' cultural knowledge and experiences to the forefront of their education and bridging what students experience within their culture with the teaching practices of the classroom (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). To bridge this gap, educators have used strategies such as incorporating student's home language and/or vernacular, cultural activities, and popular culture within classroom curriculum and instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Recently, research involving the culturally relevant pedagogy of Black youth has been focused on investigating the use of hip-hop, namely rap music and texts, in the classroom to teach academic skills (Bridges, 2011; Emdin, 2010; Gosa, 2010; Gosa & Fields, 2012; Hill, 2009; Love 2015; Love 2016; Kelly, 2013; Petchauer, 2009; Stovall, 2006).

Hip-Hop Based Education

While there are scholars who contest the valuable nature of including hip-hop in the educational curriculum (e.g., McWhorter, 2003), there is overwhelming evidence from scholars that hip-hop is a powerful and creative outlet for Black youth as they connect aspects of a culture that they use every day within the walls of their classroom (Love, 2015; Petchauer, 2009). Hip-hop based education (HHBE) is focused on using elements of hip hop to inform pedagogy (Hill,

2009; Love, 2015). Though hip-hop is theorized to be comprised of four distinct parts (i.e., deejaying, graffiti, breakdancing, and rap), much of the literature reflecting the use of HHBE has been focused on rap pedagogy where teachers include analysis of rap lyrics into their curriculum to aid in student learning (Gosa & Fields, 2012). Researchers such as Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) have designed class curricula aimed at utilizing rap lyrics to develop critical analytical skills by comparing rap lyrics to canonical poetry. These researchers found that students could not only generate interesting interpretations of the poems and music, they were also able to find linkages between the poems and rap lyrics (Alim, 2007; Hill, 2009; Sanchez, 2010; Stovall, 2006). Other researchers such as Emdin (2010), creator of Science Genius B.A.T.T.L.E.S., have shown that the use of hip-hop within science education classrooms increases understanding and engagement by allowing students to utilize their love for hip-hop culture within their science curriculum.

While hip-hop has been shown to be a great supplement to classroom material, the experiences of students of color are often silenced within their academic curriculum. In fact, some researchers within Black and hip-hop education have posited that simply using hip-hop as a bridge does little to help the cultural disconnect that is present within the classroom and the curriculum (Kelly, 2013; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). These researchers have shown that making hip-hop central in their classroom by including it as a classroom text, similar to how classrooms use traditional textbooks, provides students with a meaningful way to engage with their culture and interests while providing them the opportunity to “embrace their individuality while pursuing academic success” (Kelly, 2013, p. 52). For example, Stovall (2006) posited that through reflective writing, historical research, and discussions, students could bridge their own social issues with the social issues discussed within hip-hop and the larger society. By creating

this bridge, students were successful in creating counternarratives and developing critical consciousness while simultaneously learning pertinent educational skills.

The use of hip-hop in the classroom has become an educational movement embedded in the social culture of today's youth using Twitter as platform at #HiphopEd. The movement, created by Chris Emdin and a group of educators and scholars who are dedicated to using the culture of hip-hop in teaching Black youth basic educational skills and socio-cultural lessons and consciousness, has since transcended the walls of academia, the classroom, and social media and has become a non-profit organization that "focuses on bridging the gap between theory and practice through the development and implementation of Hip-Hop based interventions in STEM, therapy, literacy and school leadership" (Emdin, Jones, Cook, Adjapong, Levy, & Rose, 2016).

Identity and Hip-Hop

While there is much evidence supporting hip-hop initiatives in the classroom, research investigating how and why these initiatives work appears to be scarce (Petchauer, 2009). Central in the framework of culturally relevant pedagogy is the notion of making one's self and one's cultural beliefs central in education (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Baxter-Magolda, 2003). One's understanding of self and their cultural beliefs, particularly as it relates to their surrounding environment, is essential in the learning and the meaning making process in that it influences students' beliefs about learning, education, and subsequently their learning outcomes (Muis, Bendixen, & Haerle, 2006).

Research has shown that popular culture and hip-hop have significantly influenced how Black youth make sense of their racial identity and social surroundings (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2008; Clay, 2003; Dimitriadis, 2009; Love, 2012). Researchers such as Dimitriadis (2009), Clay (2003), and Love (2012;2013) have shown that for both Black men/boys and Black

women/girls, hip-hop provides them with a space to interpret and construct notions of Blackness, gender, and community. This space becomes important for both racial and gender identity development as they negotiate dominant and hip-hop notions of Blackness and gender. Though the ways in which youth read hip-hop is complex (Love, 2013), there are some commonalities in the ways in which hip-hop is being used as a space for resisting and negotiating identities. For Black men/boys, popular media often shows Black males as being criminal, dangerous, and naturally violent, which lead to socially constructed stereotypes surrounding Black male identity. As Black males are exposed to these images, they either actively negotiate and resist these negative stereotypes or reaffirm those images into their own construction of Black male identity (Clay, 2003; Love, 2012).

In contrast to Black men/boys, Black women/girls, however, are not viewed as “substantial producers, creators, and consumers of hip-hop and Black youth culture” and have a complicated relationship with hip-hop (Emerson, 2002). Most of the research involving hip-hop and Black youth has focused on the experiences of Black men/boys, leaving the experiences and narratives of Black girls silenced and invisible (Emerson, 2002; Rose, 1994). The casting of Black women within hip-hop has been extensively critiqued for their sexually explicit, misogynistic images with most Black women being cast as vixens, hos, sluts, and freaks (Pough, 2007; Rose, 2008). The normalization of these images reflects the dominant and distorted ideologies of Black female sexuality where Black women are stereotyped as sexual temptresses (Emerson, 2002; hooks, 1982; Stephen & Phillips, 2003). Research has shown that within hip-hop, Black women/girls face conflicting messages about femininity and sexuality and are forced to negotiate between popular culture’s ideologies of their woman/girlhood and their own identity construction (Love, 2012; Brown, 2009; Pough, 2007). As a result, Black girls are constantly

having their bodies, attitudes, and behaviors policed in their work and academic settings (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Personal Epistemology, Hip-hop, and Identity

For Black youth of the hip-hop generation, hip-hop is the culture that guides their beliefs about their identity and the world (Love, 2015). Therefore, the information that these youths receive through hip-hop and the hip-hop educational initiatives can influence their beliefs about knowledge and knowing within the classroom, the educational goals that students set for themselves, and subsequently their learning outcomes (Bendixen, Winsor, & Fraizer, 2017). Educational psychologists have termed the student's belief about knowledge and knowing personal epistemology. Educational research studies have shown that one's personal epistemic beliefs can impact their academic beliefs, outcomes and behaviors (Hofer, 2001; Muis, 2004). These beliefs become an integral part of one's life-long learning process as individuals (re)evaluate information from their environments based on their epistemic beliefs (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Perry, 1970; Hofer, 2008).

The hip-hop educational initiatives are tasked with creating spaces where students can explore and critique their culture and identities (Love, 2015; Petchauer, 2009). These spaces are critical in the creation of student's epistemological belief systems about education and learning (Baxter-Magolda, 2003). As students receive information from their culture about their identity, particularly within education, students are tasked with (re)evaluating information based on the foundational epistemic beliefs. For Black youth, the messages and images that they receive within hip-hop set the foundation for their beliefs, particularly regarding their position within society and their education. These messages are continually (re)evaluated and negotiated with the messages that they are receiving from the dominant society and culture. For Black youth, the

messages are often contradictory causing substantial cognitive dissonance and changes in their epistemological belief system.

While the impact of hip-hop has been well-documented for Black men/boys, the impact of hip-hop on Black girls is not well-documented. For Black girls, hip-hop as a culture is a difficult space as they are met with opposing ideologies of Black femaleness and are tasked with negotiating those identities to create their own construction of their identity, including their views about education. Therefore, the scope of this research study is to investigate the role of hip-hop in the lives of Black girls and how the culture of hip-hop informs their identity and epistemological worldviews.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Considering the marginalization of Black girls, this research study draws from Black and hip-hop feminism to investigate hip-hop in the lives of Black girls. The purpose of this research study is to: (1) understand how Black girls in a low-income, predominately Black school in an urban environment negotiated their racial and gendered identities through their perceived participation with hip-hop (including rap, graffiti, and dance) in their everyday lives and within an after-school hip-hop based program and (2) understand how the culture of hip-hop and the negotiation of their racial and gendered identities (i.e., what it means to be Black and a woman) influences their worldviews and their personal epistemology. Using a critical race, Black feminist, and hip-hop feminist theoretical framework and narrative inquiry methodology, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, used non-participant observations, and researcher journals to learn how these cultural mechanisms influence identity, worldview, and knowledge for Black girls. This study included 6 Black girls from an urban city in the mid-southern region of the United States. The following research questions were explored: (1) What

role does hip-hop (i.e., rap, dance, and graffiti) play in the lives of Black girls? (2) How does hip-hop inform racial and gendered identity for Black girls? (3) How do Black girls negotiate their racial and gender identities through hip-hop? (5) How does hip-hop inform Black girl's personal epistemologies and worldviews?

Overview

The following chapter reviews the literature that reflects the scope of this research study. The literature review combines elements of critical race theory, critical race feminisms, Black feminism, and hip-hop feminism with feminist theories of personal epistemology in order to investigate the role of hip-hop, racial and gender identity in the knowledges and worldviews of Black girls. Chapter 2 begins with an overview of hip-hop, hip-hop based education, and the theoretical frameworks that guided this study. Chapter 2 continues with connecting these theories in a discussion of the education, identity, and personal epistemologies of Black girls. Chapter 3 outlines the research study's design and the participants. Embedded within chapter 3 is a discussion of the methodological orientation that guides this study, along with the sources of data, methods for collecting data, and analysis. Chapter 4 outlines the four themes that guide this study: hip-hop as a coping mechanism, hip-hop as a critique and challenge of hegemonic ideologies, hip-hop as community bond, and hip-hop as negotiating identities. Chapter 5 reviews the findings of this research study, and offers implications for future work with Black girls and education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While the use of hip-hop is not a new phenomenon in education, understanding the role hip-hop plays in the identities and knowledge beliefs for Black girls is less investigated. Much of the research regarding the use of hip-hop in education focuses on practical uses of hip-hop, and how hip-hop can be used as a tool in the classroom (Petchauer, 2009). Teachers are centering rap music texts in their lessons and curriculum, all in the name of culturally relevant pedagogy in which students are empowered to critically evaluate the role of racist and sexist structures in their lives while simultaneously learning the necessary academic skills to be successful in the classroom.

Considering the nature of hip-hop literature, this literature review centers on both the theoretical and practical uses of hip-hop in education, as outlined in previous research studies. First, this review will outline the theoretical frameworks that guide this study and the conceptual lens that connects hip-hop, identity, and knowledge. Previous research in the field demonstrates that hip-hop is particularly important for identity formation of Black youth (Clay, 2003; Dimitriadis, 2009; Hill, 2009). As research shows, the process of identity formation is intricately woven into teaching, learning, and knowledge construction (Baxter-Magolda, 2003; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). The literature presented here seeks to illustrate this process by providing literature related to the role of hip-hop in identity, the intersectionality of identities for Black girls, and finally the role of these intersectional identities on knowledge beliefs for Black girls. Secondly, this chapter will present a brief history of hip-hop culture, particularly focusing on the role of rap music, graffiti, and dance. Next, this chapter will discuss the United States' history of racism and sexism with much of the laws, policies, and overall cultural beliefs regarding the status of Black Americans, particularly Black women/girls. These

laws, policies, and beliefs have become problematic for Black Americans, marginalizing them, particularly with regards to their education. This literature review will present a brief history of the role of sexism in the lives of Black women and girls and will illustrate how these structures are present within hip-hop, particularly rap music, and how they impact Black girls as consumers and active participants of the culture. Finally, this literature review will review the role that culture plays in the beliefs about knowledge, particularly focusing on hip-hop as the cultural mechanism. According to Nasir and Hand (2006), racism and power play a significant role in the learning process and thus impacts how individuals within a culture use cultural tools to interact with their environment and construct their beliefs about knowledge and their surrounding world. Building from Nasir and Hand (2006)'s work connecting sociocultural and critical race theories, this review demonstrates the force that hip-hop has in the lives of Black youth.

A History of the Education of Black Youth

Once slavery was abolished, Jim Crow laws were created to continually keep the Black population at second class citizenship. Black Americans were segregated from predominately White spaces and barred from participation in traditionally White activities. Building on the deficit ideology that Black children were “uneducable,” *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1886) asserted that Black children could be educated, but only in a “separate but equal” environment. However, the education system was separate but not equal as Black children were subjected to receiving an education in predominately Black neighborhoods where there were disparities in both the quality of education and resources available to Black children (Boozer, Kruger, & Wolkon, 1992). It was not until the historic *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) that Black students were allowed to attend school with their White counterparts. *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) held that the law that of “separate but equal” was

unconstitutional and detrimental to the education of Black children (Boozer, Kruger, & Wolkon, 1992). The ruling indicated that separate could not be equal when it comes to education. Though this ruling occurred in 1954, integration took almost 20 years and did not come without resistance as Little Rock and the University of Mississippi along with other institutions engaged in civil wars in an attempt to prevent integration. Residents in the Little Rock and Oxford area asserted that Black children were intellectually inferior to White children and that attending school with Black children would be detrimental to their child's education.

Majoritarian Narratives and Achievement Gaps

Academic achievement information for Black students was not available pre-segregation as many Black schools were not included in national educational census data (Boozer, Kruger, & Wolkon, 1992). After segregation, student tracking became easier to obtain. The inferiority ideology persisted as student tracking illustrated a large achievement gap between Black and White students, an overrepresentation of Black students in special education, and an overrepresentation of Black students dropping out of high school (Howard, 2008). These “majoritarian” narratives were used to reinforce the ideology of Black students’ inferiority as statistics continually showed the underperformance of Black students in the classroom (Love, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Majoritarian narratives, according to Love (2004) and Solorzano and Yosso, (2002) are stories told by members of dominant groups that confirm the beliefs and values within the dominant culture. The majoritarian narrative of underachievement of Black students and the dominance of White Americans is often used to justify the power and privilege of the dominant group. Painting the picture of the inferiority of Black students and the superior intellect of White students provides reasoning for the greater distribution of power and wealth in White communities (Love, 2004).

Majoritarian narratives reinforce ethnocentric views and present the dominant ideology and culture as the norm. In education, these narratives present schools as “neutral institutions” and education as “apolitical” with achievement in education based solely on merit (Love, 2004). The “myth of meritocracy” is the primary tool in the reinforcement of these narratives and rests on the notions of “neutrality, colorblindness, objective standards of performance, fair methods of assessment and evaluation, and neutral and objective reporting of performance results” (Love, 2014, p. 230). This “myth” becomes problematic as it negates the socio-cultural influences that cause the underachievement of Black students. For example, the notion of neutrality presents schools as “race-neutral” but does not discuss the underrepresentation of Black students in honors programs and overrepresentation of Black students in special education courses. It also negates the disproportionate numbers of Black students failing, dropping out of high school, suspensions, and expulsions. The notion of colorblindness silences the experiences of students of color and the impact that these experiences may have on their education. Further, the education system rests on the presumption of objective standards and reflects the idea that every student has an “equal opportunity to learn” (Love, 2004). However, the education system is not “equal” in that predominately Black neighborhoods and schools lack the social capital to provide a decent education to their students. With the assumption that there is “equal opportunity in education,” educators and policy makers believe that the “fair and objective methods” used to measure educational performance are not biased against Black Americans and provide an “objective, race free, culturally neutral measures by which student performance is assessed” (Love, 2014, p. 231). However, these measures only represent a proportion of learning for Black students and do not account for their potential that Black students may possess, despite their educational inequalities (Love, 2004).

All of these tools were methods in which the inferiority ideology of minorities manifested in American culture despite the inequalities that Black students experienced in education. Therefore, those from privileged socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic groups attributed their success and education to their own efforts and talents, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be viewed as “deficit and inferior” (Hill & Witherspoon, 2013). Thus, many privileged Americans endorsed this inferiority ideology and have a lower tolerance for “safety nets” for disadvantaged groups (Hill & Witherspoon, 2013). Many Black children also endorsed this inferiority ideology as their surrounding environment continually reinforced their inferiority and embedded this ideology into their psyche, identity, and academic behaviors.

An Overview of Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE)

Borrowing from the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and critical race theory (CRT), hip-hop based education (HHBE) attempts to bridge the home-school divide by bringing in hip-hop into pedagogy and the curriculum (Love, 2015). Hill (2009) defines HHBE as including elements of hip-hop such as rap, graffiti, knowledge of self, and dance to inform pedagogy in educational spaces. HHBE have recognized the racism within education and pushes for culturally relevant pedagogy by adapting teaching styles and classroom strategies that embrace the culture of the students (Gosa & Fields, 2012). Literature investigating the underachievement of Black students has alluded to the cultural mismatch of students and their school culture. HHBE provides a bridge between student and curriculum, and allows students a space to discuss their culture, race, and racial experiences and push for social justice education.

Just as the principles of CRT demonstrate dominant ideologies of meritocracy and neutrality as being evident in pedagogy, practice, and the laws governing educational bodies (e.g., Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Dixson, Anderson, & Donner, 2017), HHBE follows this

same ideology by “stressing the use of non-traditional texts in the classroom (e.g., rap videos, movies, etc.) to have students critique and question (“deconstruct”) the veracity of dominant texts” (Gosa & Fields, 2012, p. 183). Many critical race theorists have changed the face of education by pushing for more teachers of color, including more “culturally relevant” educational material and practices, and changing core curriculum and testing, making them more accessible to students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Hip-hop, especially early hip-hop culture, was also concerned with bringing about social change. Songs like “Fuck the police” and “Fight the Power” brought awareness to the social injustices present within the Black community and encouraged them to fight against those injustices. Rashid (2016) posits that the politics reflected within early hip-hop reflects the ideologies of the Black Liberation movement. With their ideologies, hip-hop became a platform for social criticism that articulated a vision of social transformation thus becoming a prominent tool for social change in the Black community (Rashid, 2016). Additionally, part of HHBE is social justice education that uses hip-hop in the classroom as a space to “explore, and prepare to engage the mechanisms that sustain inequality in society” (p. 358). CRT theorists also recognize the importance of experiential knowledge, both from the active participants and people who look like them. The stories and experiences of students of color are often marginalized and silenced, while dominant ideologies are privileged (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Love, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Critical race theorists use what they call the “counterstory” to give voice to the experiences of students of color in their classroom experience (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Dixson and Rousseau (2005) posit that the concept of *voice* is particularly important in CRT as it privileges the personal and community experiences as sources of knowledge. Similar to this ideology, HHBE seeks to push for social justice education by “making schooling

‘emancipatory’ for historically oppressed groups in society” (Gosa & Fields, 2012, p. 183).

HHBE does this by privileging the counterstories of marginalized populations as sources of knowledge within the classroom by making the student’s experiences and their culture central in their education.

What about Black Girls: The Silencing of Black Girls in Education

Educational researchers have been focused on the collective underperformance of Black students in the classroom and often do not consider that the *Black* experience is not a monolith, but influenced by other factors such as gender, class, and sexuality (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). While one of the main tenets of critical race theory and HHBE is the focus on the intersectionality of experiences, much of the concern about the education of Black youth has been focusing on the education of Black males, negating the both racist and sexist structures that Black girls face both in the classroom and in society (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008).

Black women and girls have the positionality of being both Black and female, both of which experience marginalization and neglect in society (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Black girls face discrimination in education as they are met with high levels of adversity in schools causing deficit ideologies (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016). While deficit ideologies impact both Black girls and boys, Black girls encounter racial and gendered experiences that subject them to “specific gaze” in reference to their bodies, sexual promiscuity, and deviant behaviors. Therefore, controlling the Black girls’ body is viewed as the key to academic success with a myriad of academic programs aimed at controlling their bodily behaviors in an effort to improve their academic efforts (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016). This faulty ideology has caused Black girls to be more frequently punished than their White counterparts with a plethora of school violations of dress code and higher suspensions and expulsion rates (Annamma,

Anyon, Joseph, Farrar, Greer, Downing, & Simmons, 2016; Morris, 2005; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). With this in mind, the education of Black girls is influenced by racial identity, racial stereotyping and gender identity development, as Black girls are consistently fighting against the loud, ghetto Black girl and the sexually promiscuous stereotype.

Racial Identity Theories

Social and racial identity theorists studying Black Americans have mainly focused on the racial identity development for both Black men and women (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Racial identity researchers have wrestled with defining the construct since its beginning (Sellers, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). There are several approaches to measuring racial identity that can be grouped into two main approaches: mainstream and underground (Gaines & Reid, 1995; Sellers, et al., 1998). According to Gaines and Reid (1995) the mainstream tradition of racial identity research focuses on the group stigma associated with racial identity with little regard for the Black culture. In contrast to the mainstream tradition, the underground tradition discussed the impact of individual experiences with racism and oppression and other unique cultural experiences. Additionally, the mainstream tradition focused on all racial groups as it relates to cognitive and affective processes and prejudicial behaviors while underground traditions focused on the historical and cultural factors that contribute to the Black experience.

According to Gaines and Reid (1995), the mainstream approach has its roots in research from Allport (1954) who posited that living in a racist environment has detrimental effects on the psychosocial development of Black Americans. Thus, Allport (1954) assumed that Black Americans devalued either parts of themselves that reflected the stigma of being Black or the institutional structure for its prejudice against them. Following Allport, the mainstream racial identity research began to consider the cognitive processes associated with racial identity

development and how they manifested within the individual. For example, Phinney's (1990) ethnic identity model reflects universal cognitive processes in the development of ethnic identity of individuals. Similar to Marcia's (1980) identity statuses, this model reviews how individuals develop their ethnic identity through search and commitment. While this approach has paid attention to the salience of one's racial and ethnic identity, these models lack in understanding the qualitative meanings that individuals associate with their racial and ethnic identity (Sellers, et al., 1998). Therefore, the underground approaches sought to understand racial experiences not as necessarily detrimental to the racial identity, but instead created a positive identity development for Black Americans (Gaines & Reid, 1995; Sellers, et al., 1998). Dubois (1903) first realized the Black racial identity development in his conceptualization of the "double consciousness" of being Negro and being American. Considering the inherent negative views of the Negro in American society, reconciliation of these two identities yield positive identity development. Other underground research (e.g., Cross, 1971) discuss the importance of racism and identification with African culture to construct a healthy racial identity. For example, Cross (1971) describes the impact of a racial experience on the construction of a racial identity. Cross contends that without a racial experience, many Black Americans live in a world in which they embrace White culture and reject their Black identity. After their experience with racism, Black Americans begin to explore their African roots and culture and finally develop a healthy identity in which they can fully embrace their Black identity and live together with their White counterparts.

Modern racial identity theorists have moved away from creating a stage model of racial identity development, and are more focused on ideologies, attitudes, and behaviors associated with racial identity development (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Parham & Helms, 1985).

For example, the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale focused on measuring the affective states associated with racial identity development. In contrast, the Multidimensional Inventory of Racial Identity (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998) focuses on the salience of racial identity and private and public feelings about their race. This model also focuses on the behaviors associated with race and places their respective behaviors and ideologies about their racial group in racial identity dimensions.

Gender Identity and Black Girls

When investigating Black girls, researching only racial identity does not discuss the influences of the other identities that Black girls possess, namely their gendered identity (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Theories of gender have become increasingly complex. Over the years, gender identity has progressed from biological theories of gender to a more social and performative theory of gender identity development. Early theories of gender identity development relied on biological differences in sex organs to categorize boys and girls (Levine & Munsch, 2016). However, throughout the years, research investigating gender has separated the terms “sex” and “gender.” While one’s sex is determined at birth based on chromosomes and sex organs, one’s gender is a socio-cultural construction, relying on societal and cultural ideologies (Levine & Munsch, 2016). Theories such as Kohlberg’s gender identity theory, Bandura’s social learning theory, and Bem’s sex role theory demonstrate that as one gathers information from the environment regarding their gendered identity through observational learning, they begin to create gender schemas or an organized set of gendered beliefs that guide their behaviors (Levine & Munsch, 2016)

Gendered Racial Identity of Black Girls

Simply discussing the racial identity or gender identity of Black girls using the models provided does not fully explain the multidimensionality of the identity of Black girls (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Previous research has shown that focusing on single identity factors does not consider the complexity of the identity development process and how the identity development process relies on the intersection and saliency of multiple identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Models such as the Model of Multidimensions of Identity highlighted the role of saliency of multiple identities in relation to the core sense of self (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). The more salient an identity is to a person, the more integrated that it comes to one's sense of self (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). A reconceptualization of this framework, completed in 2007, by Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), included a meaning-making capacity and posited that contextual influences and perceptions of identity are closely related and influenced by the meaning-making capacity. In other words, how one perceives their identity is directly related to the meaning that they attach to the societal ideologies surrounding their identity.

Black girls and intersectionality. For Black girls, their race and gender can be salient at the same time, especially when both racist and sexist structures impact their development. Therefore, employing a gendered racial identity framework will better explain the developmental process of Black girls (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). For Black girls, the contextual influences on their gendered racial identity include the interconnection of messages from their social environment, including institutional sexism and racism, stereotypical images, and socialization experiences (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Racial and gender identity theories do not fully consider intragroup differences, particularly for

Black women (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Crenshaw (1981) discussed the intersectional nature of these experiences for Black women in dealing with workplace discrimination cases. From a law perspective, Crenshaw details that specifically in discrimination cases, Black women are often excluded from sexist and antiracist policies because these policies do not consider the intersectional nature of these experiences. Crenshaw (2000) states, “Black women encounter a combined race and sex discrimination” and the justice system’s refusal to acknowledge the intersectional nature of these experiences “implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by White women’s and Black men’s experience” (p. 25). The experiences of Black women are often defined by the experiences of White women or Black men. These groups set the standard for how “women” and “Black people” are treated in various situations. Harris (2000) termed the standardization of these experiences “gender essentialism” and “race essentialism” in that these situations treat the “woman” and “Black” experience as a “monolithic” experience. Race and sex only becomes significant when they are viewed disadvantaged, and because Whiteness and maleness are privileged, this disadvantage often goes unnoticed. This nuanced theory (Harris, 2000) assumes that all women and Black people have the same or similar experiences. While there are commonalities in their experiences, Black women are qualitatively different than their White and male counterparts.

Collins (1990) expanded on this intersectionality theory by discussing the complex interconnections of advantages and disadvantages based on their positioning in race, class, and gender categories. For example, while maleness is particularly privileged in socio-cultural settings, all males do not enjoy the same privileges (Morris, 2007). Black males may not experience the same privileges that their White male or female counterparts experience. In this

instance, both race and gender play a role in the meaning and role that either play in social situations.

Intersectionality not only explains how these social identities operate in relation to one another, but the term also explains how those intersectional identities can leave some groups oppressed (Harrison, 2015). According to Harrison (2015), intersectionality is rarely used to discuss the experiences of Black youth, but can be helpful “illuminating how the intersection of various cultural constructions can reproduce racial and gender hierarchies and disparities among youth” (p. 4). These intersectional theories translate to the educational experiences of Black girls as the expectation for Black girls is frequently compared to their white female and Black male counterparts (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). With educational research focusing most of their studies to the experiences of Black boys, the experiences of Black girls are often left silenced with the monolithic assumption that the Black experience is a collective experience. While some research has shown that Black girls, particularly in predominately minority schools, are particularly high achieving students, many teachers question their manners and behavior (Morris, 2007). Early feminist research on the education of Black girls has shown that males (both Black and White) dominate the attention of teachers, while Black girls were struggling with passiveness and low self-esteem (Fordham, 1993). More recent research is showing that more Black girls are resisting the passiveness associated with femininity and are embracing a different, yet strong ideology of femininity (Morris, 2007; Winters & Esposito, 2010).

The history of racism and sexism of Black women. The devaluation and degrading stereotypes of Black girls/women and their bodies has a long tradition dating back to slavery in the United States. While on the plantation, Black women were expected to take on traditionally masculine roles as they were expected to work alongside the men in the fields (Davis, 1981). The

reverse was not true for Black men as they were not expected to take on traditionally feminine roles. In addition to the association of Black women with masculinity, Black women were also subjected to *institutional sexism* where it was socially acceptable to sexually exploit Black women (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1982). The devaluation of Black women became a permanent ideology in Americans and continued to shape the social status of Black women throughout Reconstruction. Ideologies of femininity have evolved and become more associated with White women and traditional family values (i.e., the cult of true womanhood), all the while Black women have been longing to appear more feminine and lady-like, similar to their White female counterparts. The *cult of true womanhood* reflected four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Collins, 1990). Black women tried to dispel the stereotypes of Black female masculinity and sexuality by trying to adopt the mannerisms of White women; however, their efforts were unsuccessful (hooks, 1982). The devaluation of Black women continued as Black women were mocked for cleaning and dressing up and continuously raped and met with other controlling images (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1982).

Stereotypes and controlling images of Black women. Following the ideologies behind slavery, the dominant group constructed controlling images of Black womanhood that both justified the subordination of Black womanhood and masked the social relations of all women (Collins, 1990). These controlling stereotypes reflect the following: (1) the maternal and family oriented mammy (2) emasculating, but nurturing matriarch (3) the lazy welfare mother, and (4) the hypersexed Jezebel. The controlling image of the hypersexed Jezebel is particularly important when studying adolescent Black girls as the treatment of Black girls in their school environment is reflected of the politics surrounding their bodies as Black girls are often viewed as “hypersexualized, aggressive, and loud” all of which do not reflect the ideology of

“conventional femininity” (Collins, 1990; Harrison, 2015; hooks, 1982). The jezebel, is a sexually aggressive woman with an excessive sexual appetite. The sapphire, a character first presented in the popular television show *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, builds from the image of the Jezebel and is viewed as loud, crude, and callous and a woman who took pleasure in emasculating men (Townsend, Thomas, Neiland, & Jackson, 2010). The modern image of the Jezebel is viewed as “hypersexual, materialistic, and controlling” and is probably the most salient stereotypical image for Black girls in popular media (Townsend et al., 2010). According to Collins (1990) these images reflect the White male interest in creating controlling images of Black women’s motherhood, sexuality, work ethic, and fertility. Not only do these images help construct these ideologies, the images help “justify the social practices that characterize the matrix of domination in the United States” (Collins, 1990, p. 84). Though most Black girls do not fit these stereotypes, these controlling images have become engrained in the psyche of Americans and impact the social interactions of Black girls. Black women often find themselves fighting against these oppressive images and against becoming objectified as the *other* in society (Collins, 1990). The images impact how Black girls portray themselves as women, mothers, academics, or any other part of their identity and can have detrimental effects on their mental health (Bell, 2004).

The controlling stereotypes of Black women prompt them to develop a sense of strength and self-determination (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). This strength and self-determination often comes from other members of their community, particularly other Black women who aim at developing protective identities against the dominant, controlling images and the sexual exploitation. Arising out of these protective identities are modernized stereotypes of the Superwoman and the Strong Black Woman and present women as “strong, tough, resilient, and self-sufficient” (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011, p. 532).

Following both the negative and strong stereotypes placed on Black girls, the *loud Black girls* is a stereotype formed out of the controlling images as previously discussed by Collins (1990) that continually marginalize and characterize Black girls as loud and aggressive. Fordham (1993) discusses the *loud Black girls* stereotype as an example of the diversity of gender construction in the US and a means to demean and suppress that diversity. Fordham (1993) presents *loud Black girls* not only as a stereotype, but as a means for Black women to render themselves visible in contexts where they would be otherwise invisible. The stereotype of the *loud Black girl* has had a significant impact on how Black girls are perceived and treated within their educational settings. *Loud Black girls* are often deemed to be loud and uneducable, a direct contrast to traditional ideas of femininity as being docile and delicate. This ideology impacts how Black girls are viewed in the classroom and often results in harsher discipline. Morris (2007) found that schools often projected those dominant ideologies of femininity onto Black girls in the classroom, projecting the idea that academically successful women were women who were passive and docile. While some teachers encourage outspoken and assertive characteristics as academically successful traits in Black girls, most teachers promote traditional ideas of femininity and thus “molding [Black girls] into less active learners” (Morris, 2007, p. 22). Additionally, teachers, while discouraging the behavior from Black girls, were encouraging the same behavior on White, middle class students thus further creating racial biases in how behaviors are presented and punished.

The effect of stereotyping on Black girls in school. Research involving the stereotyping of Black girls in school has been focused on the disciplinary actions taken against black girls and reasons behind those infractions (Annamma et al., 2016; Blake, 2011; Morris, 2007; Wallace et al., 2009). According to Wallace et al., (2009) Black girls are twice as likely to receive office

referrals or detainment than White girls and five times as likely to be expelled or suspended. Additionally, Black girls are more likely than White girls to be referred and arrested by law enforcement officers (Annamma et al., 2016). Once Black girls are involved in the criminal justice system, they are more likely to receive harsher sentences than White girls who have similar offences (Annamma et al., 2016). Research has shown that Black girls are specifically reprimanded due to gender specific ideologies associated with society (Morris, 2007). For example, Morris (2007) and Blake (2011) found that most of the violations that Black girls were cited for reflected the stereotypical images of Black girls being hypersexual, hostile, and angry; images that defy traditional standards of femininity. Morris (2007) found that the teachers in his sample thought that Black girls needed to learn more *lady-like* behaviors. The teachers would frequently instruct young Black women to act like a lady and instruct them on proper feminine mannerisms, dress, and speech. Similarly, Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg (2011) found that teachers often commented on the unlady like dress of Black female students. Blake et al., (2011) also found that Black girls were disproportionally sent to the office for physical aggression, defiance, and profanity. The researcher posits that the reason could be related to the societal view that aggression, defiance, and profanity are not representative of traditional standards of femininity.

Assumptions about Black girls are directly reflective of the aforementioned controlling images as discussed by Collins (1990). Black girls are often perceived to be angry, hostile, and loud with bad attitudes. This image of Black girls is directly related to the sapphire and angry Black woman stereotypes in that they are both viewed as un-lady like, domineering, and emasculating, similar to the comments that the teachers presented on Black girls' femininity. Additionally, Annama et al (2016) posit that Black girls are viewed as "dangerous and

threatening, stopping at nothing to get what they want” which is similar to the Welfare queen who is “dangerous and threatening” to governmental benefits (p. 21).

Popular Culture, Stereotypes of Black women/girls, and Black Sexual Politics

Popular culture such as hip-hop plays a vital role in the construction of identity for adolescence, particularly for Black girls (Muhummad & McArthur, 2015). Black girls are hypersexualized in the media, particularly within the music industry as Black women are portrayed as “hos and strippers” (Muhummad & McArthur, 2015, p. 138). Negative images impact the way in which Black girls view their woman/girlhood in that Black girls are consistently fighting against these images and struggling to be viewed as something other than objects. Adolescence is a critical period for identity development as youth in this age group are significantly more impacted by popular culture images during this time (Muhummad & McArthur, 2015). Black girls are one of the largest consumers of hip-hop popular media. The images projected in the media impact the identity of the consumers in constructing what it means to be a Black girl (Brown, 2009; Love, 2012; Pough, 2004). Research has shown that those who do not “successfully negotiate the identity formation process” may be more vulnerable to risky behaviors because they do not conform to what popular media has deemed “attractive” (Townsend et al., 2010).

Despite the focus on the negative sexual images projected in hip-hop, some research studies have shown that hip-hop can also serve as a sexually liberating experience (Carney, Hernandez, & Wallace, 2015). Carney, Hernandez, and Wallace (2015) discuss the formation of sexual knowledge and the moral panics that Black girls experience within hip-hop culture. These researchers particularly discuss the social discourse surrounding the term “lady” and its usage as a means to push heteronormativity and sexual respectability onto Black girls. Black girls who do

not conform to these societal standards are often consistently disciplined into those standards. Even some of the discourses surrounding Black feminism push for respectability politics as some Black feminists employ similar patriarchal respectability politics concerning Black girls (Carney, Hernandez, & Wallace, 2015).

The Emergence of Hip-Hop Feminism

As the culture of hip-hop began to take shape in U.S. culture, many women began to break away from the term “feminism” as it did not embody their changing ideologies surrounding Black womanhood, namely female sexuality. Many Black women were not “checkin for the f-word” as they believed that even the Black feminist ideologies did not embody the current struggles that they experienced in society. With the popularity of hip-hop in the 90s, the portrayal of Black women was different. Many of the Black feminists appeared to be disappointed with the lack of involvement from Black women in Black feminist movements and their disassociation with Black feminist thought. However, it is not that the new wave of Black feminists disassociated with the past Black feminist movement; in fact, many third wave Black feminists (e.g., Morgan, 1999; Springer, 2003) credit the past for their current privileges. However, the new generation of feminists brought in a new set of experiences that led to new forms of thought that accounted for the changing identities and environments of Black women (Peoples, 2008; Springer, 2003). Springer (2003), presumes that third wave feminism signals in a new batch of feminists, one that reflects the issues, values, and ideologies of the next generation.

Morgan (1999) was one of the first Black women to challenge the ideologies expressed in hip-hop and change the way feminism was expressed for the new generation for Black women. Morgan (1999) explored “Black women’s precarious relationship with feminism” (p. 52) by exploring the way feminism and some Black feminism are inherently disconnected from the

“round-the-way” girls. Morgan (1999) stated, “I wanted a feminism that would allow me to explore who we are as women—not victims. One that claimed the powerful richness and delicious complexities inherent in being Black girls now” (p. 56). Many women who came around the same time and after Morgan embodied the same ideas that she expressed and attempted to create a new generation of Black feminist thought which they called “hip-hop feminism.” Pough (2007) describes a hip-hop feminist as “someone who is immersed in hip-hop culture and experiences hip-hop as a way of life” Hip-hop as a culture, in turn, influences his or her worldview or approach to life” (p. 82).

While hip-hop was a space for activism, hip-hop was also a male-dominated space that reinforced the dominant ideologies of male patriarchy and the devaluation of Black women. While hip-hop was fighting against the socio-economic conditions of their communities, hip-hop struggled with the representation and visibility of women. Rap music, like the rest of hip-hop, was male dominated with the female rappers being few in its beginning stages. Female rappers were subjected to sexist stereotypes and determent from their participation and progression in rap. In early rap history, there were not many female rap groups/artists. Salt-N-Pepa is cited as the first major female rap group and artists such as MC Lyte, Roxanne Shante, and Queen Latifah paved the way for female solo artists in the mainstream. Female rappers, though judged by their femininity, sexuality, and sexual activity, brought strong, dominating attitudes to the rap scene, asserting themselves as independent women capable of, and could sometimes surpass, the lyricism of men. Some women (e.g., Lil’ Kim) used their sex appeal and femininity and appeal to the larger audience, while other women (e.g., Queen Latifah and Missy Elliot) refused to let gender stereotypes override their rap skills.

Black women tried to carve out a space for themselves within this privileged male space, but were often met with opposition from male artists, who rejected the female image in hip-hop (Rose, 1994). Female breakdances were visible, but not as dominant as the male dancers. While breaking crews such as Rock Steady Crew always had female representation, most of the breaking crews did not. Female breakers often suffered lack of exposure, social support, and male discouragement, all of which contributed to the underrepresentation of females in the breakdancing world (Rose, 1994). Many of the female breakers were subjected to male discouragement because men thought that many of the moves were perceived to be too masculine or too dangerous for the female body. The female breakers that broke those barriers were often subjected to moves such as popping and locking instead of breaking-specific moves such as the head spin or hand-glide (Rose, 1994). Though many female breakers tried to make their moves more feminine to counter the male criticism, the women were still subjected to sexist ideologies, as they were considered to be sexually promiscuous or being masculine for participating in breakdancing. Additionally, female graffiti artists made their presence known alongside their male counterparts in crews. In the early history of graffiti, two female artists were visible in the hip-hop scene, Lady Pink and Lady Heart (Rose, 1994). While these ladies and others were making strides to become visible in the graffiti scene, some male graffiti artists challenged their credibility and discouraged other female graffiti writers by spreading rumors about the sexual promiscuity of female graffiti writers (Rose, 1994). While some women in hip-hop were able to challenge traditional female images (e.g., MC Lyte and Queen Latifah), other women were subjected to reinforcing the sexualized image that men perceived Black women to be (e.g., Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown) (Peoples, 2008; Rose, 1994).

The ideologies surrounding hip-hop feminism are reflective of how the culture of hip-hop influences the identity of Black girls. Some research studies involving hip-hop focused on the violent nature of rap music while implying that the violence within hip-hop is responsible for the violence and aggression within the Black community (Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013; Squires, Kohn-Wood, Chavous, & Carter, 2006). Research involving Black girls and hip-hop emerged into the early 2000s with investigations into the risky behaviors (e.g., violence, sexual acts, and drug usage) of Black girls (Love, 2013). While research did not find a direct link between rap videos and risky behaviors, research studies did find that the more that Black girls interact with rap music, the greater their risk of engaging in risky behaviors (Wingood, DiClemente, Bernhardt, Harrington, Davies, Robillard, & Hook, 2003). Other research studies following Wingood et al. (2003) discuss how Black youth make meaning of hip-hop, particularly focusing on the role of stereotypes, Black sexual politics, and Black identity (Brown, 2009; Love, 2013; Pough, 2004;2007; Springer, 2003). Most of the research involving Black girls and these constructs found that Black girls as consumers of hip-hop culture are constantly negotiating and resisting Black female stereotypes within hip-hop. Hip-hop feminism provides Black girls with the space to continually challenge and negotiate those stereotypes. Not only does hip-hop feminism provide Black girls with this space, it also allows for Black women to do this using the elements of hip-hop.

The Education of Black Girls: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy

The research regarding pedagogical and school-based practices with Black girls is scarce (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). As previously stated, much of the educational research in disparities is focused on racial or gendered disparities, and not the intersectionality of those experiences (Evans-Winters, 2005). Researchers

such as Evans-Winters (2014) have investigated the role of resiliency in the education of Black girls. Resiliency is the ability to overcome or adjust to adversity or stressors within one's life. Research involving the education of Black girls has been specifically focused on how the promotion of resiliency strengthens their ability to deal with the issues of racism and sexism in addition to other social stressors (e.g., peer pressure, social acceptance, racial identity, and overall self-esteem and self-concept) (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; French, 2013).

However, how does one promote resilient behaviors within the classroom? Black and hip-hop feminists have explored how hip-hop can be used as a site for discovery, resiliency and identity for Black girls (Brown, 2009; Love, 2016). According to Love (2016), hip-hop as a pedagogical site creates a "space of healing for youth" (p. 414). Hip-hop feminists have brought "herstories of women who love, embrace, and are hip-hop" (p. 420). Hip-hop is a male dominated space that oftentimes reinforces the dominant ideologies of male patriarchy and the devaluation of Black women. From their journey, hip-hop feminists have created hip-hop feminist pedagogy (HHFP) (Brown, 2009; Love, 2012; Pough, 2004). HHFP is focused on creating counterstories for Black girls while simultaneously challenging the contradictions in the lives of Black girls (Brown & Kwakye, 2012 as cited in Love, 2016). Brown (2009)'s *Black Girlhood Celebration*, defines hip-hop feminist pedagogy:

"Hip-hop feminist pedagogy is one that: (1) appreciates creative production expressed through language, art, or activism, (2) privileges the in-betweenness of a Black girl epistemology or a Black feminist standpoint, (3) values and cares about the shared knowledge produced by Black women and girls presence, (4) interrogates the limitations and possibilities of hip-hop, feminism, and pedagogy and is, therefore, self-adjusting, (5)

stages the political through performance-based cultural criticism, (6) and is located and interpreted through the community (or communities) in which it is immersed” (p. 122). It is through HHFP that Black girls can “question, create, discuss, dance, perform, grapple with, and negotiate identity politics” (Love, 2016, p. 421) by *bringing wreck* and *fucking with the greys* (Peoples, 2008; Pough, 2004;2007; Morgan, 1999). *Bringing wreck* refers to challenging/critiquing dominant discourses surrounding women (Pough, 2004). The *bringing wreck* movement allows women to enjoy hip-hop, while simultaneously discussing and challenging the images of Black women that are present within hip-hop. Additionally, Morgan (1999) recognizes that there are grey areas within hip hop. Despite the inherent misogynoir and sexual objectifying images of Black women within hip-hop, one thing remains constant, Black women still love hip-hop. Morgan (1999) challenges the idea that feminism is a monolithic movement with the focus of fighting against stereotypes and patriarchal standards. She posits that there are some women who embrace the idea of male dominance in some areas in their life. Instead of rejecting the women who do embrace those standards, she pushes for a feminism that allows women to create their own standards.

Using Culture to Inform Knowledge Beliefs

One of the trends throughout the HHBE, HHFP, and other hip-hop based studies is the role that hip-hop plays in knowledge construction. However, what kinds of knowledges are being discussed within these frameworks? A recently added element of hip-hop culture focuses on the “knowledge of self.” Afrika Bambaataa, credited as one of the founding fathers of hip-hop, has defined “knowledge of self” as forming knowledges of oneself using the elements of hip-hop to create positive change with one’s self and their community (Love, 2013). This element discusses the importance of the role of identity in knowledge construction in that Bambaataa encourages

understanding who you are as a Black person in relation to your history and the collective experiences of those that have similar identities (Love, 2016). Knowledge of one's self prepares Black people as they encounter racism and sexism that exists within the psyche of U.S. society, a racism that permeates the larger institutional structures within U.S. society, particularly within education.

Much of the research within hip-hop and HHBE has focused on how Black youth construct their identities and make meaning from hip-hop texts (Dimitriadis, 2001; Clay, 2003; Love, 2012;2013). For example, Dimitriadis (2001) demonstrated that Black males used hip-hop as a mechanism for constructing their identity and sense of community and family (Dimitriadis, 2001; Love, 2013). Additionally, Love (2013) found Black boys recognized the images portrayed within hip-hop demonstrated the racial issues present within the Black community. As for Black women/girls, much of the research focuses on how the degrading and sexualized images within hip-hop impacts Black women/girls' identity development (Stephen & Phillips, 2003). As previously stated, research has found that when Black women/girls are provided with a space to evaluate and critique how they are represented within hip-hop and popular culture, they are able to successfully negotiate those identities and create a healthy identity, knowledges, and worldviews (Brown, 2009).

Following the research within hip-hop and feminism, the role of identity is important in one's construction of knowledge (Clay, 2003; Dimitriadis, 2001; Love 2013). However, research in hip-hop does not focus on the intricate connection between one's identity, their view of reality, and how one draws conclusions about truth, reality, authority, and knowledge. Identity is a multidimensional process that includes one's core sense of self (e.g., one's personal identity) and multiple rotating dimensions and contextual influences on one's identity [e.g., sociocultural

conditions, current experience, and family background. (Jones & McEwen, 2000)]. The interrelationship of these dimensions is essential in understanding how one constructs knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Black feminist, hip-hop feminist, and other hip-hop literatures have shown that a person's racialized and gendered social experiences are essential in one's identity development and epistemologies (e.g., Collins, 1990; Dimitriadis, 2001). However, bodies of knowledge have focused on how racial and gender experiences influence overall theories of knowledge (i.e., epistemologies). How one negotiates their experiences and reconciles their identity is a personal, individualized experience that leads to individual beliefs about knowledge and knowing (i.e., personal epistemology).

Overview of Personal Epistemology

Personal epistemology reflects one's belief about knowledge and knowing (Hofer, 2000). Though the term epistemology has long been investigated in fields such as philosophy and sociology, the focus on the individual beliefs about knowledge is a recent phenomenon in educational research (Hofer, 2000). Educational research studies have shown that one's personal epistemic beliefs can impact their academic beliefs, outcomes and behaviors (Hofer, 2001; Muis, 2004). Personal epistemology has also been linked to cognitive development, metacognition, decision making, and conceptual change (Schommer, 1990; Braten & Stromso, 2004; King & Kitchener, 2004). Epistemological beliefs become an integral part of one's life-long learning process as individuals (re)evaluate information from their environments based on their epistemic beliefs (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Perry, 1970; Hofer, 2008).

According to Hofer and Pintrich (1997), there are two dimensions of personal epistemology: the nature of knowledge (one's belief about knowledge) and the process of

knowing (how one comes to know). Nature of knowledge is divided into the two dimensions: certainty of knowledge and simplicity of knowledge. Certainty of knowledge reflects the belief that knowledge is either certain or evolving, whereas the simplicity of knowledge reflects whether knowledge consists of facts that are readily knowable or is contextual. The process of knowing is also divided into the two dimensions: source and justification of knowledge. The source of knowledge refers to who (or what) an individual looks to for knowledge acquisition. Justification of knowledge refers to how individuals evaluate knowledge claims.

Culture and Personal Epistemology

Key developmental theories related to an individual's personal epistemology have progressed in the last 30 years; however, many theories have been constructed using non-diverse samples. Current conceptualizations of personal epistemology have been created using predominately U.S. college student samples with initial research on this construct completed using a White, male sample from Harvard University (Hofer, 2008; Perry, 1970). Though research studies like *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) offered some insight into the gendered development of beliefs about knowledge and knowing, the results of the study do not account for the depth of the raced and classed experiences of the participants in the sample. Many research studies (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2004; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Hofer, 2008) have cited this lack of investigation into culture as one of the many limitations of personal epistemology research, but not many studies have tackled this limitation. Hofer and Pintrich (1997) discussed the overwhelming focus on US samples in personal epistemology research. They note that the frameworks drawn from the research are shaped by cultural beliefs and that the frameworks in personal epistemology thus far may only be reflective of US culture.

Schommer (2002) also discusses the need to investigate culture because the differences in the structure of personal epistemology may also reflect cultural differences in knowledge.

Baxter Magolda (2004) has cited the work of Vygotsky (1978) to justify investigation into the role of culture in epistemic development. Vygotsky has documented the significant influence of the sociocultural environment on the cognitive development by emphasizing the role of scaffolding and culture in the learning process and the role of cultural tools of a community in the facilitation of learning. Baxter Magolda (2004) emphasizes the role of the self as the meaning-maker. Similar to Vygotsky's theory on the role of culture in cognitive development, Baxter Magolda (2004) posits that the meaning that one constructs depends on their worldviews, current and conflicting assumptions, and the context in which that experience occurs. This conceptualization points to the impact of culture and the interconnecting role of both internal and external factors in the meaning-making process.

Muis et al. (2006) and Jehng et al. (1993) also cited Vygotsky and the impact of culture on personal epistemological development. Muis et al. (2006) emphasize the environmental context as being the core behind epistemic development. These researchers discuss the role of cognitive development and environmental demands in epistemic development by situating epistemic development within three specific contexts: (1) the larger societal context, (2) the academic context, and (3) the instructional context. Jehng et al. (1993) discuss the role of enculturation in the epistemic process. These researchers acknowledge that epistemic development develops out of the surrounding culture and is the "by-product" of social contexts (Jehng et al., 1993; Muis et al., 2006).

Personal Epistemology and Women

Though personal epistemology has been shown to be one of the most influential sources for knowledge development, the cross-cultural conceptualization of this construct is still in need of further investigation (Hofer, 2008). Research in personal epistemology has primarily been conducted in White, middle- to high- class samples in the United States (US); therefore, most of the theories and frameworks discussing epistemic development are only generalizable to those samples. Black Americans have experiences with racism, sexism, classism, all of which may lead to differing beliefs about knowledge and knowing. As previously stated, hip-hop provides people of color with a space to discuss and critique representations of Blackness and, in the case of women, womanness and how these representations of Blackness and womanness influence their overall identity development and thus theories and beliefs about knowledge.

How one (re)constructs knowledge is the result of cognitive dissonance (Piaget, 1932; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Cognitive dissonance is described as the result of reconstructing knowledge due to presentation of new information. According to Torres and Baxter-Magolda (2004) cognitive dissonance is at the core of identity development and prompts movement from one way of knowing to another. For Black women/girls, cognitive dissonance appears to be constant as Black women/girls are charged with constantly negotiating society's views of Black womanness and their own construction. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) explored what the experience of cognitive dissonance looks like for women and how women's identity and knowledges are intertwined with each other. Following Perry's scheme of personal epistemology development, Belenky et al. (1986) extended his work to include the perspectives of women from diverse backgrounds. These researchers included the role of sources of knowledge and truth as foundations for knowledge construction for women

(Hofer, 2001). Belenky et al. (1986) proposed a scheme that focused more on one's self as the knower and demonstrated that, for women, their self-concept and ways of knowing are intertwined. Additionally, women are more likely to "struggle to claim the power of their own minds" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 3). With the historic marginalization of women in history and the underrepresentation of women as authority figures or experts in various domains, women often find that their experiences, thoughts, and perspectives are silenced. Belenky et al. (1986) posit that including women from diverse backgrounds not only allows them to consider their own subjectivities but to also examine academic injustices by investigating the perspectives of women who were privileged and subjected to educational inequalities.

Women's Ways of Knowing

Women's Ways of Knowing follows five positions: silence, received knowing, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986).

Silence. The first position, silence, reflects women feelings of voicelessness, denial of self, and the dependence on external authorities for guidance. Women who fall in the silent position believe that authorities are "all-powerful" and "all-knowing" (Belenky et al., 1986). Men are viewed as active and responsible for getting things done while women are passive, subdued and dependent on men. Clinchy (2002) posits that this silence is the result of a background of isolation, rejection, poverty, and subordination. She also posits that "silence" should not be viewed as the first stage in a developmental sequence, but rather as the direct result of some disconnectedness between one's self and society.

Received knowing. The second position, received knowing, involves thinking in binaries and beliefs that the world is Black and white. Truth lies in the hands of external authorities, who are perceived to be experts in various domains. In contrast to those who are silenced, those who

are received knowers understand the power of another's words and believe that words are central to the learning process (Belenky et al., 1986). Additionally, those who are received knowers believe that all knowledge originates outside of the self and rely on others for self-knowledge and self-definition.

Subjective knowledge. The third position is subjective knowledge; it reflects the recognition of multiple perspectives and the belief that every perspective is "personal and individual" (Clinchy, 2002, p. 69). In Belenky et al., (1986)'s sample of women who ranged in age from 16-60 and were from various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, these knowers were women who were not described as privileged and were from homes that were unstable and not as supportive or achievement oriented. These knowers blocked out the conflicting opinions of others, and began to view themselves as having a voice within themselves. Truth is then reflected in their experiences and their "gut" instincts (Belenky et al., 1986; Clinchy, 2002). The idea about what constitutes "authority" undergoes a shift in that authority is no longer viewed as an external phenomenon, but rather internal as women develop their own voice. This newfound voice leads women on a journey of redefinition in which women act on their own beliefs about truth and create new rules and boundaries in their relationships (Belenky et al., 1986).

Procedural knowers. Procedural knowers acknowledge that there are multiple sources of knowledge present and understand that knowledge is a process that requires the comparing of differing viewpoints. The validity of the knowledge from the differing viewpoints thus "depends on the skill of the knower" (Clinchy, 2002, p. 73). Therefore, procedural knowers seek to understand the perspectives of others through listening and evaluation. There are two modes of procedural knowledge: separate and connected knowers (Belenky et al., 1986). Separate knowers

focus more on the critical analysis of varying perspectives without including personal feelings and experiences. In contrast, connected knowers acknowledge the role of context and experience in the development of knowledge. Most procedural knowers Belenky et al., (1986) sample were characterized as privileged, White college students. Finally, constructed knowing reflects the idea that all knowledge is constructed with the self being an integral part of its construction and is thus viewed as contextual and relative and is consistently changing.

Intersectionality, Black women and Personal Epistemology

Recognizing the intersectional nature of knowledge, Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky (1996) edited *Knowledge, Difference, and Power*, a book of essays reflecting the changes and new knowledge that was created out of *Women's Ways of Knowing*. The purpose of this book was to expand the argument of knowledge from a gendered experience to include the intersectional nature of race, class, and culture. Bing and Reid (1996) describe the inherent silencing of women of color in psychology and how theories of personal epistemology can approach theories of knowledge and knowing by acknowledging the barriers to knowing that communities of color may experience. Just like Crenshaw (2000), Bing and Reid (1996) acknowledge that Black women have the burden of dealing with both racism and sexism. Though *Women's Ways of Knowing* attempts to control for the role of race and class, Bing and Reid (1996) contend that more work still needs to be done to further understand the differences that can occur across racial and class lines. These researchers posit that it is necessary to examine culturally derived power relations to understand how Black women view the world. Although Black women tend to be powerful and are stereotypically considered to be the matriarch of their families, Black women undergo an “ever-shifting socio-cultural context” in which their power is

stripped in larger sociopolitical settings (Bing & Reid, 1996, p. 178). It is within this power-shift that Black women construct their knowledge or experiences changes in their worldviews.

Women's ways of knowing and Black women. Goldberger (1996) extended the results of *Women's Ways of Knowing* to build knowledge about the knowledge and meaning making process for persons of color. Her analysis reveals that persons of color, particularly Black women, discuss the process of adaptation to or resistance from the majority culture norms. For example, Goldberger discusses the complexities of silence for Black women. Living in a country in which "womanness" is considered to be White and female, Black women practice a form of resistance to silence in which they refuse to conform to those standards and choose to speak out about injustices in their environment. Though some of these "loud Black girls" are academically successful, most of them are deemed academic underachievers. This has led to some Black women to adopt silence and passing as an academic strategy. In other words, some Black women adopt mannerisms that are similar to that of White femaleness, being silent and passive (Goldberger, 1996). Additionally, silence for Black women is oftentimes contextually bound in that knowledge and speech exhibited in immediate contexts (e.g., familial and community contexts) are different than those experienced in distant contexts (e.g., political). In contrast to silence, Black women in the received knowledge category discuss the importance of God and the Black church. For Black women, God as an authority coexists with their sense of self (Goldberger, 1996). Goldberger (1996) states that "God [is] someone who listens as well as directs and dictates" (p. 348). Following Received Knowledge, Subjective Knowledge for Black women is expressed through what Goldberger (1996) describes as "body knowledge." This type of knowledge is reflected in body cues, metaphors, and experiences that reflect personal authority. For Black women, this type of knowledge can be reflected in the "gut feeling" or the

experience of street knowledge (Goldberger, 1996). Finally, *Women's Ways of Knowing* discussed the knowledge perspective of constructed knowing. Black women and other marginalized groups develop a way of knowing that reflects their experiences with marginality and life struggles. Knowledge and knowing for these groups become a “matter of strategy and survival” and constructed knowing for these groups reflects the flexibility of knowledge and the ability to understand when a way of knowing is appropriate. This requires considering the influence of cultural and political perspectives as well as intellectual and ethical perspectives.

Black Feminist Epistemology: An Alternative Epistemology

Considering the dehumanizing and discriminatory treatment that Black women experienced for both their race and gender, Collins (1990), postulated a Black feminist epistemology that reflected how Black women perceive their world in relation to these experiences. Most of the theories and ideologies that have been constructed about knowledge reflect the ideas and experiences of Elite, White men. People of color and women have had experiences that essentially have been excluded from what counts as knowledge (Collins, 1990). The word epistemology represents an overarching theory of knowledge and becomes the standard by which one assesses knowledge and views the world around them. Our experiences directly impact epistemological trajectories of who one believes to be an authority regarding knowledge, how we justify knowledge claims, and how we construct our knowledge base (Collins, 1990; Hofer, 2000).

Knowledge is evaluated by a group of experts who bring with them their experiences, ideologies, and privileges and these experts must hold largely held beliefs about their topic. The issue with this knowledge process is that Elite, White men often hold these expert positions in the academy with little to no Black women in positions of authority or power. These men often

do not understand the knowledges that are brought in by Black female experts and often rely on their ideologies and privileges when evaluating knowledge claims made by Black female experts. Relying on these sometimes-oppressive ideologies can suppress opposing ideologies presented by Black women. Collins (1990), states that “because Black women have been denied positions of authority, they often relied on alternative knowledge validation processes to generate competing knowledge claims” (p. 254).

A Four-Dimensional Model of Black Feminist Epistemology

Collins (1990) proposes that Black women possess an alternate epistemology and standard for assessing truth that contrasts widely held beliefs about knowledge. This Black feminist epistemology consists of collective experiences and worldviews that are based on their history. Collins (1990) proposes a four-dimensional model that reflects a collective Black feminist epistemology: (1) knowledge and wisdom (2) use of dialogue (3) ethics of care and (4) ethics of personal accountability. The knowledge dimension of BFT relies on lived experience. Collins (1990) posits that “living life as Black women requires wisdom essential to U.S. Black women’s survival” (p. 257). In other words, Black women rely on these lived experiences to construct their knowledge and wisdom regarding the status of Black women in society and how to survive living within that social status. Black women privilege *lived experience* more than an outsider, who has only read about the experiences of Black women; thus, those with lived experiences are deemed as credible when making knowledge claims. Additionally, Black women assess knowledge through the collective process of dialogue. Similar to Belenky et al. (1986), Collins (1990) posits that connectedness in the construction of knowledge is pertinent rather than under isolation. Using dialogue to construct knowledge validates the experiences of Black women and provides them with a space to think through their experiences. The ethics of care

reflects the ideology that Black women rely on their personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy when they are constructing or validating knowledge claims (Collins, 1990). In other words, *Black Feminist Thought* not only relies on the lived experiences of themselves and others, but the emotions that they invest in those experiences. Not only are Black women collectively constructing their knowledge claims, they must also be held accountable for their knowledge claims. One's knowledge claims reflect their core ideologies, beliefs, and character. Knowledge claims reflecting one's ethical and moral beliefs are thus more respected.

The Culture of Hip-Hop, Black girls, and Personal Epistemology

Embedded within Black culture is the culture of hip-hop. Hip-hop is a culture that includes rap music, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling, and deejaying (Petchauer, 2009). This culture served as socio-political platform that fought against the social problems that plagued communities of color, a source of identity development, and a mechanism by which Black people learned the customs of their culture (Petchauer, 2009). Not only did hip-hop serve as a socio-political platform, hip-hop served as a narrative into the lives of people of color. Rap music is a narrative describing "the shifting terms of Black marginality in contemporary American culture" (Rose, 1994, p. 3).

Though hip-hop is considered to be a narrative into the lives of Black people, hip-hop is a male-dominated space that did not consider the experiences of Black women and frequently reinforced controlling images of Black women (Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013; Hill Collins, 1990; Morgan, 1999). Hip hop feminists such as Morgan (1999) and Pough (2007) present hip hop as a space for intellectual, identity, and knowledge development for Black women. These researchers discuss the different representations of women in hip hop and how those representations impact the worldviews and epistemologies of Black women. Morgan (1999) and

Pough (2007) particularly focus on the issue of sexual exploitation of Black women in hip hop and the fact that some women choose this path for themselves or choose to reaffirm sexual stereotypes presented within hip-hop.

For Black girls, hip-hop becomes a space of identity development and social critique as narratives created by and for them are underrepresented. The hip-hop educational initiatives are spaces where these aspects of development can take place as participants are tasked with evaluating information from their culture about themselves and their worldviews. The classroom then becomes a space where Black girls negotiate the messages that they receive within hip-hop, their educational environment, and their community and construct their own meanings of Black girlhood. Considering the space and (re)evaluation of the information received from their environment, hip-hop and hip-hop educational initiatives also become a space for personal epistemology development. It is within this space that Black girls are identifying and negotiating experts and authorities regarding their knowledge about themselves and the world around them as well as finding justification for those knowledges.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this research study was to: (1) understand how Black girls in a low-income, predominately Black school in an urban environment negotiated their racial and gender identities through their perceived participation with hip-hop (including rap, graffiti, and dance) in their everyday lives and within an after-school hip-hop based program and (2) understand how the culture of hip-hop and the negotiation of their racial and gendered identities (i.e., what it means to be Black and a woman) influences their worldviews and their personal epistemology. Based on research in culturally relevant pedagogy, hip-hop based education (HHBE), and Black and hip-hop feminisms, hip-hop is a site for identity discovery (e.g., Clay (2003) and Love (2012; 2013)) and can be used as a site for knowledge discovery and acquisition (Muis, Bendixen, & Harale, 2006; Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2009). While research has shown the benefits of hip-hop educational initiatives, little is known about the cultural connection that Black youth, particularly Black girls have with hip-hop (Petchauer, 2009). The following research questions guided my research within this program: (1) What role does hip-hop play in the lives of Black girls? (2) How does hip-hop inform gender and racial identity for Black girls? (3) How do Black girls negotiate their gender identities within hip-hop? (4) How does hip-hop inform Black girl's personal epistemologies and worldviews? The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology methods, site, participants, and analysis of this study. This chapter connects the tenets of Black and hip-hop feminisms to the methodology of narrative inquiry and demonstrates how the participants, the site, and the community are being honored through the storied narratives gathered through narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Both Black and hip-hop feminist studies have demonstrated the centrality of hip hop, racism and sexism in the lived experiences of young Black girls (Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013). To understand how Black girls', bring meaning to these experiences, research studies can utilize a methodology that privileges their narratives. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that is focused on the storied experience of its participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry researchers describe this methodology as a collaborative experience between participant and researcher as they travel through the storied lives together, (re)constructing their past, present, and future experiences into that of a narrative. These storied experiences take place "over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Narrative Inquiry: A Three-Dimensional Framework

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) describe narrative inquiry as consisting of three "commonplaces." According to these researchers, narrative inquiry takes place in three spaces: interaction, continuity, and situation. The interaction dimension refers to the personal and social aspects of a person's experience. It is important to pay attention to the social conditions through which a person describes their experience. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) state that "by social conditions they draw attention to the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context" (p. 23). Not only should we pay attention to the social context that surrounds the participant, but Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that the relationship between the participant and the researcher are an important part of the research process. When we do narrative work, we work within a space in which the stories are being (re)constructed with the

participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that “our own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as much as do those of our participants” (p.62). Though it is the participant that is telling the story, it is the researcher’s job to re-tell the story, which can make us visible within our own lived and told stories. Continuity, a term borrowed from Dewey, refers to the past, present, and future experiences. Following the continuous, constructive nature of Dewey, experiences are building from each other. A person’s experience is not an isolated, solitary experience, but is always happening within the space of other people, places, and events. Finally, place refers to concrete events or situations in which the experience takes place. Within narrative inquiry, researchers should realize that these stories are “fluid, co-constructed, meaning-centered reproductions and performances of experience achieved in the context of relationships and subject to negotiable frames of intelligibility and the desire for continuity and coherence over time” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 203).

Social and personal interactions. Interaction reflects the personal and social aspects of a person’s experience. It is important to pay attention to the social conditions thorough which a person describes their experience. The personal aspect of the person’s experience involves the feelings, hopes and desires of the participant and the one that is doing the inquiring.

Collins (1990) discusses how Black women/girls encounter controlling images that are designed to define and add meaning to the lives of Black women/girls. However, Black women/girls’ work, school, and family experiences often contradict the controlling images that are engrained in America’s psyche. The personal aspect of narrative inquiry will tackle the feelings that Black girls have about these controlling images and how they negotiate these images within their identity. Collins (1990) posits that for individual women “resolving contradictions of this magnitude takes considerable strength” (p. 100). The images impact how

Black women portray themselves as women, mothers, academics, or any other part of their identity and can have detrimental effects on their mental health. The way these images impact the mental health of Black girls is through the prevailing standards of beauty that society projects onto Black girls (Collins, 1990). Similar to the “cult of true womanhood” of the late 1800s and early 1900s, the prevailing standards of beauty reflect traditional white features as lighter skinned Black women with finer hair receiving more acceptable treatment than their darker skinned counterparts. These privileges have caused an array of changes in the Black beauty community with many Black women experimenting with methods to make their hair straighter and skin lighter. To combat these stereotypes, many Black women fight to resist being classified as a “stereotype.” For example, Black adolescent girls, who are often characterized as hostile and aggressive, are consistently fighting against the “loud Black girl stereotype” and becoming increasingly academically resilient and successful (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2007; Muhammad & Dixon, 2008). The constant combatting of stereotypes demonstrates the narrative inquiry tenet of social and personal interactions in that Black girls are interacting with their social environment by reacting to stereotypes surrounding their identities.

Situation. When doing narrative inquiry research, it is important to recognize that all the participants’ storied narratives take place at a specific, concrete time and place (Clandinin, 2013). As narrative inquirers, it is important to understand the role of place, as the interactions and continuity are inexplicably linked to the place in which the events take place. Black and hip-hop feminists are consistently discussing the role of “place” within their narratives and research. Crenshaw (1982) frequently discusses the role of the workplace in the understanding the intersectional nature of racism and sexism for Black women. Many companies have looked at whether women or Black people were being discriminated against and did not consider that both

racism and sexism could take place at the same time for Black women. For Black girls, the classroom setting is a space where their voices are continually silenced with White boys and girls being given the educational and disciplinary benefit and Black girls receiving more educational doubt and harsher disciplinary practices (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2007; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). The classroom and any other racist and patriarchal structures provide an interesting space for Black girls as it impacts their interactions with their environment and how those interactions dictate present and future behaviors. Evaluating these spaces and situations fulfills narrative inquiry's evaluation of place in that it provides prospective surrounding their identities, behaviors, and ideologies.

Continuity. Continuity refers to the past, present, and future experiences. Narrative inquiry methodologists believe that our experiences are constructive and continuous, building from each other as we learn within our environments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A person's experience is not an isolated, solitary experience, but is always happening within the space of other people, places, and events.

One of the premises of both Black and hip-hop feminisms is to reflect on the past, not just in their own personal past, but in the collective past of the Black women before them. As previously discussed, hip-hop feminists frequently credit the movements before them as granting them the opportunities to challenge and critique dominant ideologies. Researching into the past collective experiences of Black women will inevitably lead to a discussion of how those past experiences impacts the present and future endeavors of Black women/girls. For example, Morgan (1999) frequently discussed her past experiences with racism and sexism as she began to construct her hip-hop feminist ideology. In her hip-hop feminism chapter, Morgan reflects on her thoughts and feelings as she watched the Million Man march. She discusses how her feminism is

different than her other feminist counterparts. She wasn't mad and respected the "sanctity of male and female space" (p. 52). That's when she discovered that her feminism did not fit neatly into a space which prompted her to discover a feminism that explored the complexity of "Black womanhood," not in opposition to patriarchal ideologies, but that allowed her to embrace her own feminist standards. In this narrative example, Morgan is demonstrating how her personal past feelings and knowledge impacted her current endeavor of pursuing her own hip-hop feminist thought. Narrative inquiry would borrow from this perspective in that it would inquire about the past experience of themselves and their ancestors and how that past experience shapes their present beliefs, feelings, and behaviors and prepares them for their future endeavors.

The Narrative Identity Thesis

Not only do our narratives focus on (re)creating storied events, narratives reflect the identities that we have for ourselves. The *narrative identity thesis* reflects the ideology that our identity is constructed through our narratives. Our identities are shaped through the social interactions that we have with our world and our narratives are the result of those social interactions. Our narratives are henceforth constructed with our family, cultural and ethnic history and how those elements constitute social interaction and thus our identities. Black and hip-hop feminists rely heavily on the family, cultural, and ethnic history. Collins (1990) posits that the Black family is the cornerstone of Black life. Black families teach the newer generation the values and customs associated with their experiences of being Black. Additionally, the cultural and ethnic history associated with being a Black woman significantly shapes the storied narratives of Black women. Black women often rely on how Black womanhood was previously constructed. Black feminists and hip-hop feminists are continuing the work of a history of Black feminists (Springer, 2003). hooks (1982) details the history of the devaluation of Black women

of color by starting with how slaves were treated when brought to America and using this historical framework to demonstrate the continued ideology of the devaluation of Black womanhood as becoming ingrained in American ideology. Hip-hop feminism, as a third wave feminism, “credits previous generations for women-centered social and political advances” (Springer 2003; p. 1063). New generations of hip-hop feminists recognize the gains of social movements such as the Civil Rights movement as providing them with “feminist privilege” and bringing both racism and sexism into conversations of equality and the construction of womanhood. Both Black and hip-hop feminists use this storied past to construct their storied narratives reflecting their current reality.

Field Texts as a Narrative Inquiry Source of Data

Field texts reflect the nature in which narrative inquirers gain access to the narratives of their participants. As stated before, the purpose of the field text is to bridge together the stories of the participant. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), central to the field texts is the relationship between the participant and the researcher. Researcher relationships with the participants “shape the nature of the field texts and establish the epistemological status of them” (p. 94). In other words, what the participant chooses to tell and how it is told is determined by the relationship between the researcher and the participant and the field texts are co-constructed. Therefore, the researcher journaling is essential for the narrative inquiry process. For Black women doing research with Black girls, journaling provides the research process with insightfulness; not only into the experience of the participant, but how the experience of the participant influences the how the researcher views and interprets the research data. Black and hip-hop feminists who use narrative inquiry work can use journaling as a field text to understand

how the institutions of racism and sexism impact other Black women and how those experiences continually shape the worldviews of both the researcher and the participants.

In addition to the researcher journaling and creating a relationship with the participant, narrative inquirers should use multiple field texts and each field text should complement each other to bring together a complete storied narrative for the participant's experience. These field texts work through the three-dimensional space as they situate the narrator and reader to the time and place, while detailing social and personal interactions within that space. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) detail an array of field texts that can be used to do narrative inquiry research. Central to the Black and hip-hop feminist theories are the reliance on conversations and interviews with other Black women/girls to gain an understanding about their experience. Morgan (1999), Springer (2003), Pough (2007) all discuss conversations and interviews that they have had with other feminists about their personal and social experiences and how those experiences shape their feminist ideologies. Therefore, to complete Black and hip-hop feminist work using a narrative inquiry methodology, both conversations and interviews can be used as field texts. Using those together not only works with the narrative inquiry, but allows the researcher to build a comprehensive narrative reflecting the thoughts, feelings, and reasoning behind the experiences and behaviors of the participant. Additionally, conversation and interviews allow for the researcher to build relationships with the participant and allow for a collective bonding of experiences.

Summary

This Black and hip-hop feminist research study will employ a narrative inquiry methodology to obtain and honor the storied lives of Black girls. To obtain those stories, this study will use the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework that focuses on participant's

time (continuity), place (situation) and interaction. This research study will discuss instances related to how their past experiences and the experiences of Black women before them created a path for their present and future endeavors as Black girls and future Black women both in education and their community. Additionally, the researcher will focus on how place, particularly the educational, home, community, and peer spaces, allow for their development within the culture of hip-hop, identity, and epistemologically. Finally, this research study will investigate how Black girls interact with the culture of hip-hop, their peers within the culture of hip-hop, and their surrounding environment based on the messages that they receive from hip-hop culture.

Methods

Following the methodology of narrative inquiry and the traditions of Black and hip-hop feminism, I chose to honor the stories of the girls in my study by using the following sources of data: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and researcher journals. The purpose of using these sources of data is to crystallize the data.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, one at the beginning of the after-school program and one at the end of the program. The initial interview included questions reflecting the participant's identity, epistemological worldviews and hip-hop (see appendix A). Follow up semi-structured interviews include follow up questions to initial interview questions and non-participant observations with questions getting more in-depth about their participation in hip-hop, their Black female identity, and personal epistemologies. These interviews were meant to gain insight into the past, present, and future experiences that Black

girls have had with hip-hop and explore how these Black girls are (re)creating their identities and personal epistemologies through the stories that they have created for their lives.

Non-Participant Observations

Throughout the program, the researcher observed the participants as they worked in their after-school sessions. I observed the participants as they work in their instructional, hip-hop, and culminating sessions to understand: (1) how they are understanding the materials, (2) how they are negotiating their understanding of English and Language Arts (E/LA) with their understanding of hip-hop, (3) how they are negotiating their own understanding of themselves and the world around them through hip-hop (4) how they are thinking through their re-creation of what they are learning; and (5) how are they representing themselves and their worldviews through their re-creation. These non-participant observations allowed the researcher to observe their experience with hip-hop in real time as they are tasked with using hip-hop in their educational setting to work through how hip-hop can be used in many ways, both educationally and personally.

Researcher Journals

The researcher kept a journal throughout the research process to help think through the research process and how it is also affecting her throughout the process. Narrative inquiry, Black and hip-hop feminists discuss the role of the researcher and participant connection in the research process. The journal acted as a method of documenting that connection and discussing how the participant-researcher story influences the research process.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

All places, participants, and communities studied and visited were given pseudonyms. After completion of the full transcription of the interviews, I utilized a method called “member-

checking” (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member-checking is when portions of the interviews are sent to the participants for review to make sure they are being represented in the way they want to be represented in the data. Throughout the interview, I repeated the answers to the participants and read through parts of their transcripts with them in order to facilitate member-checking.

Following within the traditions of Black and hip-hop feminism, the stories and accurate representation of the participants are important as well as the relationship the researcher has with her participants. Additionally, these theories posit that it is important to keep the participants central to the research study at all times. Member-checking assures that the participants are being represented in a way they deem as accurate, it helps build trust between them and the research, and it keeps them central in the research process by allowing them to review all contents related to the process.

Positionality and Boundaries

Rogoff (2003) posits that “the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred as people spend time in various communities” (p. 25). She goes further in discussing that it is difficult to determine what is consider “in” or “out” in communities as “many communities do not have strict boundaries or homogeneity that clearly allow determination of what it takes to be “in” or “out” of them” (p. 26). However, Collins (1990) has pointed out that history and life experiences surrounding Black womanhood is critical in determining “in-group” status for Black women. Outsiders lack the lived experiences that contribute to the knowledges and practices of Black women. While the outsider may provide a unique perspective, and recognize aspects of the culture that the insider may take for granted, the outsider also brings a sense of privilege into the researched population, determining what is and is not important regarding their research agenda.

It may seem simple that my race, gender, and age position me as an insider into the experiences of these Black girls. However, this alone does not make me a total “insider.” Black feminist and hip-hop feminist work discuss the importance of past experiences in creating new knowledge, therefore my experiences as a child of hip-hop are essential to my research and position within my research. While my position as a “middle” class adult who is an academic researcher and student that grew up in the suburbs does not make me a total insider into the experiences of my participants, the experiences that I had as a young, Black girl, growing up in the Memphis area connects me with my participants. Though my suburban upbringing has sheltered me from some of the experiences that most of my participants may have had growing up in an impoverished area in the city, the values, the consumption of hip-hop, the lessons that we learn from our parents and ancestors, the emphasis on church and family all remain the same.

When Did You Fall In Love With Hip-Hop?

As a late 80s, early 90s baby, hip-hop was reaching its peak. NWA was making noise out of the west coast with their “gangsta” style of rap, and New York was continuing to make hits with artists such as Nas and Biggie. The south was just breaking into the music scene with Luke and the 2 Live Crew making the country dance the “tootsie roll” and Freak Nasty making us “dip.” Hip-hop was sweeping the nation with numerous hits on the Billboard top 100, videos across MTV and BET and visibility on every major pop, R&B, and rap station and music festivals. The country was falling in love with Black hip-hop culture, and as a child growing up through its peak, so was I.

I was born in the city of Memphis, an only child, and spent most of my childhood in the suburbs in Mississippi. While most Memphians thought of Mississippi as a world away from the inner city, I was only a few miles away, and still heavily influenced by the culture of city. My

parents were both natives to Memphis and Mississippi. My mother grew up in the backwoods of Red Banks, Mississippi, later moved to Kalamazoo, MI, only to return to the Memphis area to pursue her career in nursing. My father, on the other hand, grew up in the heart of South Memphis, TN, not far from the transformative music that was Stax Records. My parents were “old school.” I grew up with R&B and soul music blasting on the radio with every trip to my grandmother’s home. I knew every word to every Isley Brothers, Temptations, Staple Singers, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Bar-kays, and Johnny Taylor song. The music and culture of the 70s was engrained in my soul, but as I grew older, hip-hop became engrained my heart.

Like most Black children, I spent a lot of weekends and holidays with my grandparents along with my other cousins who were older, but close in age. It was there that I was exposed to hip-hop music and culture. My cousins introduced to me the latest music from artists such as OutKast, No Limit and Master P, 8-ball and MJG, Al Kapone, and Missy Elliot. They rocked the latest styles from FUBU, Baby Phat, Tommy Hilfiger, Adidas, Filas, and Reeboks with their bright colored t-shirts and pants, track suits, large hoop earrings, crop-tops, and loose fitting jeans. They spoke with the latest southern hip-hop slang, played the latest, sassy hand-games, and walked with unapologetic Black female swag. I wanted to be like them, an unapologetic Black female of the 90s hip-hop generation. Soon enough, I began begging my mom for the latest Baby Phat track suit and large hoop earrings. I spoke with the same unapologetic Black girl swag that my cousins did and engrossed myself in Black popular culture. Books like *Flyy Girl* (Tyree, 1993) and the *Coldest Winter Ever* (Soulja, 1999) were my favorite escapes from reality and the music of Yo Gotti and Gangsta Boo were the soundtrack to my childhood.

Though I was one of the only Black children in my Mississippi school and neighborhood for most of my childhood, I made sure that my culture was known and represented in those predominately White spaces. As a child in a middle-class household, my mother made sure that I was involved in extracurricular activities and my activity of choice was dance. Hip-hop was not offered in my dance company, so I was forced to take classes in jazz, tap, and ballet. The music choices were largely representative of the population of my company with no representation of hip-hop. When I got the choice to perform and compete with a solo routine, I picked music that was reflective of the culture that I was living. Tag Team's *Whoomp there it is!* and Run DMC's *It's Tricky* were my songs of choice and my uniform reflected 90s hip-hop culture with bright colors and an exposed mid-drift. My routine was filled with the latest hip-hop dances combined with traditional jazz form. I refused to let my experiences, my culture, and my life be silenced.

Hip-hop influenced me much like it influences young, Black girls today. Black girls shape their attitudes, identities, behaviors, and beliefs around how they are perceived and what they perceive in hip-hop culture. My narrative is just one of many that represents the tremendous influence that hip-hop has had on Black youth. I learned to become the unapologetic Black girl that embraces her culture and refuses to let hegemonic ideologies of Blackness silence her, I feel as if I owe it to the generation following me to expose their narratives, their identities, and their hip-hop. This study considers the relationship that Black girls have with hip-hop culture and investigates how their involvement with hip-hop culture influences their Black girlhood, their identities, their knowledges and their worldviews. Hip-hop is a powerful culture that is not only something that youth listen to, it is a tool in which they learn. I relied on hip-hop to connect me to Blackness, to show me what it means to be a Black girl/woman in society and I still see that today as Black girls rely on the images projected within hip-hop to construct who they are or

who they want to be. It is this connection in our experiences that I believe qualifies me to do this work. I see myself in the Black girls that I have chosen to participate in this story and, in many ways, their stories reminded me of when I was a carefree Black girl who loved hip-hop. Throughout the process, I continually found myself reminiscing about the clothes I wore, the boys I liked, the music I played, and the friends that I made.

Site Selection

This research study took place at a school in Memphis, TN at a nine-week after school English/Language Arts hip-hop program called the *Grit, Grind, Rhythm & Rhyme: A Memphis Hip-Hop Initiative*. This program, funded by the American Educational Research Association Division C: Learning and Instruction, sought to provide 7th and 8th grade students with a culturally relevant way of providing additional English/Language Arts tutoring and to allow students to create their own interpretations through hip-hop.

The Relevance of Memphis: Memphis, Music, and Black Empowerment

In order to understand the relevance of a hip-hop program and study in the Memphis area, it is necessary to understand the history behind Memphis music culture. This section will detail the extensive history of Memphis in the Black music and culture paradigm. The remnants of earlier Memphis music and culture remain within the city and engrained within communities and has a direct impact on the culture and socialization of youth in the Memphis area. Aside from hip-hop culture, the city of Memphis has been a pioneer in Black culture, particularly Black music culture (Price, Kerdnodle, & Maxille, 2010). Since the 1920s, Memphis has been a site for innovation and culture with historical sites such as Beale Street, Stax Records, Sun Records, and WDIA, America's first radio station to use only Black DJs.

Memphis's golden age of music and culture reigned from 1945-1975 (Price, Kerdnodle, & Maxille, 2010) with Beale Street being the center for Black entertainment. Also called the "main street of Negro America," Beale Street's juke joints were home to both jazz and blues and served as weekend entertainment for Black Americans. Memphis also became the land of opportunity for displaced sharecroppers as Memphis held the promise of jobs in construction and along Beale Street as bankers and doctors (Memphis Rock N'Soul Museum). Aside from Beale Street, Memphis served as a stopping point as many Black Americans migrated from southern states to northern states in search of opportunity and escape from the oppressive conditions of Jim Crow South. Musicians such as the Howlin' Wolf and B.B. King all traveled from various areas of rural Mississippi and started their career in Memphis, recording at historic Memphis studios such as Sun and Stax. Sun Studios, founded by Sam Phillips in 1952, is credited for its start in rock n' roll and sought to give many Black musicians their first recording opportunities. However, as many artists moved further north, Sun Studios moved away from Black artists and focused on rock n'roll and country by signing artists such as Elvis and Johnny Cash.

Memphis is most recognized for its contributions to soul music. Stax Records, founded in 1957 by Jim Stewart, recorded many notable soul artists such as Rufus Thomas, Sam and Dave, Booker T and the MGs, Wilson Pickett, and Otis Redding. Rufus Thomas and his daughter, Carla, recorded Stax's first hit "Cause I love You," and Stax continued to have success and empower the Black community with continued hits from artists like the Staple Singers, the Bar-Kays, Wilson Pickett, Issac Hayes until the late 1970s. Stax was a pioneer in music history, creating the "Memphis Sound" by using their legendary house band and unique studio setting. While Stax records was making noise in the music scene, they could not ignore the political climate surround them. Memphis, as well as much of the South were still segregated and

exhibited strict Jim Crow laws. Memphis was a force in social justice and community with important civil rights movements such as the Sanitation Workers Strike of 1968 that brought civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr to the city. Following the death of Martin Luther King Jr., right in the heart of Memphis, TN, Al Bell, who was the co-owner of Stax records and A&R director, strived for “Black empowerment and pride” through his work with Stax (Danielson, 2015). Stax politicized their music and label by recording socially conscious music such as “I’ll take you there” by the Staple Singers and engaging in political festivals such as Wattstax featuring Issac Hayes and Jesse Jackson. In addition to Stax being active in Black economic empowerment and civil rights,, the women of Stax, such as Estelle Axton Carla Thomas, and The Emotions “challenged the binary understanding of masculine reclamation or feminist empowerment in civil rights scholarship” (Danielson, 2015, p. 91). The women of Stax challenged traditional gender roles by asserting themselves as strong, dominant forces in the male-dominated fields of record production and civil rights.

Memphis Rap Music

Following the success of Stax’s Wattstax festival, the record company’s future was put in jeopardy, and they officially declared bankruptcy in 1975. Following the closure of Stax, Memphis struggled to revive its Black music scene. In the 1990s, Memphis became part of the shifting Black music scene and began producing rap music. By the mid-1990s, Memphis’s underground rap scene was making noise with artists such as Three 6 Mafia, Lil Yo (who later became known as Yo Gotti), 8-ball and MJG, Playa Fly, Gangsta Black, Koopsta Knicca, Tommy Wright III, Skinny Pimp, and Al Kapone. Memphis’s style of hip hop mirrored much of the other hip-hop centers in the south such as Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, and Miami with focus on the instrumentals and heavy bass. Memphis hip-hop remains true to their soul roots with

samples from their soul and funk predecessors. Not much has been documented on the hip-hop scene in Memphis, as much of the local talent remained local; however, groups such as Three 6 Mafia and 8-ball & MJG, solo artists such as Yo Gotti and Project Pat and new age Memphis artists such as Young Dolph, and Don Trip, have transcended the local music scene into mainstream hip-hop and rap, influencing the scene with their southern style and beats. Gangsta Pat, the son of a Stax music drummer, was one of the first Memphis rap artists to receive a major record deal by signing with Atlantic records in 1991 (Lisle, 2008). Memphis rap artists have also received national recognition and honors. Al Kapone received a Golden Globe for his single “Whoop That Trick,” and Three 6 Mafia received an Oscar for their song “Its Hard Out Here for a Pimp” both of which were featured in the movie *Hustle & Flow*, a fictional movie based on rap music in Memphis (Lisle, 2008).

In the early history of hip-hop, southern artists, particularly Memphis artists where crunk music (i.e., music that has heavy bass and created specifically for dancing) originated, were criticized for their style of music which seemed to focus less on social justice and more on making crunk music (Price, Kerdnodle, & Maxille, 2010). While Memphis is considered one of the pioneers of crunk music, Memphis hip-hop goes much deeper than party music. Like many of the Black communities in the country, the city of Memphis was riddled with an increase in drug and gang activity. Many of the poor and low-income Memphis residents were being forced to live in Black ghettos and faced housing discrimination as many of the city’s white residents continued to move out of the city and into suburban areas. Much of Memphis’s city schools became predominately Black and suffered as city leaders continually took funding away from their educational system. Memphis rap artists were no stranger to the deleterious conditions surrounding them and used their music as a platform to discuss these activities. They spoke of

Black male identity, particularly in the south, and how for many Black men, the lack of social and economic mobility made it difficult to provide for themselves and a family, forcing many of them or around them to sell drugs just to make ends meet. They also spoke of the lack of family structure as many families were single-working class families and the reliance on gangs to provide a sense of community, family, and brotherhood. This style of rap music became known as “gangsta rap” and featured particularly violent references to gang activities and the use and sale of drugs.

Memphis rap and women. Rap music is and continues to be a male-dominated genre riddled with misogyny, and Memphis rap music is no different. The bulk of the scholarly literature, professional articles, and more pop culture blogs focus on male presence in Memphis rap. Female rappers in Memphis, like many females in the rap industry, struggled to make a name for themselves and are often silenced or overshadowed by their male counterparts. However, rappers like Gangsta Boo and La Chat refused to remain silenced in the Memphis rap game. Gangsta Boo, who received her start in the group Three 6 Mafia, is one of those female rappers who refused to be silenced. Her 1998 *Enquiring Minds* album was a “soundtrack to fence-jumping feminism” (Robinson, 2017). Gangsta Boo represented hip-hop feminism with her ode to “girls who did everything that the boys did” (Robinson, 2017) While male rappers discussed money, hos, and drugs, Gangsta Boo put a female spin on those lyrics by letting them know that she is a player too. Like hip-hop feminists, Boo challenges respectability politics and traditional notions of femininity with her lyricism and themes focusing on pimping, money, and power. Her clap-backs to men and using men as features and background vocals challenges how women were traditionally represented in hip-hop and placed a woman at the center of power in the rap game. La Chat’s persona was similar to Gangsta Boo in that she too challenged

respectability politics and traditional notions of femininity. While Gangsta Boo still dressed in a feminine manner, La Chat was a mix of traditional masculine and feminine qualities. While Gangsta Boo started as the first lady of Three 6 Mafia, La Chat started as a solo artist and was first featured on Project Pat's song "Chickenhead." Her first album, *Murder She Spoke* (2001), reflected themes similar to that of Gangsta Boo's first album, as well as frequent discussions of drugs, sex, and crime.

Memphis Hip Hop Dance

The dance scene in Memphis is not as well-known as cities such as New York and Los Angeles; however, there is a definitive scene in Memphis, and one that reflects Memphis's unique southern style. Memphis Jookin (or buckin) is a style that reflects a basic foundational step and rhythmic bounce, combined with sliding, gliding, tippy toe spins, and stales, mixed with lyrical word play. Originally called "gangsta walkin," Memphis jookin' can be recognized around world as background dances in rap videos to jookin competitions held annually across Memphis and other southern areas.

Memphis Graffiti

Memphis' graffiti scene is not well-known and does not have a tremendous history as many other cities; however, there is a graffiti scene present in the Memphis area. The start of the graffiti scene in Memphis is credited with the Whatever Shop, a smoke shop that sat next to the University of Memphis campus (Simmers, 2016). The Whatever Shop is known for displaying some of the city's most incredible graffiti pieces and was first "tagged" in 1995 by Darrio D. Pearce (Simmers, 2016). Since then, the graffiti scene in Memphis began to flourish with artists such as Brandon Marshall and events such as Soul Food that attracted artists from around the

world to paint graffiti murals. Interestingly, while the graffiti beginnings are credited to Black and Hispanic men, the Memphis graffiti community mostly consists of White men.

Grit, Grind, Rhythm and Rhyme Program Layout

Grit, Grind, Rhythm & Rhyme (GRR) is a program designed to serve as a creative, culturally relevant, educational and motivational outlet for the students' current academic adventures in English/Language Arts while enhancing education and economic effectiveness as well as inform current research on culturally appropriate learning. The purpose of this program was two-fold: (1) to create a meaningful and developmentally sound experience that will serve as a culturally salient educational outlet within the English/Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and (2) to bring knowledge to action by teaching students ELA skills and strategies using hip-hop as a catalyst and (re)creating that knowledge through specialized hip-hop experiences. This program was modeled after many hip-hop educational programs that have come before in that it includes incorporating the elements of hip-hop within their English/Language arts classroom. At the same time, this program informs current research on culturally appropriate learning, developing epistemologies, and identity formation.

The program consisted of 1 opening session, 5 informational sessions, and continuous instructional sessions and hip-hop sessions. The purpose of the opening session was to generate interest from the students to participate in the after-school program. The plan was to introduce the students to *Grit, Grind, Rhythm and Rhyme* by providing a small introduction. Following the opening session, five hip-hop based informational sessions were offered. The content of these sessions included: (a) introduce the students to professionals in each area; (b) hear their stories; and (c) learn techniques that can be incorporated in their final hip-hop project. The instructional sessions took place twice a week for one hour and consisted of E/LA tutoring. The hip-hop

sessions took place twice a week for one hour following the instructional sessions. This hour consisted of a hip-hop re-creation of topics discussed. It is during this time that the students worked on their projects to be presented in the culminating event. The project was a final dance, song, and graffiti art portrait that was reflective of the standards and topics discussed in their classes and instructional sessions as well as their overall identities. This session was largely student-run, however, instructors were present to review what the students discussed and to help them think of ways to re-create what they have learned. The purpose of the instructors was not to teach them how to re-create, but to scaffold what they have learned in their instructional sessions.

The Significance of the Program

I chose to create this nine-week after school program to provide students of color within the Memphis area with an opportunity to explore their English/Language arts education through a lens with which they are familiar. Memphis has a rich history of music and has birthed many well-known hip-hop artists such as Yo Gotti and Three 6 Mafia. Hip-hop continues to be a significant force in the lives of Black youth in the Memphis area as many are engaged in hip-hop dance (e.g., the LYE academy with well-known dancer Ladia Yates) and music (e.g., the Memphis Music Initiative). Not only was this program meant to engage the students with their school material, but this program allows the students to engage in hip-hop in a manner that allows exploration of their own identities, knowledges, and worldviews. Within this program, students were expected to explore the meaning within their texts and challenge each other about their beliefs about the text through class discussion and journaling. These academic tasks provided information regarding one's beliefs about knowledge and the process of knowing in that individuals "influence how learners direct their attention and process information" (Hofer,

2004 p. 133). Providing a space where students can discuss and challenge each other can create states of disequilibrium which research has shown could foster “cognitive conflict and reorganization” (Hofer, 2004). The way students resolve these epistemic conflicts is a direct reflection of their identities (Boyes & Chandler, 1992).

Participants

Participants of the GRR program brought back signed consent forms to participate in the program. Included in the consent forms were consent to participate in research. Before the beginning of the GRR program, I chose six participants from the participants in the program. They met the following criteria: (1) be a participant in the GRR program, (2) identify as Black, (3) identify as female, (4) be between the ages of 12 and 14 and (5) be a consumer of hip-hop. Participants are represented with pseudonyms that they chose at the beginning of their interview (see table 1).

Table 1

Participant Pseudonyms

Participant Pseudonyms
Unique
Evie
Tink
Mariah
Kristen
TT

Procedures

In the beginning of the GRR program, 7th and 8th grade students at Vincent Middle School (pseudonym) participated in an opening session pep rally to introduce the students to the GRR program and to generate interest in the program. Packets detailing the specifics of the program including the purpose of the program, the specific days/times that the students are expected to be there, details about instruction, consent forms for research, and information for the culminating event were distributed during the opening pep rally. Students were given two weeks to return the packets, before the start of the program. Six girls (all 7th graders) were chosen to participate in a 35 minute to an hour interview during the program (see appendix A). During the program, the researcher sat in on the instructional and hip-hop sessions, alternating among the three hip-hop groups, taking notes on the students' interaction with the material, their interactions with each other, the discussions that they were having in class and in between sessions, and how they were organizing and thinking through their hip-hop (re)creation, particularly focusing on the six girls that were chosen for the study. Researcher journals were written throughout the program. Final semi-structured interviews (see appendix B) were conducted after the conclusion of the culminating event to gain clarity on the notes that I had taken throughout the program, journal entries, and any questions from the initial interviews.

Data Management

During the interviews, I used a digital recorder to record my participant's answers to my interview questions. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher. All data were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office.

Data Analysis

This research study is concerned with how Black girls have understood and negotiated their racial and gendered experiences within the hip-hop culture and how hip-hop culture has shaped and is continually shaping their knowledges and worldviews. Considering that I am theorizing across six participants using Black feminist, hip-hop feminist, and HHBE theories, thematic analysis proves to be useful in finding common themes and connections in their stories. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke; 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Riessman, 2005; Saldana, 2013). Thematic analysis takes the participants' stories and focuses on the content of the text (Riessman, 2005). This approach is focused more on the "what" rather than the "how" of the story (Riessman, 2005). In this section, I describe the analytical processes that led to the development of the following themes.

After transcription of the data, data went through three cycles of coding: first cycle coding (initial coding), second cycle coding (pattern codes), and finally themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana; Saldana, 2013) (see Figure 1).

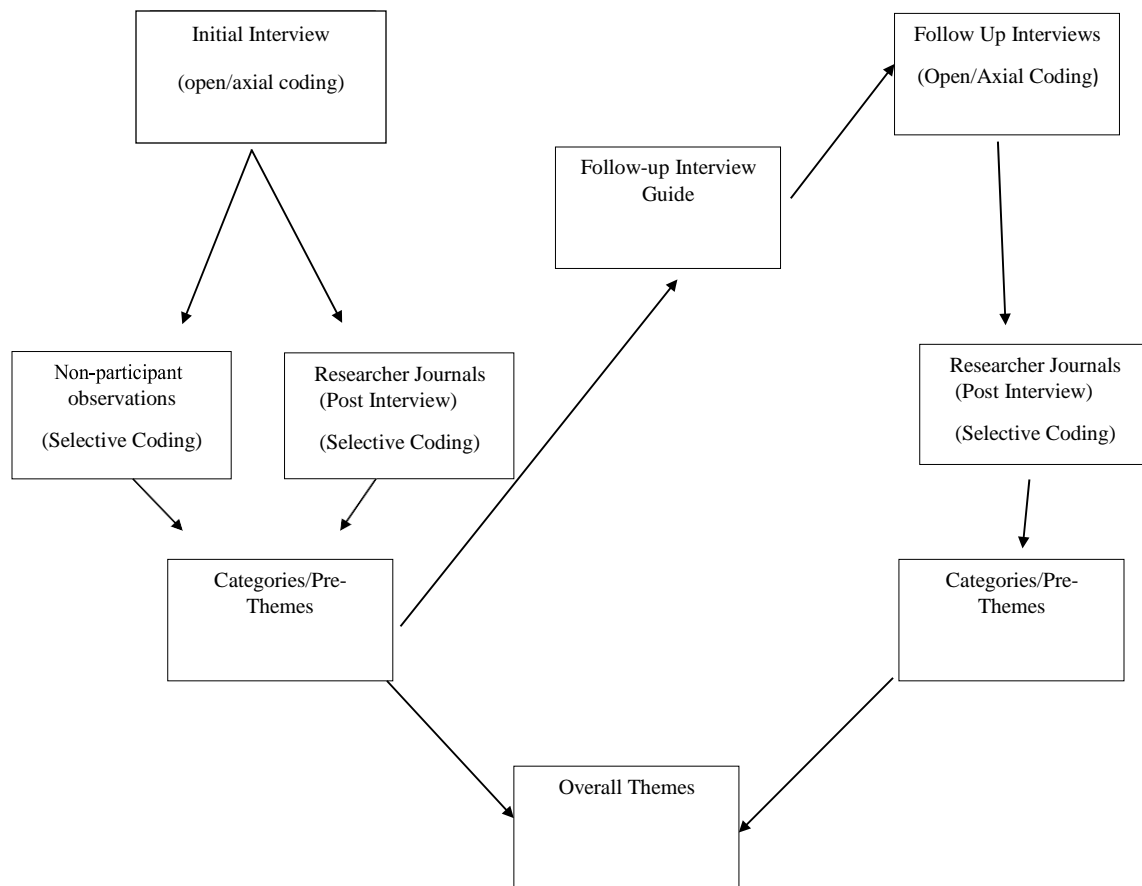


Figure 1: The Coding Process

Coding is defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2015 p. 3). In other words, codes are a symbolic word meant to provide meaning to a set of data. The first cycle of coding consisted of an initial coding phase of the first semi-structured interviews. The initial coding phase consisted of In vivo coding, values coding, and emotions coding (Saldana, 2015). In vivo coding focuses on the participants’ words or phrases. This type of coding was useful as we discussed hip-hop culture and remained true to the terms associated with the culture. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), posit that emotion coding is particularly important for studies that are exploring inter/intrapersonal experiences. The culture of hip-hop has traditionally silenced girls and their experiences. One of the purposes of

this study is to understand how girls navigated through those experiences. Employing emotion coding provided me with an insight into their perspectives regarding their situations surrounding their involvement with(in) hip-hop. Finally, to discern the values, attitudes and beliefs that my participants associate with their experiences within hip-hop, I used values coding. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) posit that values coding is appropriate for studies that explore “cultural values, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal participation” (p. 75).

Following the initial coding of the semi-structured interviews, the codes were condensed into pattern codes (i.e., categories and pre-themes). During the initial coding, I wrote memos as I found codes that connected as well as possible themes (pre-themes) that may arise out of the study. Researcher memos are essential to the qualitative research process in that they record ideas and reflections that the researcher has throughout the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Memoing serves to guide the researcher through the process and where the researcher demonstrates how they could get through the analytic process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to map out the pattern codes, I created tables to organize all of the open coding, possible categories/pre-themes and follow up questions for the follow up interviews (see table 2). I also used the possible categories and pre-themes to selective code my participant observations and researcher journals that I kept throughout the program which were also reduced to categories and pre-themes (see table 3). The relevant categories/pre-themes are as follows: hip-hop as therapy, community, epistemology, identity, and emotion.

Table 2

Coding table for initial interview

Question	Open/In Vivo Codes	Possible Categories/Themes	Follow-up Questions
1. how would you describe yourself?	<p>“I’m kind of an introvert and extravert at the same time</p> <p>¹ “artistic/creative</p> <p>¹ Strict but I care a lot</p> <p>¹ I talk to people</p> <p>¹ I read on my phone</p> <p>I talk to a lot of people even though I don’t know them</p> <p>¹ there’s a lot of people that are strict.</p>	<p>Introverted</p> <p>Extraverted</p> <p>Creativity</p>	<p>How does hip-hop provide you with a space to express your introverted/extraverted personality?</p> <p>Describe how you use hip-hop to express yourself.</p>
2. how does hip-hop influence who you are	<p>I first heard it from my dad</p> <p>¹ my dad always played it in the car</p> <p>¹ he still plays it</p> <p>¹ I listen to it a lot</p> <p>¹ I get a lot of my art from trying to draw graffiti</p> <p>Music helps me focus and calm myself (Emotion code)</p> <p>¹ music is an inspiration for your drawing</p> <p>¹ when I listen to music, my mind just flows and sometimes like if I’m drawing</p> <p>¹ and I don’t realize I’m drawing it until the music goes off</p> <p>¹ I listen to music</p> <p>a lot.</p>	<p>Dad (Father figure influence)</p> <p>Graffiti Art</p> <p>Focus/Calm (emotion)</p> <p>Music inspiration for art</p>	<p>How has your dad (or father figure) influenced your love/participation in hip-hop?</p> <p>Describe a time/situation where you used hip-hop to focus/calm you when you were having a hard time?</p> <p>Describe how you use hip-hop music in your art?</p> <p>--Describe how you use your life in your art?</p>

Following this process, follow up interviews were conducted. These interviews were subjected to the same process as initial interviews. Follow-up interviews were first open coded

using invivo, emotions, and value coding. The codes generated from this round were independent

of the codes found in the initial interview process. Following the open coding process of the follow-up interviews, the codes were reduced to categories and pre-themes. The categories and pre-themes were used to selective code researcher journals of the follow up interviews. Participant observations were not used in this process, because the program had concluded. After the selective coding of the researcher journals, the categories were further condensed into subsequent themes as the data allowed. Codes were recoded as necessary so that the codes and categories become more refined (Saldana, 2015).

Table 3

Coding Table for Initial Research Journal

Hip-Hop as Therapy	Community	Identity	Epistemology	Genderization of Hip-Hop	Emotions
Hip-hop as a coping mechanism	Society treats the lgbtq community	She identifies as black but she is mixed with black and hispanic	Evaluating		Overcome with all kinds of emotions
Escape from reality	Taught to be strong	Identifying as part of the lgbtq community	Step by step process		
12 years old you want to escape reality	Taught to be independent	Identified with the struggles of the lgbtq community	Evaluation		
	My mother being a strong independent woman	Talked about being a black woman	Getting information from her parents		
		Didn't mention	Strong black woman stereotype	specifically talking about her step-mom, not necessarily her actual mom Friends, google, youtube	

The jezebel	No one's an expert
The THOT	We all have our own opinions about Things

The themes were derived from condensing like codes into subsequent categories, and like categories being further condensed into overall themes. For example, codes that reflected stereotypes surrounding blackness (e.g., Black people steal) and gender (e.g., women are golddiggers) were placed into categories of *stereotypes surrounding blackness* and *stereotypes surrounding gender* subsequently. Those categories were further condensed into the theme of *recognizing and challenging hegemonic ideologies of Blackness and Black Womanness* because each of those categories reflected this overall theme. The overall themes of this study are: (1) Hip-hop as a coping mechanism, (2) recognizing and challenging hegemonic ideologies of Blackness/Black womanness, (3) hip-hop as community and (4) hip-hop as negotiating knowledges.

Chapter 4

The purpose of this Black, hip-hop feminist, narrative inquiry study was to investigate the role that hip-hop played in the lives of Black girls and to investigate the role that hip-hop played in their racial identity, gendered identity, and epistemic development. For this study, I selected six 7th grade Black girls who were participants in the *Grit, Grind, Rhythm, and Rhyme: A Memphis Hip-Hop Initiative (GGRR)* hip-hop after school program, a program dedicated to connecting hip-hop to education, student's identities, and lived experiences. The study consisted of non-participant observations as I observed them as the director of the program, pre- and post semi-structured interviews, and researcher journals in which I reflected on my interviews with the participants as well as my own experiences as a Black woman who loves hip-hop. These sources of data allowed for rich descriptions of their usage of hip-hop, particularly hip-hop dance and rap music, as a coping mechanism for their surrounding environment and reality, hip-hop as a space for challenging, critiquing, and negotiating hegemonic notions of Blackness and Black girl/womanness, and hip-hop as a space for negotiating epistemic knowledges both about hip-hop and their reality.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of the themes found within this research study. The research questions are as follows: What role does hip-hop (i.e., rap, dance, and graffiti) play in the lives of Black girls? How does hip-hop inform gender identity for Black girls? How does hip-hop inform racial and gendered identity for Black girls? How do Black girls negotiate their gender identities through hip-hop? How does hip-hop inform Black girl's personal epistemologies and worldviews? The results of this study reflect the following themes as it relates to the research question: (1) hip-hop as a coping mechanism (2) hip-hop as a challenge to

hegemonic ideologies surrounding Blackness and Black womanness, (3) hip-hop as community, and (4) hip-hop as negotiating knowledges.

Hip-Hop as a Coping Mechanism

Within this study, the girls found hip-hop to be therapeutic and served as a coping mechanism to help deal with their surrounding environment and reality such as issues with violence within their community, bullying, racism, sexism, and colorism. For the girls, hip-hop was a space that allowed them to “escape” that reality and create new spaces of resiliency, acceptance, and freedom. This section discusses the instances in which the girls discussed hip-hop as a coping mechanism and the connections that it has to the tenets of music, dance, and hip-hop therapy.

Hip-Hop as a Coping Mechanism for their Environment

“Hip-Hop is a way to escape reality to me. I listen to it a lot and it’s like a portal to my own world. When I listen to music or hip-hop in general and it helps me loosen up like if I’m stressed about something, it helps me focus or relax more, and then I see things that I didn’t see before” (Evie, Initial Interview)

In this study, the girls discussed how hip-hop was a coping mechanism that provided them the freedom to do what they wanted within its space. Hip-hop also provided them with the ability to escape from reality where their environment, both home and school, and the pressures from society ceased to exist. Participants used words such as *coping*, *stress reliever*, *helps me*, and *focus* to describe how hip-hop served to help them cope with school, home, and societal pressures. Within this research study, it was common across the participants to discuss how music helped them cope with the real-world dangers related to the urban environment where they are growing up. The terms *project* and *hood* were consistently used throughout the interviews

and non-participant observations and are related to the term “ghetto” which are characterized as racially segregated and impoverished areas of metropolitan cities. Evans (2004) demonstrates that children who are raised in these areas are more likely to endure more physical stressors that lead to an increase of psychological stress as well as other psychosocial issues. Youth in high-risk environments such as violent and impoverished areas are consistently seeking out outlets to cope/deal with their surrounding world. Research in hip-hop and coping has shown that hip-hop provides narratives from people who may deal with similar environments and adversities (Allen, 2005; Travis, 2016). Travis (2016) posits that youth can cope with these adversities by either creating or identifying with hip-hop and the coping strategies associated with hip-hop. For example, the participants often discussed how hip-hop provided them with a mental escape to a place where either violence was non-existent or a reflection on how others dealt with the violence. When asked how Unique used hip-hop to help her cope with her environment, she stated:

“They didn’t stop [shooting], they were shooting for 10 minutes straight nonstop, it was like a shootout or war. But I would start listening to music and it just put all that stuff to the side, it calm me down”

Research following music and hip-hop therapy recognizes the healing effects of music (Hadley & Yancy, 2012; Travis, 2016). Specific to hip-hop, Travis (2016) discusses how hip-hop helps promote resilience through its relatable narratives. Travis (2016) posits that hip-hop “allows authentic and complex stories to be told in accessible and innovative ways. By either creating or identifying with these narratives, individuals have shown that hip-hop provides ways to cope with adversity” (p. 89). For Unique, hip-hop provided her with those narratives that allowed her to escape her current reality. Actively searching for and using hip-hop as a coping

mechanism for the violence within the neighborhood was a trend throughout Unique's and the rest of the girls' interviews as they frequently equated music to reality and truth. Tink states that:

“When I'm down, I listen to music and rap and I like how the artists, the rap artists, I like how they rap, I don't like all artists but I like some artists because they rap the truth and they rap about what happens in their life and that inspires me to rap cause if I'm going through something, I'll write a quick rap. It take some time but I do”

For Tink, hip-hop is a coping mechanism not only because of the soothing qualities of music, but because the artists spoke the truth in their music, a truth that can be applicable to her life. Hip-hop therapy discusses the importance of narratives and the creation of one's own rap music. Elligan (2000) discusses that the creation of the client's rap music in addition to the discussion and critique of Notorious B.I.G's music allowed the client to successfully discover coping skills such as anger management. This claim further adds to hip-hop therapy in that hip-hop therapy believes that those who enjoy and connect with hip-hop music, may cope and utilize strategies presented within rap music to assist in their own situation. Tink also mentioned writing rap songs to help her cope. In this sense, rap acts as a type of narrative or journal. Aside from using rap music to cope, some participants discussed using hip-hop dance and graphic/graffiti art to cope with their environment. Evie states:

“it makes me feel happy and it just makes me free in particular, like I can do anything that I want with my art so I feel really free when I'm drawing. Sometimes I do re-draws of my art that I made a long time ago, but I mostly focus on the present unless I actually like, like really like one of my drawings from the past”

For Evie, drawing graffiti and graphic art provided her with the same freedom that rap music and dance provided Tink and Unique. Art was a space for Evie to not only channel her frustrations,

but to also cope with her surrounding environment and create new realities, free from the harsh realities that currently surround her. Art therapy is a well-documented treatment that has been shown to successfully help individuals dealing with issues such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and sexual abuse to channel their emotions (Gatta, Gallo, & Vianello, 2014; Pifalo, 2006). Sometimes, individuals who have been through traumatic events find talking to someone difficult. Riley (2001) states that “adolescents, in particular, are attracted to making symbols and graphic depictions; therefore, they are more attracted to using art as language than to verbal questioning” (p. 55). For Evie, art therapy provided her with the space to express herself and her reality without utilizing words, an outlet that was most comfortable for her.

Hip-Hop as a Coping Mechanism for Colorism, Racism, and Sexism

“I never thought I would have to go through that because well you know...a lot of people be like, look at white cracker, like what is that to say, it don’t get to me now, I don’t be caring” (Unique, Initial Interview)

Not only did the girls discuss having to cope with their neighborhood and violence within their neighborhood, they also discussed having to deal with bullying due to colorism. Colorism also known as *skin stratification* is a process in which lighter-skinned people are privileged over darker-skinned people with regards to dating/marriage preferences, jobs, income, education, and housing (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010; Hunter, 2007). Not only is colorism solely focused on skin color, it is also focused the stratification based on hair texture and facial features that are closely related to White features (Wilder & Cain, 2011). In addition to the racism that Black Americans have been subjected to within the United States, colorism further adds to the separation of Black Americans as lighter-skinned Black people are viewed as preferred over their darker skinned counter-parts. This color complex is further exacerbated

within hip-hop and mainstream media as lighter skinned Black women or lighter/racially ambiguous women are viewed as more desirable than their darker skinned counterparts (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Hunter, 2007). Colorism has a long and extensive history in European colonialism and slavery in both North and South America as “lighter-skinned people received privileges and resources that were otherwise unattainable to their darker-skinned counterparts” (Hunter, 2007 p. 239). For example, white slave owners used skin tone to create a racial hierarchy amongst slaves. Lighter-skinned slaves were granted privileges such as working in the home, within close quarters with the slave masters and family while darker-skinned slaves were subjected to harder labor and fieldwork (hooks, 1982). This same mentality continues to manifest within society as lighter skinned individuals continually receive preferential treatment. While lighter-skinned individuals receive more privileges, they also have to continually fight for their racial legitimacy. Hunter (2007) posits that darker-skinned people are often considered to be more “racially authentic” while their lighter-skinned counterparts report feeling “left out or pushed out of co-ethnic groups” (p. 244). This may be a significant burden to lighter-skinned people as they are continually forced to have to prove their racial/ethnic identity.

For two participants in my study, this ideology remained true as they described being bullied for their lighter skin. Unique, a lighter-skinned Black girl, candidly discusses her experiences with bullying within her neighborhood:

“because a lot of people would bully on me just because of my color, like they would be like “you white” and all that kind of..they would call me a white cracker, now it don’t get to me,, I just be like you’re mad, so what. But then I’ll just start crying”

Unique’s experiences align with the manifestation of colorism within U.S. culture. Because Unique has lighter skin, she was viewed as an outsider to her race and was continually isolated

within her neighborhood and school. With people calling her *white*, and *white cracker*, this added an additional burden to her already stressful environment. Researchers such as Cunningham (1997) and Hunter (2007) found that bullying due to colorism was a source of significant psychological stress. Though research has shown that the stress and impact is greater for darker skinned individuals than their lighter skinned counterparts, Unique appeared to be the minority in her educational and home environment as far as skin tone, which may be the cause for her feelings and treatment of being different. She goes on to discuss how she uses hip-hop, namely hip-hop dance to cope with the bullying that she receives for being light-skinned: “I feel like when I’m dancing all my pain and everything go away. I forget about everything, I just focus on dancing.”

For Unique, hip-hop dance was a way for her to release the stress and negativity that was surrounding her and incorporate something that she loved and could do anything with. All of the pain that she feels from her experiences in her neighborhood to her bullying can all be channeled through dancing, a space where she can escape into her own world and focus on dancing. Dance therapy, in addition to music and art therapy, have been shown to be successful in working with individuals dealing with anxiety or particularly stressful environments (Brauninger, 2012). Dance therapy can be defined as the “psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual (American Dance Therapy Association as cited in Mills & Daniluk, 2000, p. 80). Researchers working with dance therapy such as Mills and Daniluk (2000) and Brauninger (2012) found that dance-movement therapy was successful in treating individuals who had endured sexual abuse and other stressful situations and significantly reduced psychological stress and well-being. For Mills and Daniluk (2000), dance-movement therapy allowed the women in their study to “reconnect with their

bodies” and connect with a “sense of struggle” (p. 79-81). For Unique, dance allowed her to leave the physical environment and travel to a new reality that allowed her to “reconnect” with herself and her body in a manner that freed her from the stress of her physical environment.

Not only were instances of bullying due to colorism discussed, instances of generational colorism and the manifestations of this ideology were also discussed. Mariah, a self-described darker skinned Black girl, discussed her ideologies surrounding colorism and how she learned them:

“my auntie taught me. Like my hatred for light skinned people is over a million...like most light skinned people got good hair like they flawless, like they ain’t got no problems...light skinned people act bougie, they act like we ain’t cute enough for that. We are actually very cute...”

For Mariah, her ideologies surrounding colorism were inherited from her aunt, who had strong, negative feelings surrounding lighter-skinned people. She also developed her ideologies surrounding colorism from her experiences with light-skinned Black people and stereotypes surrounding them. Later in the interview, Mariah discusses how her aunt, who has a lighter-skinned sister, does not talk to her sister because she is light-skinned. Within the Black community, the family is regarded as one of the most powerful forces in facilitating development. Wilder and Cain (2011) discuss how the Black family, particularly Black women in a family play a significant role in the development of ideologies surrounding colorism. They found that for the women in their study, “bloodmothers and othermothers” were central in instilling ideologies surrounding “normative colorism” or “biases and judgment based on skin tone” (Wilder & Cain, 2011, p. 585). Much like Mariah’s experience, Wilder and Cain (2011) found that their participants discussed learning colorism from various women in their families.

Learning colorism from family members thus, “play a major role in handing dominant notions of colorism down to the next generation” (p. 585).

Aside from the colorism that they were exposed to within their neighborhoods, school environment, and family, colorism ideologies were also observed during the program. One of most prevalent stereotypes surrounding lighter skinned Black girls is that they are smarter and more educated than their darker-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007).

[Participant Observation (9-29): Something happened during this session that I wanted to point out, that I believe speaks to the importance of Black girls within the community. While the girls were dancing, Marcus made a comment while instructing the students during the hip-hop dance session. As a review from the previous sessions, Marcus would ask different questions regarding dance moves, the origin of different moves, and why one may choose to do one move versus the other. In this particular exchange, Marcus asked the students about one of the ABCs of Jookin, as he called it. One of the high school mentors, a lighter skinned Black girl, answered the question correctly and Marcus responded: “see light skinned girls are so smart.” I looked around at all of the darker skinned ladies that were part of the program (which were the majority of the girls) and awaited to hear a response from the group. One of the girls responded, “that’s not right, we are all smart, including dark skinned girls.” Another girl responded “yeah Black gang” expressing pride in her skin tone. Marcus, realizing what he said, quickly changed his statements saying that he wasn’t saying that darker skinned girls aren’t smart, but the girls quickly called him out and put him in check following his assertion about light skinned girls. He turned around and continued his dance instruction]

Racism. While the girls discussed more instances of violence within their neighborhood and colorism, instances of racism were also mentioned. Evie discusses an experience that she had with students at a school prior to the one that she currently attends:

“some of the white kids would say you’re not supposed to hang out with them (black people), you’re supposed to hang out with us and I never understood that so seeing the fact that they didn’t want me to hang out with them just made me want to hang out with them more”

In this section of the interview, Evie discusses two instances of racism: (1) stereotyping, and (2) societal ideologies surrounding Black people. These ideologies may arise from media and societal representations of these areas and people who may live/come from those areas. Media and popular representations of Black people often stereotypes them as violent and aggressive (Prior & Beachum, 2008). The stereotypes that surround Black people often dictate how others regard Black people as a whole and govern their ideologies and interactions with Black people as a whole. This stereotype becomes apparent in Evie’s discussion about how her classmates dictated who she should and should not hang with according to their (or their parents’ views) about Black people. However, Evie challenged this ideology by recognizing that these representations are just part of a larger oppressive society and continuing to socialize and make friends with other Black people in her school. She continues in discussing how hip-hop allows her space to cope with those racist ideologies:

“well...in some cases like how Kevin Gates was arrested and now he’s in jail, it just shows in some of the things and what he has been through, it just shows how hard he worked to make it to the top and I believe that I can do that as well”

For Evie, she related to rap artist Kevin Gates who she viewed as being successful despite his negative circumstances. Considering his success, Evie believed that being who she is and being from where she is from, that she can still be successful, still be herself, and continue to express herself and cope with her environment through music and art. This ideology follows Travis' (2016) and other hip-hop therapy principles reflecting the impact of the narrative of hip-hop. As youth identify with rappers or individuals who are involved with hip-hop, they are able to discover ways to cope with adversity. For Evie, to cope with ideologies surrounding her race(s) and environment, she turned to someone who she believed was similar to her, Kevin Gates.

The girls not only discussed their own experiences with racism, but how racism is represented within society and how hip-hop can be used to cope with racism. Kristen discussed instances of police brutality and how it had an impact on her:

“it makes me feel really really sad that White people today are still racist against Black people. And I feel that [the government] should do something about these policemen that are constantly killing Black people for no apparent reason”

Kristen discusses how the increase in the reports of police brutality has impacted her emotionally and causes her to wonder why no one is doing anything about it. She goes further in discussing how hip-hop is a means to channel these experiences and history through storytelling:

“like when we were looking at the video with the two men that were dancing and they went to jail because they passed the sign that said “I am a Man” that shows that history and that back then they really was prejudice [toward] Black people and well that shows that history. And what I mean by hip-hop is that well they’re showing their own little story when they were a kid, through their history”

Kristen uses the description of Alexa Meade's "I Am A Man" dance that was shown during the Grit, Grind Rhythm and Rhyme program to illustrate her point about how hip-hop is not only a storytelling method, but also a way in which Black people can discuss the racism that they encounter. This method of storytelling can be viewed as a coping mechanism. Hip-hop therapy borrows from narrative therapy in which clients construct their own stories in therapy (Allen, 2005). For youth, hip-hop gives voice to those issues that are continually silenced and provides them with the space and voice to discuss issues central to them. The prospect of police brutality within their community is one of those issues in which hip-hop can be used to shed light on those issues, a space where Black youth feel comfortable and free to engage and critique. For Kristen, the dance provided a visual representation of what was going on in her community and how hip-hop dance can be used to communicate as well as cope with those surrounding circumstances.

Sexism.

"they're saying so many bad things about women and you would think that women are bad people and they let anybody and they let anybody do anything to them" (Tink, Initial Interview)

For all of the girls, hip-hop was riddled with sexism and misogyny as they frequently discussed women as being represented as *sluts* and *THOTs* (i.e., That Hoe Over There). Previous research investigating hip-hop and Black girls also recognizes the misogyny within hip-hop and the representation of Black girls and how these images may impact how Black girls view themselves (e.g., Stephens & Few, 2007a; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). According to Stephens and Few (2007a), the daily consumption of hip-hop culture normalized the sexual scripts and influenced their recognition of the scripts. These researchers also recognize that hip-hop is rooted in traditional male culture where women's participation is not readily accepted. Women in hip-

hop music videos are less often depicted as individuals and more often serve as “backdrops with a focus on select body parts for male consumption” (Stephens & Few, 2007b, p. 15). Many of the girls believed that it was not the women who represented themselves that way, but the male rappers who created this representation of women. For example, Tink discussed how male rappers say things about women that aren’t true which creates a misrepresentation of women in society. She goes further in discussing how male rappers continually perpetuate negative stereotypes and the negative effects that it has on women:

“okay [they say] women are like sluts and they will open their legs and stuff for anybody and some women are like that but not all and they are saying that all women are like that. That’s probably why some men listen to these songs and be like oh women don’t care, that’s probably why most women get raped”

Tink discusses the ideology of rape culture and how rappers perpetuate the “rape culture” ideology in how they discuss women in their music. Rape culture refers to the cultural practices that contribute to sexual violence (Rentschler, 2014). For her, the male rappers are representing women as being sexually free with men being free to do whatever they want with women sexually. Because male rappers are showing that they can “have their way” with women, this may cause other men to believe that they can also “have their way” with women, hence causing women to be raped. Stephens and Few (2007b) posit that female sexual desire is linked to “male expectations, beliefs, and goals” meaning that female sexuality and her desires are not shaped by her own behaviors but by the “appraisals and evaluations of others viewing her actions” (p. 63). Tink discusses this by demonstrating that the evaluations of women in rap music videos dictate how they interact with women who look/act like the women present within the videos. To cope

with those ideologies presented within hip-hop, Tink discusses how she will make an impact within hip-hop:

“well I’m going to try to come out in hip-hop like make it big in dancing cause I’m not good at singing and rap takes time for me, but I’m still going to influence the male rappers and try to let them know what they are saying and how it effects people in bad ways because most of the stuff that they are saying does not affect people in a good way”

For Tink, to be a change within hip-hop, she must be involved with hip-hop which for her is through dancing. She believes that if she “makes it big” within hip-hop that she can influence the rappers about how their words and images of women are harming women, not only in their images of themselves, but in how men perceive and/or interact with them. In this respect, Tink is challenging those ideologies by attempting to create social change, a tenant of hip-hop feminism. Brown (2009) and Pough (2004) discuss how hip-hop feminists challenge and critique ideologies surrounding women in hip-hop by *bringing wreck* and making their voices heard within hip-hop. Tink believes that she can utilize this voice in the future and bring about change in the representation of women. However, the girls in this study recognize that there are women who want to be “sexually free,” and recognize the agency that these women have in choosing to do so; however, they also believe that when rappers generalize all women into being “sexually free” then it takes that agency away from all the women.

Hip-Hop as a Critique of Hegemonic Ideologies of Blackness and Womaness

As found in previous research studies (e.g., Love, 2012; Pough, 2007), hip-hop has become a space for Black women/girls to challenge and critique dominant ideologies surrounding Black womanness. Research studies have linked hip-hop to identity search and

development (e.g., Dimitriadis, 2001; Clay, 2003; Love 2012) with hip-hop serving as a display of Black culture and defining Black man/womanness. In this research study, hip-hop represented a similar platform for identity development for these Black girls and allowed them to challenge, critique, and develop their own idea of Black woman/girlhood. For these girls, hip-hop allowed them to (1) recognize stereotypes created from hegemonic ideologies of Blackness and Black womanness and challenge/critique those stereotypes (2) find/recognize role models (i.e., Cardi B and Beyonce) (3) recognize how they are silenced within hip-hop and challenge that silence (“I can do anything the boys can do”), and (4) construct their own identities surrounding their critiques of those stereotypes (i.e., the Carefree Black girl) and their ideas/emotions surrounding those identified role models. The following sections will discuss each of these spaces that these girls created for themselves both within and through hip-hop.

Recognizing and Challenging Hegemonic Ideologies of Blackness/Black Womanness

Each of the girls mentioned stereotypes related to both Blackness and Black womanness. Words such as *ratchet*, *angry*, *aggressive*, *thug*, *violent*, *slut*, *golddigger*, and *THOT* were used to describe the stereotypes that surrounds Blackness, Black maleness, and Black woman/girlhood present within hip-hop. As for Black maleness, most of the girls believed that Black men were represented as *thugs*, *violent* and part of *gang culture*. Kristen, when asked how people are represented in hip-hop stated:

“you see them with chains around their neck, gang signs, and then like rings all over their finger singing like cussing words, and like all that stuff and then you got some men in the hip-hop video sagging and some girls got half tops that almost look like a bra”

For Kristen, rap music videos showed Black people in stereotypical roles such as wearing lots of jewelry, showing gang signs, and sagging their pants. However, the girls recognize that these are

stereotypes and that all rappers do not project those stereotypes. Some of them recognize that some rappers ascribe to those stereotypes of thugs or gangstas, while others represent their “true” selves by being humble and speaking what they define as “truth.” Throughout this study, the girls battled with how male rappers represent themselves versus how they believed they were in public.

As for Black womanness, most of the girls believed that Black women were represented in four ways: (1) *sluts/THOTs*, (2) ratchet, (3) classy, and/or (4) powerful/empowered. The *slut* and *THOT* stereotype arises from the jezebel and sapphire stereotypes of Black women (Hill-Collins, 1990; Stephen & Phillips, 2003). The jezebel stereotype represents a sexual temptress who is represented as wanting to please men sexually to fulfill her sexual appetite. The jezebel stereotype has been expanded within hip-hop to include new stereotypes such as the freak, the hoe, and in current colloquial terms the THOT (Stephen & Phillips, 2003). All of these stereotypes are still informed by the foundational ideologies of the stereotype Jezebel as they are still viewed as “sexually aggressive” (Stephen & Phillips, 2003). However, these stereotypes have been transformed to include women “[using] sex as a means of gaining sexual control over their partners while fulfilling their own insatiable physical needs” (Stephens & Phillips, 2003, p. 21). They are typically characterized as wearing tight and revealing clothing and are shown to engage with multiple men. This stereotype was discussed in each of the girls’ interviews as they discussed women who *show off their body, wear short skirts, wearing booty shorts, and are moving from man to man*, and they did not want to be represented as such. Instead, some of them discussed either wanting to wear “classier” clothes such as a *suit and dress* or challenging traditional feminine dress by wearing *baggy* clothing. Not only was the dress for the women in hip-hop and rap videos not viewed as appropriate, many discussed how women were shown as

sleeping around a lot, and begging you to do stuff. While some of the girls didn't explicitly mention the sexual script associated with the term *THOT*, a few were candid in their description of them as *sleeping around a lot*, which is a direct characteristic of the Jezebel, Freak, and Ho.

For example, Unique states:

“Unless it's like you just one of them women who show off their body...uh uh I don't like them type of women...getting all these little extensions in their behinds and stuff...its showing a lot of women as not good enough”

Unique believed that women within hip-hop not only showed women in revealing clothing, but also showed women with body enhancements, particularly in the “butt” area. Currently, the trend within hip-hop is for women to have larger backsides (Love, 2009). Many rappers discuss in their rap songs how they desire women with a “big booty.” For Unique, this glorification of larger butts paired with both rappers talking about women with larger butts, women showing off their bodies, and getting body enhancements makes her feel like hip-hop is saying that women are not good enough. Stephens and Few (2007a) discussed the impact of the male ideology surrounding body type and physical attractiveness on Black girls and how they manifest within hip-hop. In their study, they found that the males expressed satisfaction with a curvaceous body, larger buttocks, larger breasts, and thick thighs. Following Stephens and Few (2007a) and other research studies investigating the female representation in hip-hop (e.g., Stokes, 2007), the male focus on parts of the woman's body versus the whole woman “disregards a woman's identity as a person” (p. 14). In her own identity construction, Unique challenges this ideology by finding a role model in someone who also challenges those ideologies surrounding Black womanhood, Aaliyah:

“I hate tight fitting clothes...its like...I just wanna be like Aaliyah, I don't want to be exactly like her, I want to be ahead of her, I want people to be like, I want her to be me inspiring people to do other things”

Unique challenged those stereotypes and dominant ideologies of Black womanness through her fashion. She describes herself as wearing “baggy clothes” as opposed to “tight-fitting clothes” and cites that she received her inspiration from Aaliyah who challenged those same ideologies within hip-hop by wearing baggy clothes. This is a direct challenge to the jezebel/hoe/THOT stereotype which has been characterized as wearing tighter fitting clothing (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Additionally, when I was talking to the girls about their final performance uniform, Unique discussed wanting to wear something “baggy such as a track suit.” Wearing baggy clothing as opposed to wearing tighter fitting clothing directly challenges how femininity is expressed within hip-hop.

[Notes from Author's Journal (Non-participant Observation) (12-1): After getting confirmation from the principal that the girls can perform at the final basketball game, my next step was to find something for them to wear. I had some ideas: printed t-shirts and leggings? I wasn't being very creative so I thought that I would ask the girls what they wanted to wear, after all, it is their performance. I stopped writing notes, looked up, and said “alright girls, what do you want to wear for this performance? I don't have no lot of money so it can't be nothing too expensive.” Unique screamed “TRACK SUITS!” Everybody spoke in agreement “Track suits?” I replied, “Why track suits?” Unique relied, “Because Miss Ashley, I don't like to wear no lot of tight clothes.” I looked at her in her uniform. “You don't like tight clothes?” TT and Tink replied “naw she really don't.”

While the girls explicitly discussed the *THOT* stereotype, classifying women as *golddiggers* and disloyal was also consistent throughout the interviews. For example, Tink states: “they are saying that women are golddiggers and that if you give them money then they will do whatever you want, but that’s not most women” For Tink, not only are women represented as *sluts* and *THOTs*, they are also shown as golddiggers who are willing to do anything, particularly sex, in exchange for money. Stephens and Phillips (2003) describe the golddigger as a woman who does not have education or social status and uses sex to gain materials or economic rewards. The *golddigger* has characteristics similar to that of the jezebel and the welfare mother in that they are characterized as sexual temptresses using sex to gain control, while being financially dependent on those gains (Stephen & Phillips, 2003).

The Pressure to Be Strong: The Strong, Independent Black Woman/Girl

While the girls discussed the negative stereotypes surround Black woman/girlhood, they also discussed the strength of Black women both in and outside of hip-hop and the pressure that they feel to be strong and independent. Many of the girls equated womanhood to both *strength* and *independence* for women within hip-hop, Black womanhood, and themselves. Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) discuss the development and implications of the Strong, Independent Black woman as one that Black girls are socialized to develop. Thus, the development of the strong, Black woman ideologies rests as a protective mechanism against racism and sexism. The Superwoman and Strong Black Woman are images that are promoted by other Black women, both within their families and the immediate environment, and have been shown to lead to healthier psychological outcomes (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). The Superwoman and Strong Black woman images are a direct challenge to traditional ideologies of femininity which “[suggests that] the gendered racial identity development of Black women is different from

characteristics represented by racial or gender identity constructs” (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011, p. 532). Similar to Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011), this study found that young Black girls also view strength, independence, and self-confidence as a source of coping. When asked about what it means to be a Black girl, the first characteristics that are mentioned are independence and power with a discussion reflecting how Black women don’t (and shouldn’t) depend on anyone else. Reflecting ideologies surrounding Black womanhood as posed by Black feminist theorists (e.g., Collins, 1990), the girls believed that it is their responsibility to take care of themselves and their families. The girls suggest that hip-hop details the struggles that Black people, namely Black women go through. They attribute this to their own circumstances, stating that they too live in the hood and that hip-hop songs illustrate those struggles and how to overcome those struggles. The girls believe that hip-hop discusses family care and that helping one’s own is part of the struggle process. From those struggles, Black women become strong and powerful. As an example, the girls discuss rap artist Cardi B as well as their mothers, each of which are described as “taking care of others” and “providing.” In order to do this, Black girls/women must have *confidence*. For example, Evie states: “[Black] women should always be confident in themselves no matter what cause women can be strong and we are strong and we are independent as long as we don’t rely on somebody else too much” Evie believes that people can be harsh and cruel to anyone that is different, particularly women who are outside of societal norms. She specifies that women should be empowered to be who they want to be and must possess the confidence within themselves to be comfortable outside of those norms. She goes on to state that women are *strong* and *independent* and that they shouldn’t rely on others too much.

Unique believes that the strength women possess come from them not wanting to be torn down. She states: “that’s one thing I now about [Black] women, they do not like let things bring

them down, they gon be stronger, they gonna remember what they did and they are gonna come up off of that.” Even in the face of adversity, Unique believes that women are resilient and come out stronger after facing adversity. She believes that the resilience gained becomes a protective factor against future adversity, and provides women with the strength to become better women.

Though being *strong* and *independent* appeared to be an aspiration and protective factor for the girls, this ideology also appeared to be a source of pressure for the girls. Many of the girls discussed wanting to do their “own thing” without having to rely on society’s standards governing their identity. Following a discussion about being *strong and independent*, Evie states:

“I just wanted to do my own thing and I think that I am happy with doing my own thing, instead of trying to be what other people want me to be instead of having that pressure, that everybody is looking to me for me to follow the rules of society”

Researchers such as Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) and Donovan, West and Daniel (2016) discuss the impact of Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype. Though the SBW stereotype appears to be a protective factor, it may also be a source of stress for Black women as they strive to take care of others and neglect their own needs. Evie describes not wanting to be tied to those rules of society, namely Black girlhood and recognizes that she is happy following her own path and being a *Carefree Black Girl*.

The *Carefree Black girl* identity emerged as another protective factor for the girls in the study. While the girls frequently discussed hip-hop as coping, and constructing identities, they also discussed how hip-hop was a space for them to be free from those ideologies and stereotypes surrounding Black woman/girlhood. All of the girls discussed hip-hop as freedom in some shape or form and emphasized that hip-hop was a space for Black girls to be themselves and free from societal expectations. Hip-hop provided them with the space to be protected from

those societal obligations and allowed them to be free Black girls. Most of the literature surrounding protective identities discusses the development of the SBW and Superwoman identities as being protective (Donovan & West, 2015; West, Donovan & Daniel, 2016; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). Hip-hop feminist scholars discuss the importance of spaces created for and by Black girls, giving them the freedom to create, challenge, and critique their own identities (e.g., Brown, 2009). T; Pough, 2004; Love, 2012), the development of a “carefree” identity as a protective factor is less discussed within the literature.

[Excerpt from Journal 10/17: Evie also talked candidly about societal pressures, and that is one thing that I kind of got from the other girls in the interview. Not only was hip-hop a way to cope with their realities, but a way to cope with society’s pressure to be the strong, independent, Black woman and to not be a “stereotype.” After thinking about what she said, I thought, you know, I feel those same pressures. The pressure to be perfect, the pressure to be the perfect student, and the pressure to be something that fits within a small box that society puts me in. Why am I allowing society to put me within this small box of Black womanhood without defining what Black womanhood is for myself?]

The Cardi B/Beyonce Complex: Being *Ratchet* vs *Classy*

While Black women stereotypes were consistently mentioned throughout the girls’ interviews, the girls also discussed adopting the personalities of being *ratchet* and *classy* in their identity. When they spoke about these terms, they frequently discussed them through two of their favorite hip-hop artists: Cardi B and Beyoncé. Cardi B is a new rap artist hailing out of the Bronx, New York who gained fame and popularity from the reality show *Love and Hip-Hop*. She is currently taking the rap scene by storm with her breakout single *Bodak Yellow* topping the billboard charts for weeks. In contrast, Beyoncé, is a multi-million dollar recording artist who gained popularity in the 90s as part of the multi-platinum girl R&B group, Destiny’s Child. In

her career, Beyoncé has sold over an estimated 160 million records and has won many awards including, MTV Music Awards, Billboard Music Awards, Grammys, and was named *Forbes* most powerful female in entertainment in 2015 and 2017. Though both women are making powerful moves in hip-hop, their personalities are what set them apart from each other. Aside from her music, Cardi B became popular because of her loud, outspoken, and carefree personality. She arose from her career as a stripper to fame on *Love and Hip-Hop* where fans fell in love with her loud, “no filter,” carefree attitude. Beyoncé, on the other hand, though a force on the stage and through her music, presents herself as a little more reserved outside of her music. As the girls described her, she chooses her words carefully in her interviews, she isn’t loud, and did not come from a stripper past. For the girls, these two personalities created a binary for them and their identity: Being *ratchet* and being *classy*.

“okay about Cardi B, Cardi B is like I don’t know how to explain it, but she is like so ratchet and like she expresses herself by like being herself. She taught us like to be ourselves and to never like let nobody not be yourself. Beyoncé is the same too, but she is not ratchet, she’s classy”

In the previous interviews with the girls, when asked about when they think of women in hip-hop, all of them mentioned two artists: Cardi B and Beyoncé. In the follow up interview, I wanted to understand what it was about these two artists that these girls loved and how were they attributing their identities as Black girls to these artists. Cardi B and Beyoncé provided them with a binary for Black girl conduct, being ratchet and being classy. Cardi B was “so ratchet” and even though the ratchetness is considered to be undesirable, it appears that Cardi B challenges those undesirable ideologies and continues to “be herself,” a quality that the girls appeared to love. Beyoncé, on the other hand, was a persona that the girls aspire to be, classy. While the

binary was apparent for all of the girls, some of the girls expressed distaste for Cardi B's ratchetness. For example, Tink believed that Cardi B was not a good representation of how Black girls should act, even though she likes her as an artist and as a person. Tink described Cardi B as being both *loud* and *ghetto*, the same words that others used to describe her, and she didn't believe that Cardi B was *classy*. For the girls, her loudness discounted her from being perceived as classy. They proceeded to discuss "traditional" ideologies surrounding femininity and classiness, much of which is similar to the ideologies surrounding the *cult of true womanhood* (Collins, 1990). For some of the girls, being *classy* was more than just speech, but about dress and posture. Some of the girls discussed dress as determining one's classiness and that when women/girls wore dresses/skirts they should "sit with their legs closed" to keep people from looking up their skirt. Thus, being *classy* prevented certain things from happening to you, such as unwanted gaze. Morris (2007) states that these stereotypes surrounding Black femininity characterize Black girls as "lacking control over themselves, yet trying to establish control over others in inappropriate ways" (p. 20). These perceptions often lead to Black girls being trained or disciplined in a manner that reinforces those traditional ideologies of femininity (Morris, 2007).

Building from this ideology that there is a binary for girls' behavior, the girls discuss the undesirability of *ratchetness* which some of them equate with being *ghetto*. Being both *ratchet* and *ghetto* illustrates the characteristics of the common Black girl stereotype the "Loud Black Girl." The loud Black girl is a stereotype that borrows characteristics from the angry Black woman, in that it characterizes girls as being loud and uncontrollable (Morris, 2007). As stated in Chapter 2, the loud Black girl stereotype is often associated with Black girls who are considered as being "loud" and "assertive" in settings such as the classroom, and often prompts others to want to "mold" them in to having traditional feminine qualities: being docile and passive

(Morris, 2007). This ideology, thus, further silences Black girls, particularly within the classroom where they are already silenced due to the cultural incongruence of their classroom setting. Building from that, the girls in my study have defined places where being “ratchet” is acceptable and being “classy” is acceptable. Mariah states: “it’s a time where you laid back cool like quiet and stuff and it’s a time where you can be as loud as you want but not in certain places.

In this example, Mariah discusses the times in which it is acceptable to be ratchet and the times in which it is acceptable to be ghetto which she later speaks through both Beyoncé and Cardi B. For Mariah, she perceives Beyoncé as being more complacent and *classy* in public. Mariah doesn’t negate the idea that Beyoncé doesn’t have *loud* or *ratchet* qualities; however, she believes that Beyoncé does not act like this in public and continues to present a *classy*, softer version of herself when she is interacting in public. Mariah channels these into her own life and describes similar times in which she can be *ratchet* and *classy*. For Mariah, being *ratchet* was only undesirable when done in public spaces while being *classy* was reserved for public spaces such as the store and the mall.

[Excerpt for Journal: There are moments where I love being Black and I just sit back in awe at the display of Blackness and “Black-as-Fuck” ness around me. Tonight was one of those nights. Tonight after the conclusion of my program for the night, I joined my older cousins for a night out. These are the cousins who first introduced me to Black girlhood, the ones who introduced me to daisy dukes and poppin (as it was so affectionally called back in the day). We talked, laughed, and joked about the “good ol” times at our grandmother’s home, club nights at Elmos, and other displays of Black girl magic. I reminisced about the times where I enjoyed my “ratchet” side, thinking about all of times where I lost my mind when I heard “Cash money records taking over for the 99 and 2000” and how my friends still associate my crazy-ratchetness with this song.

However, we weren't concerned with being ratchet or classy, we were concerned with just being us, fun-loving and carefree Black girls.]

“I Can Do Anything the Boys Can Do”: (Un)Silencing and Empowering Girls within Hip-Hop

“its not a lot of females that's making it. Like it not a lot of females that's making it...it's a lot of male rappers. I mean like a lot of them. Like us s females and you always at the top like you gotta be good. Like you gotta be good” (Mariah, Initial Interview)

In addition to hip-hop being a space for freedom/carefreeness, hip-hop was also expressed as a space for empowerment. While the girls acknowledge the negative stereotypes of Black womanhood presented within hip-hop, they also acknowledged that the women who were able to penetrate into the hip-hop world and become successful were *powerful* women. Brown (2009), Pough (2004), and Love (2012) all discuss the empowerment that is present within hip-hop, despite the negative ideologies and stereotypes surrounding Black women within rap music. Hip-hop feminism (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004) discusses concepts such as *fuckin with the greys* and *bringing wreck* within hip-hop, both of which demonstrates that there are grey areas within hip-hop with regards to images surrounding Black womanhood and that Black women should *bring wreck* by challenging and critiquing those ideologies. The girls in this study demonstrate both concepts and ultimately recognize that Black womanhood in hip-hop is about: (1) having agency to do/be who you want to be, (2) challenging those ideologies, and (3) carving a path for yourself and other Black women/girls because “you can do anything that you can put your mind to” (Unique, Follow Up Interview). The girls in this study discuss how Black girls, particularly within hip-hop, have it harder than boys because hip-hop is considered to be a “man’s world.” In the quote from an interview above, Mariah discusses how that being a Black girl [in hip-hop] meant that you had to work harder than the boys. She believes that men, particularly within rap,

are either really good or are “slaw,” but have a catchy beat, dance, or phrase within their music that causes a hit. However, women have to be “perfect” in everything that they do within hip-hop, particularly rap music. Many of the girls mentioned that Black girls have to work harder than boys, especially in careers. Boys/men are allowed to think of ideas/concepts “off of the top of their head,” but women/girls are required to work/think harder. They also discuss that there are other things that you have to take into account with women that you don’t have to account for with men. Black girls don’t necessarily have it harder than Black boys, recognizing that both Black girls and boys have to deal with racial issues, but being women/girls comes with additional issues/problems that boys/men do not have to consider. When discussing women in hip-hop, TT states: “you can do anything that you put your mind to, like some people don’t expect women to dance or rap cause they think it’s a man thing but girls can do whatever men can do.” TT takes these ideas a step further by discussing hip-hop as a man’s thing and that people do not expect women to dance or rap. Rap and hip-hop dance is dominated by men who create standards which dictate good/authentic hip-hop. Women, who are underrepresented within hip-hop are often silenced when they try to step into that world because they do not meet those standards originally set by men. Women who do become successful within hip-hop are viewed as powerful because they were able to prove that “[women] can do whatever men can do” (Mariah, Initial Interview). Other girls discussed how female rap artists such as Cardi B defied the odds to be represented in hip-hop:

“a lot of people ain’t gonna recognize you because they are so focused on its men supposed to be doing like up top type of things but me I be like women are the best thing in this world, like women brung you into this worl like that’s all I think about...the reason why I chose Cardi B is because I feel like she just took things coming from

nowhere, like when you put your mind to it, and she really did it. So that's why I like her.”

Unique further discusses the silencing that Black women receive within hip-hop by stating that people “ain't gonna recognize you” because they are so focused on the men and the hip-hop that men have created. However, for Unique, she challenges these ideologies by actively seeking out female artists and empathizing with their stories. Cardi B exemplified this by coming from a lower income area in New York and being who she is without caring about what others have to say. This encourages young, Black women to “be who they are” and they too can become successful. Female artists like Cardi B were particularly important for these girls because they represented freedom, femininity, and power: The freedom to be who they want to be, define their own femininity, fight against the silencing of women, and become successful in hip-hop.

These girls believe that if a woman becomes successful within hip-hop, she is powerful. Seeing these women in hip-hop encouraged them to believe that they are “limitless” and that they can do anything that that men can do. Some of the girls such as Evie go further in illustrating how women in hip-hop encouraged her to show other women, particularly Black and Hispanic women, that they have the same opportunities, and they have to unsilence themselves by not letting fear stop them from wanting to be successful within hip-hop. Evie's ideology provides an interesting perspective regarding who is actually silencing the women within hip-hop. While the other girls discuss men as creating the standards within hip-hop and silencing women and their hip-hop, Evie discusses that some women actually silence themselves by letting fear stop them from participating in hip-hop.

Hip-Hop as Community Bond: “I Feel Like You Understand Us”

[Notes from Participant Observation (12-15): so today I used the yes and game as a way to introduce Art of Storytelling and learn how to build on telling stories from others. I wanted them to put it to a beat so that they can see that their stories can build together to create a community cypher. I had Sarah start off the story, I know Sarah isn't too keen on rapping so I have her start off the storyline and they continue the story first without a beat and then once they get the flow, I have them put it to a beat. The class today was split with 6 of the girls learning new dance techniques from an invited dance studio and about 4 of them (2 of them being the high school mentors) participating in the “Art of Storytelling.” Sarah starts the girls off and together they create their own stories of Black girlhood. I watched as the high school mentors coached the girls through creating their raps/rhymes and helped them build their stories. With each lesson and story, the girls laughed with each other followed by echos of “ohhhs” and “yaaaaasss.” At the end Mariah tapped me and said, “Miss Ashley, I’m gonna miss yall!” It was then that I knew my job complete.]

Ruth Nicole Brown (2009;2013) created a community program aimed at empowering young Black girls using community-arts based methods and hip-hop as a means for the young girls to channel, discuss, and critique their representation of their Black girlhood. *Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truths* (SOLHOT) is a revolutionary program built from and transforming the ideologies surrounding hip-hop and hip-hop feminism and building a space for Black girls, by Black girls. Though the *Grit, Grind, Rhythm & Rhyme* (GRRR) program was created for both young Black boys and girls, the space transformed into a space celebrating Black girlhood. The high school volunteers were all young, Black women, and the participants in the program were

also young, Black girls. Each day, I watched the young girls interact with the older girls, asking them for advice about boys, family, friends, and other life advice. I watched as the high school mentors gave them “real talk” about how to handle those situations and formed sisterhoods that will continue long after the program is over. “I love those lil girls mane” one of my mentors said to me as we waited for her ride to show up, “I make sure that I come just to see them.” That’s when it occurred to me that this space was much more than about hip-hop but a space for community and sisterhood. Not only do they discuss using hip-hop to form communities, but they also talk about the influence of the community on their love for hip-hop. They discuss how hip-hop is the community. It is Black culture; therefore, it is them which connects the community to the identity.

Sisterhood of Hip-Hop: Using Hip-Hop to Form Community

[Excerpt from Participant Observation (11/17): We just wrapped up our English/Language Arts session and I sent the girls out to the bathroom to wash their hands before they ate their snack. Soon after the girls left, I realized my mistake in sending the girls out alone to the bathroom and sent my two high school mentors after them to make sure that they are doing what they are supposed to and coming right back to the room. I walked my high school mentors to the door, peeked out to make sure that the girls were in the bathroom, and sat back down at the table to finish writing notes from the first session. Two minutes later, I heard beating on the wall and “aye aye aye ahhhh.” I shook my head and walked out the door to see what my girls were up to now. Sure enough, one of my high school mentors was had started a beat on the wall and all of the girls had began to dancing in the hallway and hyping each other up with each dance move.]

Forming a sisterhood through hip-hop and the program was one theme that was consistently discussed and observed during their time within the program. Four out of 6 of the girls were friends before the program started while two of them were viewed as outsiders within

school. Each of the girls discussed how they used hip-hop to connect with their friends, with four of them discussing the talent show that they participated in earlier that year as a pivotal moment for their friendship as well as bringing them closer to hip-hop. In the excerpt from the participant observation above, the girls used hip-hop dance to connect with each other, each of them creating a dance from a beat and *hyping* each other up in the process. This was continually seen and discussed as the girls talked about how the program and hip-hop brought them closer to each other. For example, Unique discussed how her and her friends' participation in the program brought them closer and lets her know that she doesn't have to do anything alone. Throughout the program the girls mentioned the hip-hop dance that they created for their school's talent show as one of the most memorable and bonding moments within hip-hop culture. Unique states:

“just last year, when me, TT, Tink, and Mariah did the talent show. Well, it was a whole lot of people [there]. We were all scared. We were just breathing (mimicking short, panicked breaths). I was like yall we got thing, we got this. We were pumping each other up and then when we got up there we just [did it]. [We all came up with the routine], we all put our own critiques in it, well I just put, you know how they always say there is one person that be like ‘you can do this’ and piping them up. It was some [dis]agreements [but] I was like you can do anything that you put your mind to.”

Unique discusses how they worked together to create a new hip-hop dance for their talent show. She describes how they divided up the responsibilities, giving each person a role in its creation. Not only did they work together to create a dance, they were also very supportive of each other throughout the process and during the performance. Throughout the program, these four girls describe how this experience “brought them closer” to each other because they were able to explore and create new things within hip-hop dance. Aside from the bond that the girls fostered

within their own friendships, Evie discusses how she uses hip-hop dance to connect with her friends who do not attend the same school:

“I feel it feels nice, its fun, I feel like I’m connecting with them more and...I don’t see them a lot because they live down in the northside...cause they are like my sisters and I consider their mom like my mom because I don’t really have my mom right now...”

Evie, much like the other girls, uses hip-hop dance to connect with her friends. She believes that her participation in this activity with them connects them to her more, especially since she doesn’t get to see them much following her moving in with her father. Evie did not go in depth about her move from her mother’s home to her father’s, but throughout the time in the program and the interviews, it was evident that the change was a source of pain for her. In a sense, the dancing and the sisterhood that she formed with her friends act as a coping mechanism for her reality and the move to her father’s home. Hip-hop was not only a space for friendships, but also a space to bring family closer together. Mariah follows this sentiment in discussing how dancing has brought her closer to her cousin Taylor:

“um Taylor, we’ll dance a lot like we’ll perform like Sunday we performed at her little brother birthday party and we was killing it like we’ll rap in front of everybody we don’t now. We not shy, it makes me feel happy, it make me feel like nobody can bring me down, it make me feel like we just living life, like everything that happen in the past stay in the past, we never think about it no more, we just dancing, we in full mode”

For Mariah, hip-hop dance and rap brought her closer to her cousin, who is roughly one year older than her. Being able to participate in both dance and rap with her cousin encouraged her to be her best self. She continues in discussing how being able to do that with her cousin provides

her with strength and carefreeness, also acting as a coping mechanism in which they turn their focus from negativity to positivity.

Throughout the program, I observed various instances of sisterhood, circles of girls discussing their boyfriend problems, rap cyphers where they discuss issues related to their Black girlhood, mentorship from the high school mentors, and heated discussions regarding their friendship with each other. The program served as another method for them to connect to each other through a culture that they love and participate in everyday, hip-hop. Research in Black and hip-hop feminism discusses the impact that a community of Black girls/women has on the psychosocial well-being of Black girls/women (Brown, 2009; Collins, 1990; Lindsey-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011; Sullivan, 1996). Lindsey-Dennis, Cummings, and McClendon (2011), in the creation of a culturally responsive mentoring program, recognize “the importance of incorporating Black girls' cultural background and lived experiences in aspects of the mentoring process.” The implementation of this program found that when working with Black adolescent girls the ethics of care, shared lived experiences, and the sisterfriend and othermothers are important aspects of building successful community and mentoring programs (Collins, 1990; Lindsey-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011). The mentors in their study had a certain level of personal investment in the lives of the girls in their program and were able to connect through shared life experiences. In a sense, the mentors became sisterfriends who were viewed as the listening ear or othermothers who were the non-biological mothers who assist in nurturing responsibilities. The space that we created within the GRR program became much like the space that both Brown (2009) and Lindsey-Dennis, Cunningham, and McClendon (2011) discussed: a Black girlhood celebration governed by both sisterfriends and othermothers. In his case, the girls created the community of learning through the bonds they created with themselves

and challenged, created, and critiqued Black girlhood through their interactions with each other. This community of learning was guided by the sisterfriends (high school mentors) and the othermother (myself) as we played the listening ear and nurturing home away from home.

[Journal Entry, Last focus group with the girls (1-30): I arrived at the school, hot wings and fries in tow at the request of the girls, excited to see them, but sad that this would be the last time that I would be able to see them. I signed in at the front desk around 12:45 and walked into the cafeteria to wait on my girls to come down for lunch. Mariah was the first one I saw as she ran through the door to me and screamed "I am so happy to see you! OHHH AND YOU BROUGHT US WINGS! I smiled and said "Yeah, that's what yall wanted right?" The other girls followed through the door smiling and running, each of them screaming similar sentiments of being "happy to see me" and "ready for a break." Once all of the girls, with the exception of Kristen who did not want to participate today, surrounded me, we walked out to the music room, which is typically empty during lunch time, to complete our last focus group for the program. When we walked in, the girls snatched the wings, plates, fries, and drinks and devoured them seemingly in one bite. While the girls ate, we conversed about their experience in the program, what they didn't like, what they liked, how will they used what they learned etc. One of the things that the girls talked a lot about was how much closer that they felt to each other because of the program. They discussed how they were able to do things that they were not able to do during school and explore new things within hip-hop with their friends. They expressed pleasure in learning graffiti art and how without the program, they may not have ever learned how to do it and how grateful that they were able to explore those things with their friends. Not only did they discuss how their love for hip-hop expanded, but how much they loved and appreciated the time that was spent not only with me, but the high school mentors. "They were so cool Miss Ashley! I am gonna miss them for real" Mariah said. "Yeah, I followed them on snapchat! We talk on there sometimes" TT followed. They felt like they made closer bonds with their classmates and friends, even those

they don't normally speak to. They also discussed how they made stronger bonds with the high school mentors and how they were able to talk about some things that related to them and how they even made a bond with me and it was amazing and I feel really good about everything that I was able to do for them. I truly feel like that I was made to do this and I was made to work with young Black girls and to continue to inspire young Black girls like me to be strong to be independent to be successful and to be something in life and I am glad that I was able to do that for those young ladies]

Hip-Hop as Negotiating Knowledges: "Evaluating and Creating My Own"

Forming knowledges about themselves, Black culture, Black woman/girlhood, and hip-hop was also a theme throughout the interviews. The way in which the girls discussed how they actively sought out these knowledges and created their beliefs surrounding hip-hop, Black culture, and Black woman/girlhood speaks to their personal epistemologies. As discussed in Chapter 2, Personal epistemology refers to one's beliefs about knowledge and knowing (Hofer & Pintrich, 2000). One's source and justification of knowledge as well as the developmental process has all been shown to be impacted by one's culture, racial, gendered identity and experiences (Belenky et al., 1986; Muis, Haerle, & Bendixen, 2006; Torres & Magolda, 2004). When discussing hip-hop as a culture, the girls discussed similar sources of knowledge (i.e., internet sources); however, when discussing how knowledges surrounding their Black girlhood or hip-hop culture is justified and how they construct their idea of what hip-hop means, the girls discussed differing levels of epistemic development. This section discusses the following: (1) the sources of knowledge surrounding hip-hop and Black culture, (2) justification of those knowledges, and (3) levels of epistemic development.

Source of Knowledge

Hofer (2004) posits that one's source of knowledge is simply where one's knowledge originates. For some, that source of knowledge may originate from external authority, while for others, the source may be themselves as they actively construct knowledge with their interaction with the environment. While all of the girls mentioned an external source of knowledge when asked where they look for knowledge about hip-hop, for some, the source became more complicated as they recognized that knowledge can also come from within themselves. The internet was a dominant source of knowledge for all of the girls with the search engine, Google, and popular video site youtube listed by everyone as sources. For example, Tink states: "I look it up on youtube...and sometimes google, because when you ask google a question it will give you several things"

This sentiment was echoed by all of the girls who believed that google and youtube served as a gateway to learn new things. For Tink and the other girls, google and youtube were viable sources because they offered you many options to choose from and allow for application of the new information to their "prior knowledge" or previous experiences. Hofer (2004b) posits that the exposure to multiple, possibly conflicting sources, leads to one to "metacognitively monitor" what they believe to be true. How this metacognitive process happens depends on the "sophistication of students' skills" and could range from exploring external authorities to building their own understanding based on the information that they received from the various sources (p. 49). For the girls in this study, the various sources that youtube and google provide allowed them to construct their own understanding, particularly about hip-hop culture and Black girlhood, without regarding the external sources as authority.

While the girls discussed themselves as knowers, a few of the girls acknowledged “experts” who they view as authority when seeking knowledge about hip-hop. These individuals were considered to be skilled in their craft, presented experiential knowledge in their music, and were profitable within hip-hop. Experiential knowledge provides them with the ability to be sources of knowledge when it comes to dealing with adversity because they have lived through and overcome it. Collins (1990), in her Black feminist epistemology, discussed the role that experience played in the epistemic development of Black women. For her, Black women relied on the testimonies and experiences of others in order to construct their knowledges surrounding Black womanhood. This ideology was similar for the girls in this study, as girls such as Mariah often sought out the experiences of others through hip-hop to build their knowledges. However, different from Collins, these girls not only sought out the experiences of other Black women through hip-hop, but the experiences of Black male artists as well. The Black male artists spoke to both the Black and hood experiences, experiences that the girls could also connect with. Tink follows this idea: “well when most people rap, well yeah when most people rap, they rap about their lives..but when you rap the truth, like most of them you are living in [their] moment”

For Tink and some of the other girls, when people rap, it is similar to living in their moment, their experiences. It is those truthful experiences that contribute to building one’s knowledge surrounding topics discussed within hip-hop. Researchers within personal epistemology discuss the influence of experiences in the construction of personal epistemology (e.g., Hofer, 2004b). Black feminists such as Collins (1990), hip-hop feminists (Brown, 2009), and other notable researchers working within the realms of Black education, have noted that experience is central to their knowledge construction. Particularly for the Black girls, the

experiences of older women “sisterfriends” or “othermothers” are often considered and held to a higher regard than other knowledges. Other girls, such as Evie, took a different spin on this idea:

“umm...I don’t really, everyone has their own idea, opinions, and ideas. I don’t really have an expert. But I usually go to my dad because I know he listens to a lot of hip-hop or my step mom because I know she listens to a lot of things too”

When Evie was asked who she believed the experts to be within hip-hop, she stated two epistemological sources: (1) knowledge within oneself and (2) seeking knowledge from others. According to Hofer (2004), seeking knowledge from others represents an external authority. For Evie, when she is seeking knowledge about hip-hop, she often goes to her dad or stepmother, someone who she believes is knowledgeable about hip-hop. However, Evie recognizes that the knowledge is flexible and that everyone has their own ideas and opinions regarding hip-hop. This recognition connects to the ideology that one constructs their own ideas and opinions within hip-hop and thus can be viewed as sources of knowledge.

Justification of Knowledge

The girls recognized that all of the knowledge, both about hip-hop and Black womanhood, was not all good and/or truthful knowledge. Within the interviews, I inquired about how they knew the information that they received within music, youtube, google, or any source they sought out was good or truthful. Each of the girls mentioned the following as ways they justified the knowledge they received: (1) feeling, (2) trust, (3) evidence, and (4) quality. These notions are similar to Hofer (2004) surrounding one’s justification of knowledge which discusses the feeling, observation, judgment of evidence, or integration of the views of others as methods used to justify knowledge claims. Also, the feeling and trust follow Collins’ (1990) ethics of care

in which Black women rely on their feelings and emotions to justify knowledge claims. For example, Evie states:

“its like the tone and the mood of the song. You can tell by the beat, the tone the person is rapping in, how they feel about it and then the feeling after you listen to the song. Just makes you feel a certain type, and then depending on what you think and how you think and me I like to dig deeper into songs that I like so I would dig deeper into it and finding the real meaning, go behind the lyrics and go into the thinking of this person”

For Evie, the tone and mood of the song can justify whether there is truth to the lyrics. She goes on to discuss that how they feel about the lyrics in the song as well as how you as the listener feels after listening to the song is another justification of knowledge. While this ideology builds on Collin’s (1990) ethics of care, Evie takes this ideology a step further by considering the person (knower), their thought process in the process, and how she connects to the person as knower.

Within hip-hop, the concept of “truth and authenticity” is important (McLeod, 1999). For example, Unique states: “some people could be like truth is only telling the truth, but really it’s not. It’s like it’s a way of telling the truth and it’s like you trusting them to tell you the truth.” Unique recognizes that everyone does not have the same idea of what truth is because people may have different realities, therefore understanding information as truth depends on the trust that you have for the person and the information. Following trust, Tink believes that the quality of the information as well as evidence being necessary to justify knowledge:

“because there’s some videos where they are doing a lot of things in the back of their camera quality is not right or the person is looking kind of rough o you know what they are about to say has nothing to do with what you just asked. They have like a good

background and their camera is focused right and they are dressed nice or something then you know they are going to give you what you asked for”

For Tink, if the video quality is not professional and lacking in focus or appropriate attire, then she believes that the information is not going to be adequate. In the follow-up interview, Tink discusses that it is not only about the quality of the information, but about the evidence to support the information. For Tink, it is not enough to mention experiences within rap songs, there must also be evidential support to support those claims.

Levels of Epistemic Development

Research within personal epistemology has alluded to the influence of culture on one’s epistemic development; however, the impact of culture has been scarcely discussed (Hofer, 2008; Muis, Bendixen, & Haerle, 2006). The girls in this study all exhibited varying levels of epistemic development, dependent upon the subject discussed. The domain specificity of epistemic development has been thoroughly discussed throughout epistemology research; however, the impact of the cultural experiences of Black people, particularly Black women, is limited. The stories and experiences from the girls provided an insight into how their experiences and hip-hop culture impacted their epistemic development.

Silence. *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) discusses silence as an epistemic position for women who felt silenced and voiceless at the hands of authority figures. While the girls in this study were outspoken and opinionated without a care for the thoughts of others, there were still instances in which the girls discussed being silenced, particularly when discussing their participation in relation to men within hip-hop and their position within society with regards to their race, gender, and for some, skin tone. For example, Evie discusses silence as it relates to her race:

“well people look down on you a lot and you don’t really, I don’t care if people look down on me, especially since I am half Mexican, that just brings me down more, so I don’t really care, I just block them out. I don’t really see why I should listen to other people or social standards or society. I just like to do my own thing. I don’t care if other people don’t think I am good enough and I don’t care if people think or turn me down because I am a different race or I am a blend of two more like how do you say since I am half [Black] and half Mexican so that just brings me down on a lot of job opportunities, but I don’t really care, I don’t really listen to them”

For Evie, she feels silenced because she is of three marginalized populations, Black, Mexican, and female. She recognizes that society silences her and her experiences as well as prevents her from gaining other experiences. Though she says that she doesn’t care what society says about those identities, she still believes that those identities continue to silence her within her environment. Unique also discusses an instance where she felt silenced because of her race:

“So when we went in the restroom, it as a lady and she was real Caucasian and it was her and her daughter, and she was like ew, and I was gonna say something, but I thought about it, I didn’t want to act out in public.”

In this instance, Unique was exposed to an encounter with racism. In this instance, Unique saw a White woman and her daughter while they were going into the restroom. The woman proceeded to give her a look of disgust causing Unique to want to say something to her. However, Unique did not want to be characterized as the “loud Black girl” and did not “want to act out in public causing her and her existence to be silenced. Belenky et al.(1986) discuss women who are silenced as “obeying wordless authorities.” In these cases, both Evie and Unique are silenced due to the ideologies that they have surrounding their race and gender.

As discussed throughout this chapter, the girls discussed how women are underrepresented in hip-hop, and those that are involved in hip-hop are often held to the standards of men. For example, the girls discussed hip-hop as providing them with the space to be either *ratchet* or *classy*, two identities that the girls frequently discussed through Cardi B and Beyoncé. In a sense, hip-hop allowed them to be their *true* selves, without having to worry about their identities being silenced in various settings. This either-or binary is similar to Belenky et al.'s (1986) silenced position and reflects maintaining a woman's place. Belenky et al. (1986) described these women as "passive and incompetent." While the girls in this study were not by any means incompetent, they did describe situations in which they were to be *quiet* and *classy*, following the rules of womanhood set by society.

Absolutism/Received Knowledge. When discussing hip-hop and Black culture, some of the girls believe that there are outside experts and thus authorities that are the only source of knowledge for defining hip-hop and Black culture. For girls such as Mariah, hip-hop is Black culture; therefore, if you want to understand/come to know anything about Black culture, you must ask Black people who are involved in hip-hop. Mariah states: "[hip-hop] is like its black culture, it really came from Black culture like that's what we do, we always listen to hip-hop, we always listen to this and this is like what we experience." For Mariah, hip-hop was created by Black people through their own experiences. Therefore, any knowledge regarding Black culture and hip-hop can be gained from hip-hop or Black people. Hip-hop culture and the experiential knowledge of Black people are authorities to knowledge, an authority in which girls like Mariah look to for knowledge about themselves as Black people, Black women, and connoisseurs of hip-hop.

Evaluativist/Constructed Knowledge. While some of the girls discussed absolutism and received knowledges within the interviews, two of the girls, Unique and Evie, discussed more advanced personal epistemologies and discussed recognizing the opinions of others, recognizing that truth is relative, and then constructing their own truth based on their own construction of knowledge. For example, Unique states:

“okay first I be like, if I see somebody doing it, I be like teach me that, then I go to youtube and try to figure out how they did it and try to put two of them together and I create my own type of sense”

For Unique, when she wants to learn something new in hip-hop she first asks the person who is completing the act, then she goes further and conducts more research on the activity. From there, she creates her own knowledge regarding hip-hop. Kuhn and Weinstock (2002) discuss evaluativism as an advanced level of epistemic development. Evaluativism believes that knowledge “assertions are judgments that can be evaluated and compared” (p. 124). Unique believes that knowledge surrounding hip-hop is her own and can be compared to others to create their own. Evie also discusses:

“on youtube they post different things and how they feel about the song and I just see different points of view and I just try to get it down to two different types of view and depending on how the song is told and what the song is I will agree with one of the sides or I will have mixed feelings about it looking at the pros and cons of it”

For Evie, she discusses using youtube as a source of knowledge because people can post various facts and opinions about different topics. She evaluates these various points of views and reduces it to those that she can agree with.

“[I live] in a black neighborhood where people look down on you for living here or they feel pitiful for you because you have to live here and they have the social standards that black people are more likely to break into your home and steal your things. I have met a lot of people, especially a lot of black people who don’t do that”

Not only were did the girls consider others’ opinions when they were discovering information relating to hip-hop, they also considered others’ (i.e., society’s) opinions when constructing their race and gender identity. When marginalized individuals are exposed to situations challenging their identity, it causes cognitive dissonance as they evaluate the thoughts/ideas/opinions surrounding their identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Torres & Magolda, 2004). This interaction with their environment and their own identity construction causes a restructuring of knowledge and leads to higher levels of epistemic thought such as relativism or the recognition that knowledge and truth is relative to the knower and situation. For Evie and Unique, as they were negotiating their racial and gender identities, they were able to consider/critique multiple sources surrounding those identities which allowed for cognitive maturity.

Conclusion

This research study sought to explore how Black girls were utilizing hip-hop in their lives, how hip-hop influenced both the construction and negotiation of their racial and gender identities, and how hip-hop influenced their personal epistemologies. The first theme, Hip-hop as a coping mechanism, answers research question 1 in that the girls discussed using hip-hop as a space to cope with social, personal, and environmental adversities in their daily lives. The second theme, hip-hop as a critique for hegemonic ideologies surrounding Blackness and Black girl/womanness, answers research question 2 in that the girls described recognizing, challenging,

critiquing, constructing, and negotiating ideologies surrounding Blackness and Black girl/womanness. The girls discussed stereotypes that surrounded both their racial and gender identities in hip-hop and how they challenged and critiqued those images by either (1) defining Black girlhood for themselves or (2) finding strength in the women who challenged those stereotypes in hip-hop. They also discussed how they negotiated those identities by creating protective identities (e.g., the Strong Black Woman and the Carefree Black girl) and creating binaries for their behavior (e.g., being Ratchet vs Classy). The third theme, hip-hop as a community bond, answers research question 1 as the girls discussed ways in which they bonded and co-created meanings of Black girlhood through forming communities. Finally, the fourth theme, hip-hop as negotiating identities, answers research question 4 as the girls discussed how they used hip-hop to create knowledge as well as advance their epistemic thoughts.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications and Future Research

“We are not what happened to us. We are more than what others have defined us to be.

More than necessary, the words spoken, sung, and rhymed reveal the complexity of Black girls and women’s experiences, exposing to the world our own critical understanding of the meaning of our own lives” (Brown, 2009, p. 19)

Recent research involving Black education and culturally relevant pedagogy has been investigating the role that popular culture, namely hip-hop, can play in the classroom and educational settings (Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Kelly, 2013; Love, 2012). Principles behind culturally relevant pedagogy suggest that there is some disconnect between the school and home environment, causing the educational setting to be “unfamiliar” to students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2014). While research in hip-hop based education and hip-hop pedagogy has found hip-hop based educational programs to be successful, research that investigates why these programs are successful appears to be scarce. The purpose of this study was to build on previous research investigating the role of hip-hop in Black girls’ lives and demonstrate the importance of hip-hop for the Black community, namely Black girls, by investigating the role of hip-hop in their identity and epistemic development. This research study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What role does hip-hop (i.e., rap, dance, and graffiti) play in the lives of Black girls? (2) How does hip-hop inform racial and gendered identity for Black girls? (3) How do Black girls negotiate their racial and gender identities through hip-hop? (4) How does hip-hop inform Black girls’ personal epistemologies and worldviews? This chapter will review the research findings presented in chapter 4, connecting them to previous research, and discuss implications for identity research, personal epistemology, hip-hop therapy, and educational research.

The Role of Hip-Hop in the Lives of Black Girls

Research investigating Black girls and hip-hop has primarily been focused on: (1) how the sexual images and misogyny presented within hip-hop impact their identity development and (2) how these images may impact their sexual identity (Stephens & Few, 2007a). While researchers such as Pough (2007), Love (2012), and Brown (2009;2013) have demonstrated that hip-hop has also been a positive force within the lives of Black girls, the images and research demonstrating negativity surrounding hip-hop and Black girls appear to dominate. While researchers such as these demonstrate the value of hip-hop for Black girls in showing that it promotes community and agency, research studies discussing the therapeutic effect that it also may have on Black girls is also scarce. In answering the first research question, for the girls in this study, hip-hop was a source of coping and developing resiliency, a method for challenging and critiquing dominant ideologies surrounding who they are and their future selves, a space for mentoring and community, and a space for negotiating the knowledges surrounding themselves and their culture.

Hip-Hop as a Coping Mechanism

When I began this research study, the therapeutic impact that hip-hop has on Black girls was not a finding that I was anticipating, yet it was the finding that was the most dominant throughout my interviews and observations working with the girls in the program. The girls in the program were all from the “hood” as they called it, living in predominately Black, low-income environments where gang and gun violence were prevalent in their surroundings. Not only were they dealing with a potentially dangerous environment, bullying, colorism, and gender inequality were also part of the girls’ reality. During the interview and the program, the girls candidly discussed seeking out hip-hop as a coping mechanism for their environment, not only

seeking out rap music, but including R&B music, dance, and art as part of their coping. The idea that these girls are actively seeking out hip-hop as a coping mechanism for their environment yields implications for hip-hop therapy (HHT).

Hip-hop therapy (HHT) is becoming a space in which therapists, social workers, and other groups that work with Black youth use aspects such as rap music to allow youth to create their own counternarratives and channel their emotions, stories, and ideologies about themselves and the world around them into hip-hop culture and music (Allen, 2005; Tyson, 2002). Research investigating coping within the Black community has found that Black Americans are more likely to utilize religious coping practices when dealing with major problems or health issues (Chatters, Taylor, Jackson & Lincoln, 2008). For Black youth, the complicated relationship with therapy is even more exacerbated, particularly for those who are considered to be high-risk, who become more apprehensive about therapy and the connections to their environment (Allen, 2005).

Hip-hop therapy interconnects the realities of hip-hop with bibliotherapy and music therapy and allows participants to discuss and critique themes of rap music and provides them space to use rap music to construct narratives surrounding themes within themselves and their lives (Tyson, 2002, 2004). Bibliotherapy is a psychoeducational type of therapy that utilizes literary works such as stories and poetry to facilitate treatment (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994; Tyson, 2002) by identifying and discussing client problems, illustrating that others may deal with similar problems, and discussing/providing solutions for those problems. Hip-hop therapy utilizes these same tenets by treating rap music as a form of storytelling or poetry and uses the themes within rap songs to stimulate discussion around the themes. Music therapy is a well-documented form of therapy that has been found to significantly impact on all facets of

development including emotional regulation, psychosocial functioning, quality of life and coping strategies (Tyson, 2013). Music therapy has been used to treat various mental and physical ailments and has been shown to be successful in increasing self-esteem, self-awareness, and executive functioning (Sharma & Jagnev, 2012). Until the early 2000s, rap music was not included in the music therapy conversation, leaving those who culturally identify with hip-hop culture and their experiences without a culturally sensitive or relevant therapy experience.

Elligan (2000) and Tyson (2002) were among the first to theorize hip-hop as a therapy. Elligan (2000), in his work with Black men, found that rap therapy was a “culturally-sensitive” approach for Black men to work through anger issues. Using his five phase of rap therapy (i.e., assessment, alliance, reframing, role play with reinforcement, and action and maintenance), Elligan found that therapists were able to better engage with Black men by understanding their affiliation with rap music and understanding how rap music was being used in their lives. From there, therapists were able to utilize rap music as a narrative to discuss issues within their clients’ lives. In his case study, he found that his client, a Black male, was able to successfully discover anger management skills as well as improve in his school performance through his discussion of Notorious B.I.G and creation of his own rap songs about the death of his father. In contrast, Tyson (2002) explores the “therapeutic potential” of rap music intervention with at-risk and delinquent youth. Within his exploratory story, he found that those who had engaged with hip-hop therapy not only enjoyed and preferred the therapy sessions, but they also were appreciative for the inclusiveness of their culture and expressed desire to create their own rap music to share with their group. In his semi-structured therapy session, Tyson (2002) has the therapist take an active role by the therapist introducing hip-hop in a therapy session, defining positive and negative rap, playing a verse, facilitating client interpretation of lyrical relevance to social

realities, validating client values, helping clients address goals, and asking for feedback (Kobin & Tyson, 2006). Both of these studies paved the way for rap music to be included in therapeutic settings as a culturally relevant and sensitive way to reach Black youth, with particular attention being paid to their home environment and client outside interests, similar to the theories surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom.

Some research studies within HHT create a “positive/negative” binary within rap music, establishing rap music that is positive as “rap that depicts solutions and self-protective concepts and skills, as well as inspires to improve unwanted conditions” (Tyson, 2002, p. 135). However, other researchers have found that hip-hop therapy is successful when the rap music chosen is relevant and understandable to the clients (Allen, 2005). Within therapy, the music is a “point of reference” for clients as they are able to identify and critique the negative themes as they relate to hip-hop and their own environment and adapt positive themes that will assist in “making appropriate decisions and managing positive attitudes and behaviors” (Allen, 2005, p.34).

Hip-hop feminist therapy approaches borrow from the tenets of hip-hop feminism by using the ideas of collaboration, community building, and critiquing images of Black womanhood to create a culturally and gender relevant therapy session (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Similar to what other hip-hop therapists have suggested, hip-hop feminist approaches to music therapy uses hip-hop music that portrays positive/relevant themes as talking points within therapy sessions and allows young women to construct their own original raps as part of collaboration and community building. Veltre and Hadley (2012) stress that the writing of original raps “creates a safe space for exploring creativity through analyzing and writing rap, sharing ideas, giving and receiving encouragement, and learning to honor the female voice” (p. 89). These authors also discuss the importance of facilitating discussion about conflicting

messages presented in hip-hop music and videos and how one's identity can be shaped following those images. This idea borrows from the hip-hop feminist ideologies of "bringing wreck" (Pough, 2007) or critiquing images of Black womanhood. By challenging and critiquing these images, bringing wreck can lead to "social transformation at various levels, at the individual level, the group level, and the community level" (p. 96).

The girls in this study confirm the powerful effects of hip-hop on their coping and resiliency as a young Black girl. Without it being a focus of the study, hip-hop as a coping mechanism emerged as one of the most prominent themes for the girls in the study. Hip-hop was represented as a source for *focus*, *calm*, *release*, and *escape* for my girls who were all seeking to leave the reality of their neighborhoods, experiences with inequality, and issues with school and travel to a new reality that they created for themselves through hip-hop. Research within hip-hop therapy focuses on: (1) the narratives that the artists tell within the music and how those narratives can be applied to the lives of their clients, and (2) the narratives that clients may create in writing their own raps (Allen, 2005; Tyson, 2002). While these were shown to be part of the girls' coping processes, what is not being researched is the alternate reality that the girls are creating for themselves within hip-hop and how these alternate realities may impact the therapeutic process, particularly for Black girls. For all of the girls, rap music was a portal to a new world where their problems disappeared and they were able to be who they wanted to be, without societal standards or expectations. Additionally, the girls within the study chose their music with regards to what was appropriate for their situation and relevant to their generation. One of the reasons that many therapists suggest that children/adolescents do not seek/trust therapy is because of the lack of cultural relevance of the therapeutic settings. While including hip-hop in therapy sessions provides some cultural relevance, having the therapists "choose" the

type of hip-hop present within the session does not allow the full experience/reality of the girls to be considered within the sessions.

Implications for hip-hop and therapy. Additionally, aside from using rap music as a means of therapy, hip-hop therapy should consider using both dance and art (graffiti) therapy. Many of the girls discussed the importance of dance in their lives and using dance as a means of coping. Leafloor (2012) discussed the impact that hip-hop dance (b-boying) had on Arctic, Inuit, and First Nations communities who lived in the remote part of Canada and were plagued by “high suicide rates, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, family violence, and loss of culture and cultural pride” (p. 132). By combining elements of hip-hop such as b-boying and cypher circles and therapy techniques such as cognitive, group, meditation, and disclosure and healing path stories, Leafloor (2012) uses the feelings of anxiety and fears that may be associated with the performance of a cypher circle as a shared feeling with all involved with the activity. The support of the activity from the group eases that anxiety and fear. Leafloor (2012) applies these feelings with real world feelings of anxiety, fear and the effects of support. The girls in this study use hip-hop dance in a similar manner. They discuss the feelings associated with dance both when they danced alone and when they performed together in a group (i.e., the talent show). Some of the girls discussed that dance allowed them to feel more like themselves without fulfilling societal standards, similar to the effect of rap music. When the girls were tasked with dancing in a group, they discussed all of the emotions that were similar to the cypher circles that Leafloor (2012) discussed. However, without the leader of a group facilitating discussions regarding psychosocial issues, the girls challenged, collaborated, and became resilient on their own. They discussed feelings of fear and nervousness before they performed, hyped each other up in those times of fear, and discussed the feeling of relief and joy after succeeding together.

They discussed that the process and feeling was something that they were able to apply to other circumstances and situations stating that “if I can do that, I can get through anything” (Unique, Initial Interview). Hip-hop therapy should be expanded to include elements of both dance and art therapy, particularly for Black girls and women, who in my study, found dance to be an extension of their identity and provided them with a sense of freedom. Mills and Daniluk (2002) discussed the importance of this sense of freedom for women in therapy, who felt that dance therapy allowed them “the physical discharge and expression of emotional and psychological energy through bodily expression” (p. 83). This discharge and release could be important as the girls seemingly disconnect from their realities and create a new world within hip-hop.

Sexuality, Binaries, and Empowerment: Implications for Hip-Hop as Identity for Black Girls

Related to the second research question, this research study found that hip-hop was a space for informing both the racial and gender identity of black girls through their critique of how they believed they were represented within hip-hop. This critique allowed for them to construct what they believed a Black girl/woman should/should not do and how they governed themselves based on those beliefs. Related to the third research question, the girls negotiated those identities based on which scripts they thought were appropriate and by adopting new protective identities such as the strong black woman (SBW) and the carefree black girl. Research involving hip-hop and the Black community has consistently found that hip-hop is a source of identity development for Black youth. Early research found that hip-hop was a source for investigating gendered roles both for Black boys and girls (Clay, 2003; Dimitriadis, 2001). For example, Clay (2003) found that hip-hop culture including the language, gestures, and fashion provides insight into who is or isn't Black. In her study, she found that girls who presented

“highly feminine and sexualized” identities received high attention not only from their male counterparts, but also from other female authority figures (p. 1356). Research investigating Black women and hip-hop has consistently recognized the impact of the sexualized images presented in hip-hop on the identity of Black women (Stephens & Few, 2007b). Early images of Black women illustrated them as being oversexed, sexual temptresses who were often represented as the jezebel and the sapphire (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1982). As Black culture evolved, hip-hop images of Black womanhood became apparent. Images such as the freak, ho, diva, golddigger, and gangsta bitch emerged as an extension of the early images of Black womanhood (Stephens & Few, 2007b). Research involving hip-hop and Black girls often links the hypersexualized images presented within hip-hop to the sexual identity of Black girl/womanhood. Previous research has shown that Black girls who were presented with images of Black woman engaging in sexual behaviors were more likely to engage in sexually risky behaviors (e.g., frequent sex, more partner, and non-usage of contraception) (Stephens & Few, 2007a; Townsend et al., 2010).

The girls in this study recognized the sexual scripts present within rap music and music videos. They specifically spoke of the freak, ho, golddigger, and Jezebel stereotypes when discussing sexual scripts within hip-hop. They candidly discussed how these stereotypical representations of women impacted how they feel about themselves as Black girls and how others may feel about them. While the sexual behaviors and identities of the girls were not discussed in the interviews or observed in the participant observations, the sexual scripts were discussed and critiqued both in the interviews and within the participant observations. The girls discussed images related to the Jezebel, ho (THOT), and golddigger as images that they do not aspire to be. They believed that these images were partially due to how men view women, and

partially due to how some women may view themselves. While the girls recognize the agency that women have in choosing to be presented in that manner, they also believe that those images may rob them of their agency of choosing their womanhood and may also contribute to rape culture. This finding has implications for Black girlhood and sexual identity in that it adds to previous findings regarding sexual scripts and Black girls' identity development as providing them with images of what they do not want to be. At the same time, it takes previous research a step further by addressing agency vs. non-agency for Black girls and how the sexual scripts within hip-hop impact how Black girls are perceived by boys/men. West (2009) posits that the misogynistic images within hip-hop may encourage men/boys to commit sexual violence and also allow Black girls/women to become more accepting of their victimization from sexual violence. For the girls in this study, the perpetuation of sexual violence was clear, but their accepting of their victimization was not. In fact, the girls viewed these images as individualized and themselves as able to overcome these images to construct their own identity surrounding Black girlhood.

While some researchers such as West (2009) posit that "these sexualized images are so deeply embedded in our history and culture that they can obliterate individuality" (p. 99), the girls challenge this ideology by showing the strength in the women who choose to be presented with those images. "Do you" and "make your money boo" were phrases that were constantly observed and used in interviews and represents the girls' recognition of the individuality of Black girl/womanhood images and the agency surrounding their choices/decisions to be part of that script. Pough (2007) discusses how the agency of video vixens (i.e., video vixens are women in hip-hop music videos, often the object of the man's affection Pough, 2007) complicates the discussion regarding Black women and their bodies within hip-hop. While she doesn't ignore the

oppressive systems that may impact the decision making of video vixens, she discusses that their agency is an important element to add to the discussion. Morgan (1999) uses the term *fuckin with the greys* to describe the “grey” areas within feminism and challenges essentialist ideologies surrounding feminism. Durham, Cooper, and Morris (2013) discuss these grey areas within hip-hop feminism and the goal of hip-hop feminism as an “elastic way of talking about gender relations [and] can provide a useful lens with which to view this continuing reliance on normative notions of respectability as the primary way to understand gender and sexual politics in the public sphere” (p. 726). The girls in this study recognize the “grey” areas as well and use hip-hop as a means to challenge, critique, affirm, and create images surrounding their version of Black girlhood. It is not the images themselves but the power to challenge and create their own identities that was important.

Strong Black Woman and Carefree Black Girl as Resilience and Power

Aside from the sexualized images of Black womanhood presented within hip-hop, the girls in this study also discussed the Strong Black Woman stereotype as an identity that they use to combat those sexualized images. Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) found that the Black girls in their study discussed the influence of those negative, sexualized images perpetuated within mainstream media and their need to overcome those images through self-determination, the push to break/overcome stereotypes, and the development of inner strength. Additionally, West, Donovan and Daniel (2016) found that Black women attribute the strong Black woman (SBW) to be independent, caring, hardworking, educated, and self-confident. Similar to previous research studies, the girls in this study use words such as *strong*, *independent*, and *confident* to describe what they believe Black womanhood should be. The SBW and Superwoman stereotypes borrow from the Mammy stereotype as the nurturing mother who is concerned with taking care

of all aspects of the family as well as herself. The SBW is naturally resilient and able to handle any adversity (Donovan & West, 2015). The girls in this study discussed the SBW as an identity that they aspire to be in contrast to the sexual scripts that are typically presented in hip-hop and popular media. In essence, the girls in this study adopted the SBW as a counter-identity to the sexualization of Black woman/girlhood.

However, even the SBW stereotype was viewed as a source of pressure and stress for some of the girls. Though the girls discussed the SBW as an aspiration, the aspiration to always have to be strong, even in the face of adversity, appeared to be stressful for the girls. Previous research has shown that being “strong and confident” are characteristics that Black girls/women are taught within the Black community as pertinent characteristics of Black womanhood. Based on foundational pop images (e.g., the Mammy), Black girls/women hold beliefs that they must be strong in every situation and be able to take care of not only themselves, but others. The girls in this study recognize the strength and confidence in the SBW as desirable characteristics, but also recognize that *always* having that strength can be a source of pressure from society. Previous research investigating the SBW stereotype show that Black women/girls that ascribed to the stereotype had higher levels of stress and depressive symptoms (Donovan & West, 2015; West, Donovan, & Daniel, 2016; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). Some researchers believe that the internalization of these stereotypes may lead to Black women/girls putting others’ needs before theirs and defining themselves in relation to others’ happiness, well-being, and satisfaction (West, Donovan, & Daniel, 2016; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). To combat that pressure to always be *strong* and *independent*, the girls sought out hip-hop as a space for freedom and adopted the carefree Black girl identity. *Freedom* was a consistent theme throughout the interviews and participant observations as the girls discussed hip-hop providing

them the space to be free from society's ideologies of who they are supposed to be and just be themselves. In essence, hip-hop allowed them to be *Carefree Black Girls* and allowed them the space to deconstruct their identities of Black girlhood and construct a new version of themselves within and against those norms. This "carefreeness" was also viewed as a coping mechanism as Black girls actively sought out the carefree identity when they felt pressures to conform to other identities surrounding Black girl/womanhood. Future research studies investigating the identities of Black girls should investigate the role of the carefree black girl as a protective identity against societal pressures. While the focus is on the strength of Black women, new age movements within Black and hip-hop feminism push for embracing the self despite what society says about their identity which may be the cause of the development of the protective carefree black girl identity.

Ratchet vs. Classy: Combatting and Finding Power in the Loud/Angry Black Girl

Research surrounding Black girls, education, and discipline not only discussed the hypersexualization of Black girls but also the challenges that Black girls receive within educational settings surrounding their femininity (Morris, 2007). Previous research has shown that Black girls are often stereotyped as Loud Black Girls which continually marginalizes and characterizes Black girls as loud and aggressive, a direct contrast to traditional ideologies surrounding womanhood (Annama et al., 2016; Blake, et al., 2011; Collins, 1990; Fordam, 1993; Morris, 2007). Black girls are often disproportionately disciplined or viewed as uncontrollable, particularly within their educational environments as a result of stereotypes such as the Loud/Angry Black girl.

The girls in this study recognized the stereotype of the Loud Black Girl and gave her a new term "ratchet." Being ratchet, though not viewed as a desirable trait, was considered to be

part of their Black girlhood and was shown to be only acceptable in certain settings. In contrast, being “classy” was a trait that was often pushed on the girls, by their family members, teachers, and even the administration. Being ratchet vs. classy, was a binary that was discussed through hip-hop/R&B artists Cardi B and Beyoncé who resided on opposite ends of the spectrum respectively. In an effort to subscribe to societal ideologies surrounding womanhood, the girls in this study delineated times in which being ratchet was acceptable and being classy was acceptable. Creating this binary contributes to previous research surrounding Black girls in that it shows that Black girls recognize, associate, and have embraced the loud Black girl stereotype as part of their identity instead of shying away from this aspect of their identities.

While some research studies (e.g., Morris, 2007) may believe that the stereotype hinders them within education, the girls find power in being ratchet and loud. Fordham (1993) posits that the loudness of the Black girl is an attempt for Black girls to combat their silence and render themselves visible. The girls in this study affirmed that ideology as they viewed their loudness as challenging dominant ideologies of femininity and rendering themselves visible in a society that continues to silence them. With this in mind, the girls believed that female hip-hop artists such as Cardi B, though ratchet, were also rendered powerful for being themselves in a world that wants them to be something different. While the girls believe that they should be Beyoncé in their educational settings, this study shows that associating with ideologies surrounding classiness does not completely silence them, but allows them to create spaces where they can be loud, which may be good for their self-esteem, confidence, and future identity development. However, this finding shows that the girls are still being silenced within their educational settings and are not allowed to be themselves, even in a school where the teachers, administrators, and student body look like them. However, contrary to researchers such as Morris (2007), this silence does

not lead them to become “less active learners” (p. 22), it instead leads to the girls seeking out other outlets to express themselves and what they may have learned in their educational settings. Future research within education should embrace the “loud, ratchet Black girl” instead of shaming her from educational settings. The “loud, ratchet Black girl” provides the girls space for healthy identity development, and allows them to channel themselves and find power within their educational settings which may yield better educational outcomes.

Hip-hop as a Community of Learning and Power: Implications for Education and Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy

Hip-hop has been shown by many to be a community of learning for Black youth, not only for learning their racial and gendered identities, but also a space for education and life lessons. The space that was created within the *Grit, Grind, Rhythm & Rhyme* (GRRR) program, though created as a space for connecting English/Language Arts to hip-hop, became a space for racial and gender identity development, learning of life lessons, and bonding among the girls and mentors within the program. This was similar to Brown (2009; 2013) in the creation of *Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truths* (SOLHOT) which was also a space where Black girls and women came to be themselves, young, Black and everything else that was important to them. In a sense, SOLHOT was not a program, but a celebration of Black girlhood. She posits that calling it a program diverts from the point of the work and the needs of youth, particularly Black youth: building power and not programs.

While GRRR began as a hip-hop after school program to bridge classroom learning with culture, the program became much more. The girls created bonds or continued to build bonds with each other, actively sought out mentoring from the older students in the program, and were able to find and utilize their voices. In a sense, the culture of hip-hop in this program created a

community of learning for the girls who were able to build and learn from each other as well as with each other. It appears that these hip-hop based educational programs are successful, not only because they bridge the home/school gap, but because they allow the students the space to build communities of learning and power. The girls in the GRRR built this community and found their power through hip-hop by: (1) finding their identities without the pressures from society (2) channeling their true identities into the contents of the program (3) challenging hegemonic ideologies surrounding Black girlhood and (4) discovering the power and voice within themselves to challenge oppressive structures and celebrate themselves as Black girls. The manner in which the girls in this program found community and power through hip-hop is directly related to the hip-hop feminist pedagogy as outlined by Brown (2009) and, if continued, can bring about social change within the Black community and their education. Future research within hip-hop feminist pedagogy should investigate the role of identity development, identity conflict, and identity change as it relates to challenging and critiquing hegemonic ideologies within their community of learning. The community that the girls created influenced how each of the girls discovered their identities and moved through the steps of finding their power and celebrating their Black girlhood. *Bringing wreck* and *fuckin with the greys* are key tenets to hip-hop feminism and key to bringing about social change within dominant society, hip-hop, and the Black community. In addition, they have been shown to influence self-esteem and self-awareness for Black girls (Brown, 2009). While these tenets were clearly expressed throughout the program and the community for learning that the girls created for themselves, the complexities surrounding how these concepts manifest and allow for matriculation through their identity and cognitive development process continues to be understudied. In other words, as Black girls become self-aware through *bringing wreck* and *fuckin with the greys*, how does it impact their

matriculation from immature to more sophisticated levels of racial and epistemic identity development?

Identity and Personal Epistemology

Not only does hip-hop provide students with a space for coping, identity development, and learning, it also provides insights for teachers and educators about the influences of culture, identity, and the power of cultural trends on adolescent epistemological development. Personal epistemology refers to one's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the process of knowing (Hofer, 2001). This study captures how hip-hop acts as a scaffold for young Black girls while they make sense of the world during a developmental period of epistemological growth. Many research studies involving personal epistemology discuss what this concept may look like in the classroom, but many ignore the role that culture and identity may play in one's epistemic trajectory. Some research studies have alluded to the importance of one's culture and identity (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986; Hofer, 2008; Muis, Bendixen, & Haerle, 2006); however, there are not many studies that investigate the role of culture, cultural beliefs, and identity in the development and manifestation of one's personal epistemology. This research study found that one's culture influences one's identity and thus influences one's level of epistemic development, which adds to the literature in personal epistemology research. Research on personal epistemology and culture have demonstrated that one's culture and cultural practices influence their epistemic development (see Hofer, 2008 for review). Research within the United States often treats the US as a monolithic culture without considerations for the various racial/ethnic, religious, sexual, and gender cultural groups. This research study recognizes the subcultures of racial groups (in this case, the Black community), culture (i.e., the culture of hip-hop), the

experiences of marginalization for both race and gender (i.e., being Black and female), and the process of identity development that takes place within those cultures.

Sources and justifications of knowledge. Research in personal epistemology has found that Black Americans typically rely on religion as a source of knowledge, particularly reflecting authority and moral development (Belenky et al., 1986; Goldberger et al., 1996; 2002). Collins (1990) and Goldberger (1996) discuss the role of religion, God, and the Black church as a source of knowledge. For the Black community, God and religion are central to their lives, with God being an active collaborator in knowledge construction. Though religion is of importance to the Black community, the girls in this study did not discuss the importance of God, religion, or church in their lives or identity development. As a matter of fact, only one of the girls mentioned being “with God” to justify her moral development and ideas surrounding Black girlhood. Instead, the girls discussed experts who they believed were knowledgeable about the topics they wanted to learn more about through hip-hop. With the internet being more popular now than it was nearly 30 years ago when Collins and Goldberger’s conducted their studies, the internet emerged as a main external source of knowledge, particularly when looking/seeking information about hip-hop and the Black community. For the girls, the internet was not viewed as an authority, but as a portal to many different sources, facts, and opinions regarding their culture and identity. The girls believed that it is important to have access to many different sources of knowledge and judge the knowledge based on what they believe or have been taught to believe is true/truth. How they judged information was mainly based on feelings and trust, with only a couple discussing having evidence or the quality of information. Some of the other girls discussed looking into those who were profitable in the area/topic or who appeared to be very skilled in the topic as experts to knowledge that they were seeking. All of the girls discussed the

importance of community, as Black girls look to older Black women for knowledge about themselves, their culture, and the world around them.

This finding has important implications for personal epistemology and educational literature. For the girls in this study, the sources of knowledge may be different for Black women than previously thought. While older research studies show the importance of religious influences and family, these girls discuss the internet, famous individuals, and older mentors as their main sources of knowledge. These sources of knowledge and the information that is gained from them are legitimized by the trust that they have for the source, the feeling about the information that they received, and how they identify with the person giving the information. While the views of experts as being knowledgeable and game-changers are synonymous with previous literature (e.g., Hofer, 2004), the girls added to literature surrounding sources of knowledge, individuals they can connect to be it by identity (e.g., Black women) or experience (e.g., Tupac's experiential knowledge). Collins (1990) discusses the importance of community and experience from other Black women in her discussion of Black feminist epistemology. Black women privilege "lived experience" more than an outsider; thus, those with lived experiences are deemed as credible when making knowledge claims. This continues to be true for Black girls, but is complicated by the knowledge of "fakeness" and "false claiming" within hip-hop and the Black community. Therefore, the girls justify knowledge and the sources of knowledge by their feelings of trust and the feeling that it can be applied to their own lives. The idea of justifying knowledge based on emotion follows Collins (1990) epistemological concept of ethics of care. The ethics of care reflects the ideology that Black women rely on their "personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy" when they are constructing or validating knowledge claims (Collins, 1990). In other words, Black Feminist Thought not only relies on the lived experiences of

themselves and others, but the emotions that they invest in those experiences. Within education and educating Black girls, not only does the source have to be able to identify with the population with which they are teaching, but they also have to develop a sense of trust with their students, provide multiple points of views, and continually provide real-world evidence of knowledge claims.

Levels of epistemic development. Previous research on personal epistemology has shown that there are multiple levels of epistemic development ranging from absolutism and reliance on external authorities to relativism and recognition that knowledge is relative and connected, allowing multiple ideas and opinions to be recognized and evaluated (Belenky et al., 1986; King & Kitchner, 1994; Perry, 1970; Hofer, 2008). Research investigating these developmental levels of epistemology have shown that culture, identity, and experience influence their level of epistemic development and can either be domain specific or domain general (Hofer, 2008; Muis, Bendixen, & Haerle, 2006). For the girls in this study, when discussing hip-hop culture or Black culture, their level of epistemic development varied based on their experience and feelings surrounding their idea of the representation of Black women in hip-hop.

All of the girls exhibited some instance or discussion of silence. Belenky et al. (1986) describe silence as an instance of “not knowing” as a protective factor against dangerous authority. In a sense, the girls believed that women in hip-hop are silenced to protect themselves from the standards that the men created within hip-hop. Not only did the girls discuss silence as a protective factor within hip-hop, they also discussed silence as it relates to how they deal with racism, sexism, and colorism. Also, the binary of being *ratchet* vs. *classy* is an illustration of how the girls describe being silenced in various settings. However, researchers such as Belenky

et al. (1986) did not take into account the complexities of silence. Goldberger (1996) revisited *WWoK* and the idea of silence and concluded that the “silenced” and “silence” are two different epistemic stances, with “silenced” being a protective factor and silence being able to demonstrate of immediate and distance context for speech and silence. The girls in this study demonstrated “culturally and ritually endorsed silence” which is far different from the lack of knowledge or defense against authorities. While they might be practicing silence within these settings, they are still are engaged as active builders of knowledge for themselves and within their community.

Aside from the silence vs silenced epistemic stance, some of the girls exhibited higher levels of epistemic development, particularly the ones who also discussed personal instances of racism, sexism, and colorism. These girls discussed evidence of what Kuhn and Weinstock (2002) called evaluativism and what Perry (1970) called relativism. These epistemic stances recognize that others have their own opinions and knowledges that may be different from one another. The two girls in this study who discussed instances of colorism and bullying also discussed an evaluativist and relativist epistemic stance. These girls realize that others have opinions about them, their girlhood, and their authenticity as Black girls/women. These girls challenged those opinions and constructed their own “type of sense” (Danielle, initial interview). Sometimes the girls discussed taking pieces of the information of others and combining that information to make their knowledges. Other times, the girls discussed building their own knowledges from their exposure to differing opinions and thoughts. It appears that the girls who were exposed to experiences reflecting attacks on their identity were more likely to develop higher levels of epistemological beliefs versus those who did not discuss personal issues with racism, sexism, or colorism. For the epistemological literature, this finding illustrates that when marginalized individuals are exposed to situations challenging their identity, it causes cognitive

dissonance and may lead to higher levels of epistemology earlier than previously theorized. According to Jones and McEwen (2000), identity development is a social construct influenced by one's interaction with the environment and larger social issues. Central to the identity development process is the cognitive process of restructuring social knowledge through cognitive dissonance (Torres & Magolda, 2004). A study completed by Torres and Magolda (2004) found that students' exploration (particularly for college students) of their racial and gendered identities and the social constructs surrounding those identities allowed for cognitive maturity. Racial identity models echo the complexity of identity development and the cognitive dissonance that happens as one transitions among the stages (Cross, 1971; Sellers, Chavous, & Cook 1998). As one progresses through the racial development stages, they must explore and define their racial identity for themselves from the information that they receive from various sources regarding their identity, which may yield more sophisticated epistemological development. In other words, as their racial or gendered identity became apparent, their epistemic stances became more complex as they moved from relying on external authorities in constructing knowledge surrounding their race to an internal authority, themselves.

Implications and future research for personal epistemology and identity research.

This finding yields an important implication for linking personal epistemology and racial and gender identity development. Following Torres and Magolda (2004), this research study informs the link between identity development and personal epistemology. When the girls negotiated their racial and gender identity through their experience with bullying or exposure to racism, they experienced cognitive dissonance which allowed for more advanced levels of epistemic thinking. It would appear that the racial/gender identity process for Black girls, depending on the gravity of their experience, assisted in the development of more advanced epistemic thinking.

Within education, youth of color should be encouraged to explore their racial and gender identities within the classroom. This exploration promotes healthy transition to more advanced epistemic levels which has been linked to better instances of academic self-regulation, metacognition, and other academic behaviors. Future research within personal epistemology should include an identity aspect within personal epistemology models. Results from this study indicate that the process that one goes through in discovering their racial and gender identity may influence the sophistication of their epistemic thought. This may be due to the complicated cognitive process that one must go through in constructing knowledge surrounding their racial and gender identities, particularly when you identify with multiple marginalized groups. Muis, Bendixen, & Haerle (2006) posits that it is culture that impacts epistemic beliefs, however, this research study illustrates that, in-between the culture and epistemic process, the identity development process must be considered.

Implications for HHBE

Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE) discusses the impact of hip-hop as a pedagogical tool, and the use of aspects of hip-hop, such as rap music, to connect with concepts learned within the classroom (Hill, 2009; Love, 2015). This research study provides evidence for the community of learning that hip-hop creates, building from the elements of knowledge of self within hip-hop and the concept of the counterstory and “voice” of critical race theory. The girls in this study privileged the voices of themselves and others, particularly those who had similar identities (e.g., Black girls/women) or those who emerged from similar circumstances (e.g., Cardi B and starting from the bottom). Thus, the group created a community of learning in which they learned from each other’s experiences, interpretations of hip-hop, and the experiences of hip-hop artists. The manner in which the girls were able to identify with hip-hop determined how they learned about

hip-hop, culture, themselves, and their cognitive and epistemic processes. Research within HHBE should further investigate the community that is created within hip-hop educational settings, and how these communities continually impact not only knowledge construction educationally, but also the transformation of their personal identities and cognitive changes. As this research study demonstrates, much of what the girls learned about themselves was embedded within the hip-hop pieces that were discussed/created within the program, the hip-hop that each of the girls brought with them, and their own ideologies surrounding hip-hop. This space allowed for the girls to (re)construct their ideologies surrounding who they are based on what they learned from each other and their prior knowledge about themselves. As students learn new things regarding their personal identities, namely their racial and gender identities, their cognitive processes and level of epistemic development becomes more sophisticated and can continually impact not only how they are evaluating pieces within an educational curriculum, but how they utilize those cognitive and epistemic skills within their lives as they grow and develop.

Final Thoughts

Black identity, Black girlhood, and Black womanhood are salient and important constructs for young Black girls/women. Your identity is not a stagnant entity, but an ever-changing construct that continuously influences all aspects of your life from your self-esteem, to your relationships with others, to how you matriculate through your educational and professional settings. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007)'s integrated model of identity demonstrates the importance of social and contextual influences on the ever-changing identity development of youth. These researchers posit that those social and contextual factors impact which identities become salient and how they make meaning of those factors. The Black girls in this study took the social and contextual factors that surrounded them and created multiple meanings

surrounding Black girl/womanhood. The multiple meanings that they created for themselves impacted all aspects of their lives: how they coped with adversity, how they challenged/critiqued conflicting images, how they developed protective identities, how they formed communities and how they created/gained knowledge. This work follows notable Black feminist and hip-hop feminist work in centering the experiences of Black girls, allowing them to create a space by them and for them. Future work with Black girls should continue to center them, their experiences, their knowledges and value all parts of their identities because even those that society deem to be undesirable have been proven to be the most powerful.

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Appendix A: Initial Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. How did hip-hop influence who you are?
2. Tell me about the first time (that you can remember) that you were exposed to hip-hop.
 - a. What were you doing?
 - b. What did you hear?
 - c. What did you see?
 - d. How did it make you feel?
3. Tell me about your participation in hip-hop.
 - a. What do you do?
 - b. How do you do it?
 - c. Why did you choose this activity?
 - d. How does this activity make you feel?
4. If you want to learn about something new in hip-hop, what do you do?
 - a. Where do you go to look for information about it?
 - b. How do you judge whether the information is good or bad?
 - c. Who do you consider to be the experts in hip-hop?
 - d. Why do you consider these people to be experts?
 - e. What are their qualifications?
5. What does hip-hop mean to you?
 - a. When you think about women in hip-hop, who/what are you thinking about?
 - b. Why do these women/this represent hip-hop for you?
 - c. How are you going to influence how Black girls/women are represented in hip-hop?
6. What does it mean to be a female/girl/woman in the hip-hop world?
 - a. How does hip-hop represent Black women/girls
7. Think of a hip-hop song, dance, video, or graffiti piece that represents who you are.
 - a. Tell me your thoughts about this video/song/picture?
 - b. How does this song/video/picture represent Black women?
 - c. As a Black girl, how does this make you feel about yourself?
 - d. How does it represent your idea or the world that we live in?
8. Describe how you and your friends interact with hip-hop?
 - a. What activities do you all participate in together?
 - b. How do you feel when you participate in those activities with your friend?
9. How has hip-hop influenced your education?
 - a. Describe a time when you used hip-hop at school.
 - i. What did you do?

Appendix B Follow Up Interview Questions

1. Describe how you use hip-hop to express yourself.
 - a. How does hip-hop provide you with a space to express your personality?
 - b. How has hip-hop become part of who you are?
2. What does it mean to be a Black girl?
 - a. How does hip-hop influence your definition of being a black girl?
 - b. You mentioned liking Cardi B and Aaliyah. What about them speaks to you as a Black girl?
 - i. alternate the artist depending on the previous interview
3. Do you believe that society has standards for how girls should act or conduct themselves? Describe some of those standards.
 - a. How does hip-hop contribute to those standards?
 - b. Do you feel pressured to conform to those standards?
4. Describe your surrounding environment/your reality. How does hip-hop help you deal with your environment?
 - a. Describe a situation where you struggled. How did hip-hop/music help you cope?
5. Do you believe that there are differences between men and women within hip-hop? Describe those differences. If not, discuss ways in which men and women are shown as equal.
 - a. Why do you believe that there are not a lot of women in hip-hop?
6. You mentioned “quote here about hip-hop making you free.” Describe that freedom.
 - a. How does hip-hop provide you with that freedom?
 - b. Why is it important for you to be free?
7. Define racism/being racist.
 - a. How does hip-hop influence your idea of racism?
8. Some people talk about searching for truth or speaking the truth within hip-hop. What do you think people mean when they say that? (WWoK)
 - a. How do you know people within hip-hop are speaking truth?
9. Why do you choose to use the internet to research things about hip-hop?
 - a. How do you know when something is right/true in the things that you research?
10. How will you use hip-hop in the future of your education?
 - a. What ways would you like to see hip-hop be used in your education?

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