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Graduate Program in Popular Music and Culture
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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**“RAP IS EASY, CAREER IS THE HARD PART:” ANALYZING SUCCESS,
LONGEVITY AND FAILURE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE HIP-HOP
CAREER**

by

Christopher White

Graduate Program in Popular Music and Culture

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
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requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Conceptualizing and analyzing the hip-hop career and the role of success therein allows us to investigate the long-term shifts in the economic and cultural capitals associated with the genre, and can help us better understand how hip-hop has achieved enduring success and respect. As hip-hop musicians continue to prosper financially and achieve unprecedented levels of success and longevity in the industry, understandings of the hip-hop career have shifted. Hip-hop musicians attempt to translate their cultural capital into financial profit by leveraging their respective personas into marketable brands and lifestyles that act as non-musical, career extending strategies. The thesis investigates how the hip-hop music career commences, the activities and individuals required to nurture a career, and the criteria that ultimately determine success. When entering contractual employment relationships, how do hip-hop musicians navigate intricate relations of power, retain or give up important authorial rights, and understand the attainment of economic self-sufficiency in relation to autonomy? Ultimately, I suggest that many contemporary hip-hop musicians develop and structure their careers based on previously established models and recognizable patterns, and that popular musicians in other genres face similar struggles for autonomy. For hip-hop musicians, unlike those working in other genres, there is a linkage between possessing large amounts of economic capital and high evaluations of cultural capital, and establishing a long-term career is the most effective way of achieving success in these interrelated areas.

KEYWORDS

Hip-hop, Career, Success, Longevity, Mixtapes, Music, Jay-Z, Wiz Khalifa, Mac Miller, MC Hammer, Vanilla Ice

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One-hit wonders (The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight") and novelty songs (Kurtis Blow's "Christmas Rappin'") marked the formative years (1970-82) of the hip-hop genre. This contributed to dominant views of hip-hop as a passing fad, and this dismissive categorization was underscored by a predominance of the single, rather than album, releases. It was difficult to determine if hip-hop music would simply be a temporary response to disco or occupy a long-lasting place in popular music history. Hip-hop performers were not likely to have sustained careers at this point or reap the rewards that long-term participation might bring. Further augmenting the uncertainty of its significance was the regional formation and centrality of hip-hop in New York, and its slow spread to other areas of the United States over subsequent years.

While hip-hop singles sold very well, an early indication of a crossover to the mainstream transpired when "Rapture" by Blondie became one of the first rap-influenced pop songs to reach number one on the U.S. Billboard "Hot 100" chart on March 28, 1981 (Grein, 1981). Over the next few years, hip-hop musicians like L.L. Cool J and Run-D.M.C. became some of the first hip-hop acts to sign recording contracts with a major record label. Acts like these demonstrated the ability of hip-hop artists to sell large quantities of albums and singles, tour on a national level, and eventually infiltrate the rock and roll-saturated playlists of MTV. More importantly, with these artists there emerged a sense that hip-hop was solidifying itself as a key cultural, economic and social influence. We might locate early evidence of this when Robert Christgau (1984) classified the debut album by Run-D.M.C. as "easily the canniest and most formally sustained rap album ever, a tour de force I trust will be studied by all manner of creative downtowners and racially enlightened Englishmen." As we will see, the ability of rap to sustain itself will be crucially joined to the development of enduring careers for hip-hop musicians.

In just over forty years of existence hip-hop has become one of the most commercially successful and enduring forms of music. Beyond the beats and rhymes, hip-hop also extends into activities such as breakdancing and graffiti art, creative innovations in styles of dress and manipulation of language, and many believe that these elements combine

into a hip-hop culture. As a phenomenon that now influences industries such as fashion, food & beverage and cinema, hip-hop culture is responsible for generating billions of dollars in revenue annually. Advertisers and marketing directors borrow, repackage and use the symbols and signifiers associated with hip-hop culture to imbue commercial goods with connotations such as rebellion or youthfulness, which can then enhance sales and market shares. Hip-hop musicians also make use of their cultural capital, not only for financial profit, but to build and leverage their respective names into brands and lifestyles that act as inventive, non-musical career-extending strategies.

While difficult to locate a watershed moment when this way of thinking changed, at one time most hip-hop musicians did not think about developing a career in music. However, as some early artists prospered and achieved unforeseen accomplishments, the notion of the hip-hop career developed concurrently. The hip-hop career is now such a dominant part of the genre that it can serve as a unit for investigating shifts in the economic and cultural capitals associated with hip-hop over the long-term. Analyzing its structure and significance can help us better understand how hip-hop as a genre, and as a culture, has achieved enduring success and respect.

As hip-hop solidified its place within popular music and mainstream society more generally, its status as the object of academic research also increased. Authors attempt to analyze its importance from a diverse variety of perspectives and frameworks, but there has been very little focus on what constitutes a career in hip-hop, let alone successful or failed hip-hop careers. The untheorized notion of the hip-hop career is not altogether surprising for a musical genre that began as a fad. Early originators may have noticed the potential for a quick profit, but long-term aspirations likely were not a major concern for most. As a larger base of listeners began to develop, focus shifted toward comparing the validity of hip-hop to more established popular genres like rock and roll. As the cultural impact of hip-hop became more undeniable and its potential for economic profit more realized, the discourse shifted focus toward the entrepreneurial spirit and earning power of rappers. Hip-hop artists were clearly reaching new milestones and establishing a lasting place in popular culture, but the notion of a career was still overlooked and so remained untheorized.

Perhaps the multitude of definitions and interpretations of what constitutes a general music career helps explain why the specificity of the hip-hop career has gone unexamined.

Does a music career commence the moment one decides to perform songs for hobbyist purposes, or must a musician earn money in exchange for live performance or the sale of recorded music? Might the music career begin when a musician signs a recording contract with an independent or major record label, thus agreeing to engage in musical labour for eventual distribution and sale by the employer? Is there a required length of activity after such initial stages to qualify as a career? Further complicating the analysis of a music career is the question of what amounts to a successful or failed music career. The meanings of the words “success” and “failure” as its antonym are incredibly malleable, and their definitions can be dependent on the musician's subjective interpretation, historically established music industry accomplishments, or a number of constantly changing criteria.

This career trajectory is a long-standing creation of the music and entertainment industries and an underlying industrial structure is primarily responsible for shaping it (Peterson, 1990; Dyer, 1998; Cloonan, 2009). The occupational career sequence for rock musicians (Bennett, 1980) is similar to that of hip-hop musicians. Typically a rock or hip-hop performer will begin on a local level, writing and performing original songs, and working toward recording an album or single. This may eventually lead to signing with an independent record label, a desire to seek new audiences through participation in the national touring circuit, or capturing the attention of the artist & repertoire (A&R) division of a major record label. The important difference is that the hip-hop artist generally romanticizes the act of signing to a major label, whereas some rock musicians – particularly in the indie rock sub-genre – may have a more hesitant relationship with that pursuit.

When the indie rock musician makes the decision, or expresses the desire, to remain independent of the mainstream music industry and eschew the pursuit of increased economic capital, observers may acknowledge this as a form of autonomy. In one sense, attempting to convert the cultural capital associated with this autonomy to economic capital invalidates the purpose of occupying the position. Whereas an alternative perspective may claim that the indie rock musician was always, consciously or unconsciously, attempting to economically capitalize on this autonomy. While these positions appear at odds, if a larger audience perceives the continued maintenance of a D.I.Y. spirit as a positive quality, it may ultimately lead to increased concert attendance, or album and merchandising sales. The conundrum for the indie rock musician is to resolve this newfound relationship with economic capital while

continuing to signify autonomy.

For the hip-hop musician, making the transition from independent career development to the mainstream music industry is also an active choice that is loaded with conflicting values. On one hand, the hip-hop musician may feel pressure to remain loyal to the cultural values of the hip-hop community from whence they came. While on the other, there is a desire to embrace the pursuit of upward mobility to reach middle- or upper-class bourgeois status. It is possible for a hip-hop musician to realize a combination of both, but the decision often privileges the acquisition of economic capital and the taste of necessity, while maintaining some degree (or, at least giving the impression) of an anchoring connection to the romanticized origins of hip-hop culture as anti-commercialized in nature. Despite privileging the transition from independent success to the major label recording contract, the hip-hop musician faces a somewhat similar philosophical predicament as the indie rock musician.

Rationale and methodology

The hip-hop career has primarily gone unrecognized as a category of investigation, and has the potential to underscore crucial transformations at the cultural, political, and economic levels. While some literature examines individual components of what might constitute a hip-hop career, it is important to scrutinize the hip-hop career in its numerous expressions. Despite some similarities to the career trajectories of other popular musicians, it is significant to examine how the hip-hop career is similar to, and differs from, other genres. It is also essential to study the hip-hop career from a historical perspective as the hip-hop genre evolved from its early fad status through its rise to an international influence on economics and culture. Finally, it is vital to understand the ways in which the hip-hop career parallels other forms of creative or industrial labour.

Initially I will explore understandings of the hip-hop career in relation to careers in other popular music genres, the entertainment industry, and more traditional occupations. I will then examine notions of successful and failed hip-hop careers by utilizing a combination of dictionary interpretations, existing academic literature, journalistic reporting, commonly recognized milestones of the popular music industry, and previous achievements by key hip-

hop artists. Following this I will investigate the ways in which the development of the contemporary hip-hop career is similar to or different from methods utilized in the past. Finally, I will theorize how aspects of the contemporary hip-hop career resemble wider trends within the sociology of labour.

Research questions

The key question this thesis will explore is what constitutes a career in hip-hop? Answering this question will involve exploring two critical and related questions: How might establishing, or failing to establish, a career affect the hip-hop musician's economic survival, cultural status, or ability to create music over the long-term? How are hip-hop performers redefining notions of long-term music industry success, or are these musicians simply following previously established models of contractual labour? Secondary concerns will include: what is the role of entertainment corporations in the production of culture, how are ownership and control exercised, and how does this impact the contemporary musician as a creative labourer? Does the industrial structure frame the milestones of success and limit the possible routes to stardom? In order to seek answers to these questions the thesis will also address the broader contexts in which hip-hop exists, such as industry, authorship, autonomy, technology, racial politics, social relationships, and media institutions.

Chapter 1 comprises a literature review, which initially focuses on the sociological study of labour as the framework for the later analysis of concepts like occupations, careers and success. The remainder of the chapter locates and examines existing literature with a more direct focus on the career in both popular and hip-hop music. In chapter 2, I examine MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice as two of the first hip-hop musicians to accumulate high levels of economic capital after crossing over to a popular music audience, and how their inability to sustain long-term music career success has affected their current career pursuits. Hot Karl and J-Zone will then offer two contemporary examples of failed music careers, and we will see how both individuals approach their transition to life after music. Chapter 3 examines Jay-Z as one of the most prominent examples of a hip-hop musician who possesses great economic and cultural capitals, music career success that exceeds fifteen years, and lucrative expansions into non-music, career-extending activities. Biographical and retrospective

accounts of his life will also help us understand the development of a hip-hop music career. Odd Future, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller are the focus of chapter 4, and these emerging rappers help us understand how many aspects of contemporary hip-hop career development have shifted online, yet in many ways these online activities simply replicate more traditional offline endeavours. Musicians like these are increasingly responsible for completing activities that were formerly the responsibility of record labels and other music industry participants, and in the conclusion I will theorize how their experiences may reflect broader labour trends.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores academic and popular literature pertaining to concepts and issues relevant to the study of the career, which serves as the first step toward researching the hip-hop music career. A number of key words will regularly appear during this analysis, and many, if not all, of their meanings will change depending on the conceptual- or situational-specific context. Much like the literature under analysis, many of these fundamental terms will refer back to one another and this interconnectedness demonstrates the necessity of investigating the various nuances associated with the complex concept of “career.”

The Oxford English Dictionary (2011) defines the word *career* as the “course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world.” Raymond Williams observes that the career “now usually implies continuity if not necessarily promotion or advancement, yet the distinction between a career and a job only partly depends on this and is often associated also with class distinctions between different kinds of work” (1983, 53). While Everett Hughes interprets the career in a similar manner, he notes that it does not always occur within a hierarchical workplace because many life-careers lack formal organization and conscious definition (1997, 389-90). These definitions demonstrate that conceptualizing the career implies a connection to the notions of jobs, work, and labour over an extended period of time. As a concept, the term “career” also has an inherent flexibility or ambiguity that allows its application to various forms of less-traditional employment or activities in general.

Some may question whether creating and performing popular music qualifies as an occupation. The Oxford English Dictionary offers a number of contextual variations of the word *occupation*, but its usage in relation to time is of most interest. An occupation is described as, “a) The state of having one's time or attention occupied; what a person is engaged in; employment, business; work, toil. b) A particular action or course of action in which a person is engaged, esp. habitually; a particular job or profession; a particular pursuit or activity” (2011). It should be apparent that an individual is free to dedicate time and attention to musical endeavours, and all popular music genres provide some evidence of musicians who hope to earn an income level comparable to more traditional forms of

employment. Therefore music-making becomes an occupation if or when a musician decides to treat it as one.

In order to introduce career-related concerns to popular music-making as an occupation, it is helpful to refer to the term “occupational career,” which Watson defines as “the sequence of positions through which the member of an occupation typically passes during the part of their life which they spend in that occupation” (2008, 214). He claims that numerous factors influence an individual’s orientation to work, and that it is possible for more than one typical career pattern to exist in any occupation (2008, 214-5). According to Bennett (1980), one widely recognized occupational career sequence for an aspiring rock musician begins with acquiring and learning how to play an instrument, practicing original or cover songs, and performing locally for an audience. As the musician progresses through these activities he might then transition into more professional endeavours such as performing a series of touring gigs, recording an album, and perhaps signing a contract with a record label. While this occupational sequence is common for many rock and other popular musicians, it is by no means the only way to develop a popular music career.

Career and success are therefore also evaluative concepts that will change depending on the individual analyzing them. For example, a musician might evaluate his own career through the framework of subjective self-understanding, but an outside researcher might be limited to objective and observable criteria. Watson believes that a thorough understanding of the occupational career entails both an examination of subjective interpretations and objective accomplishments (2008, 214-5). Hughes agrees and suggests that researchers strive to study the social processes in which individuals select new or alternative career positions, and the steps that will determine their future status in relation to upward or downward movements in financial earnings, prestige or power (1997, 394-6). While it might not always be possible to uncover the self-understandings that popular musicians will have concerning their respective careers, Watson and Hughes are useful for suggesting that a complete study of the popular music career must extend beyond objective criteria whenever possible.

To summarize: a career is an extended unit of work that primarily exists within the framework of occupations. Its flexibility as a concept primarily derives its varying criteria of analysis, such as subjective personal interpretations or objective, goal-based accomplishments. The field of sociology is well-suited to shed light on the cultural study of

labour, and what follows is an overview of relevant literature on both the subject of the career in general and the hip-hop career in particular.

Early sociological analysis of the career

While Becker (1952) provides a very early study of the attitudes of working jazz musicians in relation to audiences, the body of research on musicians' work attitudes (Groce, 1989; Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Tunnell and Groce, 1998) is still relatively small. A sociological investigation into the careers of popular music-makers is also underdeveloped, so it is helpful to first look at the cultural study of work. Harper and Lawson recognize Marx, Weber and Durkheim as authors who inspired early sociological writing on core issues related to labour, and claim that Engels was the closest to studying the cultural definition of work (2003, xi-xii). Oswald Hall (1948) deserves credit for providing an early study of the career as defined inwardly and by the calendar. The importance is that Hall was one of the first to highlight the possibility of both subjective and extended time-based interpretations as criteria for defining and analyzing the career.

Harper and Lawson identify Hughes and other members of the Chicago School of Sociology as leaders in the tradition now formally recognized as the cultural study of work (2003, xii-xiv). Much of Hughes' early efforts studied the professionalization of occupations, and how different economic or social systems may shape them. To draw a parallel with hip-hop music, the formative years of the genre were widely seen as a novelty, and rappers thus likely have anticipated recording a hit single or one album as the upper limit of a career. During the middle-to-late 1980s, hip-hop musicians began recording progressively more cohesive albums, they were signing multi-album recording contracts with major record labels, collaborating or touring with popular musicians from other genres, receiving increasing radio and music video play, and gaining acceptance from popular music audiences. The cumulative effects were becoming more noticeable in the early 1990s when some rappers began achieving successes that occasionally rivaled some of the most popular musicians in other genres. Notions of career longevity and economic success expanded as these and other hip-hop musicians began to achieve previously unforeseen successes and enduring appeal. Making hip-hop music is now a viable occupation that many aspiring and

long-term participants take very seriously, and it creates employment opportunities for a number of other music industry participants (e.g. record label employees, concert booking agents, venue owners, and managers).

The influence of cultural intermediaries on the career

The interconnected nature of musicians and music industry personnel, in hip-hop and other popular music genres, extends further because these intermediaries are often responsible for creating or helping musicians achieve new career opportunities. Murdock explains how social connections are vital for maintaining continual employment in cultural occupations like music-making because job security is never guaranteed when younger aspirants are always willing to do comparable work for little or no economic reward (2003, 31). This analysis is heavily inspired by Becker's concept of the art world, which is described as a "network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (Becker 1982, x). More simply, Becker's focus on social organization addresses the sociology of occupations as it relates to cultural texts (1982, xi). Dowd (2004) notes increasing academic attention to the organizations and networks (Faulkner, 1971; Peterson and White, 1989) that musicians inhabit, which indicates the continual relevance of the art world perspective.

Researching the music career will lead to encounters with individuals who may claim that artistic instinct and aptitude can explain the success of a given musician. While the art world perspective recognizes that creative genius and high aesthetic evaluations of cultural products by critics are important, it does not privilege these criteria as preconditions for success. For instance, most contemporary recordings involve the input of sound technicians in the studio or mastering environments (Kealy, 1990), which signals a shift away from isolated artisanal production and toward an organizationally-structured system of production. Additionally, if we consider that popular music creation has relatively low barriers to entry and includes a large number of aspiring participants, natural artistic gifts cannot solely explain why some musicians have successful careers and others do not. If it is true that societal mechanisms sort out the talented from the others (Becker 1982, 16), it seems

reasonable to theorize that similar systems help determine who has a career in popular music-making, who becomes successful, what qualifies as success, how success is achieved, and the potential for career longevity.

Art world intermediaries are responsible for completing a number of other tasks that are essential to the final outcome of the creative work, and some of these activities may rely on business expertise or other forms of specialized, non-artistic knowledge (Becker 1982, 23-5). Jones suggests that the recording industry represents a series of active relationships designed to transform the unique traits of popular musicians and the cultural materials they create into marketable commodities, and thus it is important to identify these intermediaries and examine their roles (2003, 150-1). He notes that musicians, managers, and record company personnel possess expertise, and the desire for success unites them. However, conjuring success requires developing, deploying, refining, and reasserting career-building and promotional strategies in order to justify the effort and financial investment that creating a marketable commodity demands. One outcome is that the record company is constantly reassessing the potential fortunes of their artists using portfolio management techniques because they never have sufficient resources to support each one equally, which leads to a prioritization of musicians (Jones 2003, 156; Negus 1999, 527), and thus they also serve as gatekeepers.

Recognizing their powerful role in the production and marketing of music, Toynbee argues that musicians cannot reach a significant public without the assistance of record labels. Like Jones, he agrees that the music industry maintains a reservoir of workers who are initially willing to work for free, and market conditions (e.g. the uncertainty of demand) necessitate this reservoir of potential replacements. Record label personnel and other intermediaries select the cultural workers who appear most likely to succeed, but have the power to terminate contracts and select new artists if necessary (Toynbee 2003, 40-1, 50-1). This highlights the precariousness inherent in the pursuit of a popular music career, and further suggests that talent alone does not always guarantee a career or success. However, Toynbee also finds optimism in the relative affordability of musical instruments and home recording equipment, in addition to the ease in which popular musicians can access to proto-markets like small clubs and online music distribution (2003, 52). Florida and Jackson (2008) also acknowledge that affordable digital distribution and social media may enable musicians

to participate from locations outside the core centres of musical activity. This indicates that economic and technological trends are increasingly making it easier for contemporary musicians to nurture some aspects of their careers without the assistance of record labels or music industry intermediaries. The rise to prominence of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller are two recent examples that perhaps suggest the relevance of this idea, and their career development strategies will be the focus of an upcoming chapter.

Career beginnings and professionalization

Given the uncertainties associated with earning a living, why do individuals continually pursue music-making as an occupation and what signals the beginning of a music career? Coulson (2010) studied the working lives of British musicians to understand what contributes to the desire and ability to begin a musical livelihood. The primary factors examined include the early recognition and nurturing of talent, the building of skills, performance experience and contacts, and a dedication to lifelong learning. She understands these criteria as various forms of social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that musicians amass in life, and while they are all influential, Coulson recognizes that there is no clear entry point or progression through a career in music.

Examining the transition from amateur to professional might strengthen the relevance of the claim that one key moment signifying the beginning of a career is the achievement of professional status. The word *professional* has multiple meanings, and in the context most relevant to the study of the career, a professional is “a person or persons... that engages in a specified occupation or activity for money or as a means of living, rather than as a pastime,” and the definition also includes connotations of pursuing the occupation over a long-term period (OED Online, 2011). This definition highlights the reliance on engaging in an occupation to earn a living wage, and it implies a certain level of seriousness or commitment. The Oxford English Dictionary also notes that an individual engaging in a *profession* commonly “has or displays the skill, knowledge, experience, standards, or expertise of a professional” (2011), and presumably many of these attributes are also developed and refined over an extended period.

From a sociological perspective, Stebbins often focuses on the distinctions between amateurs, professionals, and the public (2007, 178). He maintains that amateurs internalize standards of excellence as established by professionals, possess a strong understanding of what amounts to an exceptional product or performance, and often enter an organizational or monetary relationship in order to receive professional training or education. The crucial difference is that professionals maintain a commercial orientation because they create artistic products with the intention of selling them to a public, whereas amateurs primarily engage in leisurely pursuits rather than seeking to enter the marketplace (Stebbins 1977, 585-6). Alternatively, we might say that professional musicians occupy what Bourdieu refers to the heteronomous principle of hierarchization where success is measured by criteria like album or concert ticket sales, while amateurs inhabit the autonomous principle of hierarchization because they create music solely for their own enjoyment (1993, 38-39). Ultimately, Stebbins utilizes the attributes of confidence, preparedness, self-conception, and the temporal categories of perseverance, continuance, and commitment help separate amateurs from professionals, and to separate both from their publics (1977, 595-6).

Wilensky claims that occupations reach professional status when occupational participants engage in a task on a full-time basis, complete a series of training procedures, and when likeminded individuals combining to form a professional association (1964, 142-4), and arguably one can find evidence of these characteristics in the realm of popular music. Musicians commonly express the desire to make music for a living, which indicates a yearning to create and perform music full-time. Formal performance training may take place in an academic institution, aspiring musicians may pay professionals for private lessons, or as Bennett (1980) indicates, the possibility of self-learning through copying recordings and studying live performances also exists. Many countries have professional organizations for music-makers such as the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, and we also might interpret record labels as another type of professional association.

Lee (2009) employs the sociological metaphor of the “turning point” to describe how aspiring rappers subjectively perceive leaving the Project Blowed open mic venue as the beginning of a professional hip-hop career. The participants initially visit Project Blowed simply to practice their performance skills and learn by watching other rappers. Lee’s ethnographic fieldwork indicates that rappers often perceive the recording and selling of

music, performing at other venues, and networking with members of the music industry as true indicators of a professional hip-hop career. While Lee does not specifically identify him as such, one participant may represent mid-career success somewhere between the older rappers who do not progress beyond Project Blowed (“negative career models”) and those who eventually transition into career opportunities unconnected to the venue. Lee’s work is useful because it indicates the importance of practice, and it documents subjective interpretations of the hip-hop career from the perspectives of up-and-coming rappers.

Commitment

In addition to examining the occupational network, we must focus on the actions of its participants. For example, to afford the costs associated with living and the pursuit of a music career, a musician may need to sustain traditional 9-to-5 employment. This is a practical strategy because few musicians will ever be fortunate to earn a living solely from music performance, and generating a steady income helps to offset debt that will accumulate during this pursuit. However, one might also interpret the 9-to-5 job as indicating a lack of full commitment to the music career or the confidence to succeed at it – two characteristics common to amateurs. It is the professional musician who will possess the confidence and commitment to abandon other forms of employment in order to focus on the full-time music career, and in most cases it is also an early indication of success.

As we will examine in more detail later, many successful musicians recognize that music career longevity is never a guarantee, and they will use their fame to seek non-musical career-extending strategies in other areas of the entertainment industry or in commercial product endorsement. In situations where a successful musician demonstrates increasing commitment to the pursuit of non-musical activities, it could suggest that their commitment to a music career is decreasing. Musicians who once had successful careers may ultimately discover that their fanbase has diminished and they can no longer earn a living primarily from music-related activities. In circumstances like these, the musician may want to continue making music with the hope of one day regaining their former level of career success, but must ultimately return to more traditional employment in order to afford the costs of living and to support the pursuit of music career resurgence.

In both of these examples we see how difficult it is to determine if music-making always remains the primary career, or if it shifts to a role of lesser importance as a secondary career. For the purposes of my research, I acknowledge the fluidity of primary and secondary careers as concepts, and will interpret the primary career as encompassing those activities that an individual relies on for economic sustenance. Yet, I also recognize that in case studies of hip-hop moguls, for example, it may be difficult to determine which career activity acts as their principal source of revenue. In situations like these I will claim that music-making remains the primary career for as long as a rapper maintains an active presence in the recorded or live performance marketplaces at a level of success on par with that of their musical peers. Formerly successful hip-hop musicians may claim that music-making remains as their primary career, but it will be most useful to allow their primary revenue source to define their primary careers.

Skill acquisition and time investment

Individuals must invest time and effort to improve the relevant skills that will help them overcome the demands of a given occupation (Watson 2008, 177, 213-14). From the perspective of popular music-making as an occupation, Bennett explains how acquiring an instrument and declaring the desire to become a musician are important steps early in the music career, but one must also dedicate time to practicing in order to learn how to play the instrument and to understand the basics of song creation. In other words, desire must be supplemented by skill. Over the course of the career, the musician will also have to develop other skills like efficiently packing musical equipment into an automobile, balancing interpersonal relationships with other band members and music industry intermediaries, booking gigs, and meeting audience demands or expectations (Bennett 1980, 17-20, 134-5). Unfortunately musicians cannot guarantee that their time and effort will ever result in financial, emotional or reputational rewards, and this demonstrates another reason why seeking a career in popular music is a precarious endeavour. Thus a musical career is an outcome rather than simply a choice.

Subjective occupational analysis

As one method of analyzing popular music-making as an occupation, Stebbins defines the subjective career as, “the actor’s recognition and interpretation of past and future events associated with a particular identity, and his interpretation of important contingencies as they were or will be encountered” (1970, 34). An individual may have concurrent careers and overlapping scheduling commitments may lead to conflict, but possessing an awareness of these tensions will allow the individual to reduce any potential strain that they may cause (Stebbins 1970, 34-36). If an aspiring musician simultaneously holds a 9-to-5 job while pursuing the goal of a full-time music career, he will initially have to balance these two occupations. If he successfully abandons a reliance on traditional employment and is able to earn a living via music-making, it will result in a shift in mentality and self-identification – put simply, “I am now a musician and I now have a full-time career in music making.”

While the popular music career may be desirable for its perceived autonomy, in addition to the positive associations of job satisfaction and occupational prestige that come with it (Foley and Polanyi, 2006; Sennett, 2006; Stahl, 2008), the newly full-time musician will also begin to recognize a new set of occupational requirements, goals, and contingencies. Becker (1963) and Glynn (2008) investigate how a musician’s subjective interpretation of the popular music career may affect its development. Each author examines factors that may force musicians to modify their working behaviours in ways that may not match their initial ideological stance. The musician will often make concessions if they believe it will ultimately help their career and provide them with the autonomy to focus solely on music in the future (Becker 1963, 109-11; Glynn 2008, 23-5).

Using the subjective view of career as a framework may help us understand how a musician’s self-evaluation of objective career accomplishments affects future behaviour. For example, in Bennett’s study of rock musicians, he notes how the characteristics of different venues can shape the career of the rock group. As the group progresses from small temporary gigs to steady performances they will begin to nurture an audience of fans and possibly attract the attention of a concert booking agent. If a booking agent successfully schedules concerts in progressively larger venues that attract an increasing number of fans, the rock group will interpret these events as positive progressions toward a successful music career (Bennett 1980, 97).

Objective occupational analysis

The preceding example demonstrates the linkage between subjective and objective analysis for the musician, but researchers who seek to analyze the popular music career may or may not have access to these subjective self-understandings. Instead they are more likely to rely on objective criteria (e.g. the number of promotions within an occupation) because their exoteric characteristics are more conducive to study (Gutteridge, 1973; Judge et al., 1995). Relating objective analysis to the music career, Zwann et al (2010) examine how professional contacts (managers, booking agents) directly influence positive career progression because they help the musicians translate their reputational value or cultural capital into financial value (Becker, 1982; Beckert and Rössel, 2004; Bourdieu, 1996). Accessing professional contacts is early evidence of music career success and, as a career demonstrates positive growth, musicians will connect with increasingly influential contacts that have an even greater ability to nurture further success (Zwann et al 2010, 18). It is important to stress that the quality or authority of the intermediary, rather than the quantity of contacts available to a musician, is more important for positive growth of the popular music career.

These results display congruence with earlier investigations by the same group of researchers. Zwann et al (2009) determined that a “stamp of approval” from an intermediary in a professional network can lead to further advancement of the music career. Additionally, Zwaan and ter Bogt (2009) determined that A&R managers are more likely to discover and promote new talent through their professional network connections. After discovering a musician it is their potential marketability that becomes the main criteria for signing a recording contract. Association with a record label may lead to an increase in reputational status, thus making the musician more appealing to booking agents or other music industry professionals.

The three preceding inquiries raise a number of interesting ideas and demonstrate the continual influence of the art world perspective, but they cannot precisely account for how a musician’s career is shaped. For instance, does having managerial representation in the music industry always help musicians become more successful, or do musicians attract the attention of management by first achieving some level of success independently? Petti (2006) argues that independently-created, self-directed exposure can help musicians attract the attention of

A&R executives, but it does not guarantee that record labels will take notice. Ultimately, changing market trends dictate what style of music is prioritized and promoted at any given time, or in a best case scenario, record label personnel may attempt to modify and sculpt a music-maker with sales potential to fit the ideal image, but success is never guaranteed (2006, 25).

Quantitative/economic career analysis

Quantitative analysis provides another set of easily observable criteria, which allows musicians, music industry personnel, and fans to measure the success of a popular music career. The most common statistical measurements include the sale of recorded music, concert tickets, and musician-branded merchandise, which cumulatively assist with estimating the economic success of musicians. There is emerging interest in the numerical data associated with fan activity on social networking websites, as some music industry participants believe that social media has the potential to assist with monetizing the music career. While these figures do not have an inherent economic component and there is no guarantee that fan interest will correlate with economic success, the data helps determine a hierarchy of popularity and allows us to predict which musicians might be more financially successful than others.

Goldberg (2005) defines a “mid-level artist” as one capable of selling a minimum of 50,000 albums and, while he does not include an upper sales limit for this category, his writing hints at a figure near 200,000. He uses estimates of music industry financial data to break down the costs and earning potential associated with this category of musician, and argues that mid-level artists are only valuable to major record labels for their future potential. Goldberg's assessment offers a valuable median at which to determine when a musician has progressed beyond the earliest stages of the music career, but has yet to achieve peak levels of success. From a historical perspective, quantitative sales data often dictate the future outcomes of a musical career. When J. Mayo Williams was signing African-American artists for Paramount Records in the 1920s, only musicians whose sales reached a minimum level of 10,000 copies were eligible for a follow-up recording session (Calt 2005, 93). While it may prove difficult to obtain evidence that contemporary record labels use sales data to determine

the short- and long-term career potential of musicians, the emphasis these labels often place on corporate profit makes it easy to presume that this practice is still in existence.

We cannot solely allow economic criteria to indicate the existence of an active popular music career because some music-makers will continue to generate income after they have ceased participating in the music industry. Keightley (2004) contrasts the slower temporal logic of the long-play album and emphasis on long-term sales to that of the single. In turn, record labels and musicians may then rely on back catalogue sales as an economic “anchor” insulating profits against shifts in music industry trends. Roberts (2005) recognizes that the median annual income for professional musicians in the late 1990s was approximately \$30,000, and he claims that the most successful musicians are those who continually earn royalties from a hit single or album. Discussing the catalogue value of hip-hop, Negus contends that, in comparison to other genres of music, rap songs have a considerably shorter “shelf life” and generate less long-term revenue. More specifically, the complexities of hip-hop production make the recording and performance of cover songs rather difficult, and as a result, hip-hop musicians receive smaller advances and royalties (1999, 532-3). While only a fraction of aspiring musicians will be fortunate enough to continually generate revenue from the sale of their back catalogue, it appears that hip-hop musicians also begin at a disadvantage in this regard.

Evaluating success in popular music as an occupational career

Combining subjective, objective, and quantitative/economic analysis of the career allows us to begin evaluating levels of career success. The general tendency is to interpret occupational careers in terms of upward, horizontal or downward movements for the individual, with each vertical movement correlating to differing levels of reward and prestige. Many occupations follow a hierarchical structure where every upward progression connotes successful progress, but careers in arts and entertainment may follow a different pattern. Giuffre argues that artistic careers are “a series of positions occupied within a structure that is itself in a state of flux” (1999, 818). Her theory combines Bourdieu’s (1989, 1993) conceptions of a field and an individual’s trajectory through it, Faulkner’s (1987) correlation of success with connections to important actors in a given network, and White’s

(1970) observation that all career moves require an entire chain of others to fill vacancies in open spaces. Drawing on Becker's art world perspective, Giuffre argues that in order to determine an artist's level of success, one must examine the network picture at multiple points in time, alongside the ways sources of external validation (e.g. critics and fans) help determine which career paths have been most successful (1999, 818-9, 825).

Abbott and Hrycak suggest that orderly careers do not exist, and cite Wilensky (1961) to indicate that the majority of the workforce follows disorderly careers (1990, 145). The authors clarify that, despite the appearance of disorder, a career may follow a logical structure from the individual's subjective perspective. Additionally, an individual's future career plans may reflect their present situation in combination with an evaluation of their current chances for advancement. Abbott and Hrycak ultimately state that there are reasons to believe that individuals try to structure their work histories into careers based on culturally acceptable models and recognizable patterns (1990, 146-7), which suggests that the career is a form of self-understanding.

Hip-hop musicians often use clothing, jewelry and automobiles as visual signifiers to depict a degree of subcultural capital and urban authenticity. Lyrical boasts simultaneously signify personal greatness and serve to disparage any possible competitors. The visual and the verbal work in combination by projecting images of wealth, power, masculinity and success. Considering that rappers often exaggerate their boasts, emulating markers of status and success are believed to lead to real status and success. Given the emphasis on criteria such as overall net worth, total album sales, or the cost of luxury items purchased, it appears that rappers understand economic measurements as most emblematic of a successful hip-hop career. As a result, many will actively structure their career-related activities toward achieving these goals. Underlying these aspirations is the assumption that financial wealth correlates with control over one's creative musical endeavours and personal life outside of the music industry. This is somewhat of a false notion, particularly for musicians who are signed to recording contracts, because their economic wealth has no effect on the pressures to continually create marketable music. In fact, economic success would seem to intensify the desire to replicate past musical successes in order to maintain a certain standard of living.

Contemporary hip-hop musicians recognize that the potential for economic success increases if they transition into non-musical activities. With this in mind, Aho (2005) equates

the achievement of star status as an indicator of a successful entertainment career, and notes that many stars will eventually expand their careers into new areas. We find evidence of Aho's claim by observing how an individual like Snoop Dogg initially became quite popular through participation in the hip-hop music industry, but it is no longer easy to determine if music is his primary career focus or even his main source of income. Like many successful hip-hop musicians, his stardom now consists of a number of activities such as acting (Tyree, 2007), product endorsements, talent scouting, and charitable fundraising, and production of pornography. Stardom is not the same as having a career because, for example, a musician can acquire short-term popularity as a one-hit wonder and fade from wider public awareness if their other songs fail to generate the same level of listener interest. However, stardom does generate more career opportunities because organizations and businesses are often willing to pay star entertainers to promote their service or product. Goodwin claims that only stars can achieve career longevity (1992, 103), which suggests that if a successful musician builds fan loyalty to levels of stardom, it allows them to transition into new endeavours should public tastes change so drastically that music-making is no longer profitable.

A less commonplace interpretation of the successful hip-hop career also exists, which emphasizes artistic autonomy over financial profits. Some musicians value peer, critical, and fan recognition for their contributions to hip-hop culture, and while it may not be as lucrative as selling millions of albums or scheduling a sold out national tour, it is possible to translate this reputational value into the ability to earn a living. De La Soul paid a \$1.7 million copyright infringement settlement and cannot re-release or sell digital copies of their most popular album, 3 Feet High And Rising, because the group does not have clearance for all of the samples used (Vaidhyanathan 2003, 141). However, their historical influence on hip-hop culture allows the group to sporadically perform internationally or as festival headliners, which likely affords them a reasonable standard of living and the autonomy to follow creative impulses with minimal pressure to cross over to the pop market via a hit single. Thus De La Soul demonstrates that it is possible to have a career without economic success.

The music career as examined in popular literature

In addition to scholarly works, it may prove instructive to examine how authors of popular texts understand and interpret music-making as a career, and how they define success. A number of books (Beeching, 2010; Bordowitz, 2007; Krasilovsky et al, 2007; Oliver and Leffel, 2006; Weissman, 1997) target musicians as the primary readers, offering observations of how various facets of the music industry operate, and usually include direct or underlying claims of teaching the reader how to be successful and how to make money through a career in music. Musician biographies are another primary means of disseminating to a popular audience recognizable models and patterns of music-making as an occupation. Rappers (Mumford, 2011; Williams, 2010) and record executives commonly associated with the hip-hop genre (Simmons, 2001) offer career advice and strategies for success, and while the content is often rather insubstantial, texts of this nature offer insight about career milestones and definitions of success directly from the perspective of musicians and music industry professionals.

Beeching (2010) recognizes that the multidimensional nature of a music career prohibits the identification of one consistent definition, or path toward the achievement, of success. With this in mind, she recommends that musicians define success on their own terms, set practical goals, and work toward achieving them over the long-term. Weissman (1997) offers the reader a partial road map to aid the transition from a near-beginner in the music industry to working toward a music business career. The suggested steps initially mirror those of Bennett (1980), but the usefulness of Weissman's text is that, like Beeching, it also illustrates the possibility of seeking an equally-rewarding, non-performance-based career in areas such as studio work, publicity, songwriting, and teaching private music lessons.

Bordowitz (2007) offers a slightly cynical examination of the recording industry, which acts as a realistic counterpoint to the optimistic tone of Beeching's book. For instance, his text attempts to demystify the romantic notions associated with signing a major label record deal as a potential indicator of success. Rather, Bordowitz highlights the reality that artist development over the span of multiple albums is often now the responsibility of musicians or their management, rather than the label, as in the past, and this represents another version of the music career. Krasilovsky et al (2007) outline the rights and

obligations of musicians by presenting a simplified guide to common legal concepts and activities relevant to participation in the music industry. Unlike Bordowitz, who presumes the music business is corrupt or flawed, Krasilovsky et al hope to educate the reader about the finer points of pursuing a music career, and perhaps the underlying notion is that, for them, success is simply avoiding exploitative contractual arrangements.

Writing from a musician's perspective, Williams (2010) was arguably the first Canadian rapper to achieve national recognition as Maestro Fresh Wes. The inability to break into the United States market initially affected his subjective assessment of truly having a successful hip-hop career, and it also illustrates the distinction between the possibility of having a national and international music career. With age came the self-awareness that Williams could create his own definition of success as providing a certain quality of life for his family, while consistently improving as a performer, and expanding his presence into other areas of the entertainment industry. As a recent addition to this style of literature, Mumford (2011) offers his perspective on becoming a cult favourite hip-hop musician who abandoned a music career after realizing that his music was not selling and concert attendance was diminishing. His book is instructive as a first-person account of the growth and decline of a hip-hop music career, and how the lack of tangible results (e.g. economic revenue generated from the sale and performance of music) affects one's self-definition of success, and thus one's ability or desire to continue making a living via a music career.

Simmons (2001) made the transition from a party promoter, to a musician manager, to a record label executive, and ultimately to an entrepreneur who turned hip-hop culture into opportunities for economic growth by marketing hip-hop as a lifestyle to a mainstream audience. While his experiences and activities differ from rappers, Simmons' success demonstrates the importance of creating partnerships with individuals or corporations in the music and entertainment industries as a career-building strategy. Using Simmons and a number of other examples, Oliver and Leffel (2006) draw parallels between the attributes (e.g. vision, market analysis, leadership) of hip-hop moguls and those of businesspeople in other industries, and use wealth accumulation and expansion into entrepreneurial endeavours as indices of success.

Charnas (2011) examines the history of hip-hop through the filter of economic data to examine how accomplishments within the genre changed North American culture. His book

depicts the evolution of rappers selling independent album pressings out of car trunks or at swap meets, to the multifaceted business dealings of current hip-hop stars, which suggests that a successful hip-hop career no longer consists solely of musical activities. Occupying the dual role of musician and businessperson seems to be the fundamental indicator of maximum hip-hop career success in the majority of his examples. Jay-Z is the most emblematic hip-hop musician to occupy these roles. Bailey (2011) theorizes that the rapper's success is a combination of business acumen, networking with other successful people and some luck, but curiously he does not account for talent. Offering an account based primarily on financial statistics, Greenburg (2011) utilizes interviews with former associates and media reports of business dealings to formulate an analysis of Jay-Z's path to success.

Jay-Z is a very important figure for my study because the rise of his career and its sustained success epitomizes most, if not all, of the themes encountered thus far. For example, his role as an unpaid opening act for Big Daddy Kane demonstrates the sacrifices that aspiring musicians must make in order to develop their skills, to increase their exposure to new audiences, and to attract the attention of music industry intermediaries. Jay-Z also established his early success when rappers were beginning to demonstrate the possibility of expanding the hip-hop career beyond music-related activities, and he has surpassed his peers to become the standard against which hip-hop success is now determined. While the attainment of hip-hop mogul status deserves much praise, Jay-Z also stands as a counter-example to rappers like Williams (2010), Mumford (2011), or groups like De La Soul who do not appear to aspire to that level of success. Thus we should avoid privileging hip-hop mogul status as the ultimate goal for all hip-hop participants.

Summary/overview

Taking this academic research and popular literature into consideration allows us to make a few initial observations. Popular music-making becomes an occupation when an individual devotes time toward participating in various forms of music industry labour, while actively treating music-making like a traditional form of employment. The individual may initially be required to balance traditional employment while simultaneously pursuing music-making as an occupation, but the ultimate goal is to abandon the 9-to-5 job and commit to

full-time musical activities. While I will primarily analyze individuals that seek to earn a living through the recording and performance of popular music, it is important to briefly mention that engaging in other musical activities (e.g. producer, tour manager, venue sound technician) may also constitute an alternate career path. The inability to determine exactly when a career begins and the lack of a typical career patterns makes charting the popular music career a difficult endeavour. However, I will argue that the popular music career begins at the moment a musician actively attempts to earn financial profits via musical activities, as entering the marketplace often separates a professional musician from someone who simply enjoys music-making as an amateur or hobbyist.

A professional in the field of popular music engages in music-making as an occupation on a full-time basis, and is committed to this career path as the primary means of earning a living over a long-term period. Training and prior experiences will provide this individual with relevant skills and knowledge, and they will often hold membership in some sort of professional organization. Beyond these characteristics, the evaluation of professionalism – much like authenticity and other key concepts relevant to the analysis of popular music – often takes place within the discourse of musicians, fans and music industry intermediaries.

As point of possible contention or clarification, I would also like to argue that professionalism is not necessarily a prerequisite for a successful popular music career because even so-called amateurs may have a career. For instance, amateurism and authenticity in the punk rock genre are intimately connected, and as such, many musicians in punk and other popular music genres will deny claims of professionalism despite their ability earn a living through music-related activities. Additionally, some musicians may act in an unprofessional manner (e.g. appearing late for performance times, allowing drug use to affect performance ability) and will remain rather successful in spite of this. For the purposes of my research I will claim that possessing characteristics and behaviours commonly associated with professionalism will very likely increase the possibility of having a successful popular music career.

Evaluating what constitutes success becomes a complicated task because the most appropriate and relevant criteria are constantly shifting in relation to music industry trends, which are initially shaped by wider economic, social and technological changes. Another

difficulty is determining when a popular music career first begins to show evidence of success. For the purposes of this research I will claim that one of the earliest indicators of successful career progress occurs when a musician begins to attract the attention of music industry intermediaries such as managers and record label personnel. Popular musicians rely on these intermediaries to help locate increasingly lucrative and highly regarded career-building opportunities, and these intermediaries often possess non-artistic expertise necessary to help the musician turn their creativity into financially sustainable opportunities. As musicians begin working with these individuals it also shapes their subjective notions of career success.

This merely hints at one entry point for the examination of the popular music career, but a multifaceted approach based on subjective, objective, and quantitative/economic criteria is essential to achieve the most complete analysis. Musicians will examine and make career-related decisions based on their subjective self-understandings of past achievements, failures, and potential opportunities for advancement in the future. Unless they have direct access to a given musician, researchers often will have difficulty obtaining this sort of internalized insight, but it may appear in the form of interviews, song lyrics, and in authorized biographies of popular musicians. Researching the popular music career will more commonly rely on exoteric data such as tracing a musician's relationship with influential music industry intermediaries and professional organizations such as record labels. Quantitative data associated with criteria such as the sale of recorded music, concert attendance, or fan activity on social media websites provides another set of useful data, and while these statistics are not inherently economical, they often are. Discourses generated by journalists, fans, analysts and intermediaries in the music industry will also play a role in indexing and measuring the success and relevancy of a given career.

Negus argues that musical genres guide actions and activities, like the way a musician might interact with an interviewer, the way audiences behave, and how journalists aesthetically evaluate a musical performance (1999, 25). It seems reasonable to argue that different genres also produce different ways of thinking about the career and about a successful career. While the hip-hop career shares some features with careers in other popular music genres, I would like to take a brief look at some similarities and differences in relation to ratios of economic and cultural forms of capital in both rock and hip-hop music.

Rock musicians who appear to practice and privilege artistic creativity, as opposed to those who assert the desire to use music-making solely as a means generating wealth, often possess a considerable amount of cultural capital and occupy the upper regions in the hierarchy of rock authenticity. This is to say that rock musicians who appear to promote discourses of artistry (“doing it for the love of the music”) are often more respected by fans and critics than those who value the lucrative potential of rock music (“doing it for the money”). The interesting contradiction or trick in the realm of rock music is that adhering to, or creating the façade of favouring, artistic over monetary impulses can actually be quite profitable if the musician convincingly conveys this ideology to their fans.

As stated earlier, there are numerous rappers (e.g. De La Soul) who earn admiration for their historical contributions to hip-hop culture, or for following creative impulses rather than seeking financial profits via a hit single or album that crosses over to mainstream audiences. Similar to the experience of rock musicians, this career path or ideological pose has the potential to imbue a hip-hop musician with cultural capital. This may lead to such endeavours as long-term touring and festival concert appearances, which in a sense allows the hip-hop musician to translate cultural capital into economic capital. Yet many other hip-hop musicians openly privilege the attainment of economic capital as evidence of a successful career, and may claim that it is of greater importance than cultural capital. This celebration of material wealth seems to stand in opposition to the narrative of artistic authenticity that is normalized in rock culture.

Participants in rock and hip-hop culture utilize a number of similar indicators of success (e.g. record sales) and celebrate the accomplishment of these goals by indulging in many of same material rewards. A key difference is that it is much more acceptable for hip-hop musicians to relate stories of their successes back into song lyrics or biographical accounts of their lives. Successful rock musicians may also transition into non-musical and lucrative career-extending strategies, such as product endorsements and film roles, but in comparison to hip-hop moguls, these endeavours filter back into their recorded music with far less frequency.

On the surface it appears that hip-hop represents a new moment where musicians clearly seek monetary profit and foreground their successes in lyrics and material signifiers. In some ways this is indisputable, and perhaps hip-hop culture is responsible for predicting

the blatant celebration of success evident in wider sociological trends. However, despite popular assumptions and the pervasiveness of the hip-hop mogul narrative, some rappers do not seek to gain power and autonomy through the acquisition of material wealth. Instead, these rappers realize that creative musical contributions leave an indelible mark on hip-hop culture and result not only in respect and admiration, but also the ability to earn a living wage. We might consider this the professional hip-hop career model where music-making is seen as a long-term occupation with the goal of sustaining a living, and it stands in opposition to the mogul narrative, which attempts to exploit all possible musical and non-musical career opportunities for maximum economic gain.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SHORT-TERM HIP-HOP CAREERS OF MC HAMMER, VANILLA ICE, HOT KARL AND J-ZONE

This chapter examines MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice as two of the first hip-hop musicians to fully cross over to the mainstream music industry, and how this helped to establish the potential heights of career success for later hip-hop moguls. Yet the successes of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice were relatively short-lived, and while this affected their ability to sustain a long-term living via hip-hop as a primary career, we will see how declining popularity does not necessarily signal the end of a music career. Rather than return to more traditional employment, the recent career activities of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice will reveal how name recognition and experiences accrued during the hip-hop career can be used to seek other opportunities in the entertainment industry. Hot Karl and J-Zone will be introduced as contemporary rappers who did not achieve very much primary music career success, and yet these case studies will show how it is possible for less successful hip-hop musicians to pursue secondary, non-music career opportunities.

Performers like Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J and The Beastie Boys were some of the first musicians to develop hip-hop careers premised on album, rather than single, releases. These rappers later experienced moderate mainstream music success, earned respect from critics and fans, had careers that endured for decades, and ultimately transitioned into non-musical career activities. For these musicians and for many others, having a hip-hop career began with the idea of abandoning traditional employment and focusing on making hip-hop music as the primary means of earning a living. However, upon achieving this goal, the notion of the career likely expanded to sustaining a long-term living via music-making, and success ideally meant finding ways to maximize the resulting economic profits.

It was not until 1990-91 that MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice became two of the first hip-hop musicians to develop wildly successful, yet short-term, careers on account of crossing over to the pop music marketplace. These two rappers set new records for number of hip-hop albums sold, were very popular on the international concert touring circuit, their songs were often inescapable on radio and music video stations, and each transitioned into lucrative activities such as selling licensed merchandise and appearing in promotional roles for Hollywood films. At the peak of their careers, particularly in the case of MC Hammer, it

may have appeared as if they were following a path toward long-term success that could potentially rival some of the most well-known pop/R&B vocalists of the same era. So for MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, the hip-hop career began with goals and expectations that were comparable to the rappers who came before them, but meeting or exceeding the criteria typically used to evaluate pop stars measured success.

If not Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J or The Beastie Boys, why were MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice the first hip-hop musicians to cross over to extraordinary levels of hip-hop and popular music career success? In large part, they were the first rappers to combine music performance with dancing and entertaining talents comparable to performers like Michael Jackson and Bobby Brown. More importantly, a catchy hit single helped to welcome their acceptance into the mainstream music industry. For Vanilla Ice it would be his only hit single, thus relegating him to what is commonly known as “one-hit wonder” status, and while MC Hammer would have a few more hits dispersed over the next few years of his career, he was never perceived as much of a serious musician. So initially it seems as if one of the key factors differentiating the careers of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice from someone like LL Cool J is that they focused on singles, which Keightley observes as occupying a lower prestige in the recorded music industry (2004, 378). Hammer and Vanilla Ice also did not, or were unable to, emulate the rock model of artistic career development over multiple full-length albums (Straw, 1999).

The short-term career models of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice are also instructive because they reveal that carefully planning and implementing career-extending strategies does not always result in long-term success. They also allow us to examine how these musicians attempt to remain active in the music industry after the majority of their fanbase ceases to offer economic support, and how they seek non-musical career activities later in life in order to sustain a living. Of related interest are the careers of aspiring hip-hop musicians who are either unable to become successful, or those who are incapable of maintaining a music career that will sustain even a basic standard of living. I will introduce Hot Karl and J-Zone as two contemporary examples of this type of short-term hip-hop career, and even as they lack wider recognition in North American popular culture, we will see how these two rappers attempt to leverage their hip-hop career experiences into other post-musical careers.

The early music careers of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice

Stanley Burrell spent much of his youth working odd jobs within the Oakland Athletics baseball organization and after developing friendships with Dwayne Murphy and Mike Davis in the mid-1980s, Burrell asked the two players to invest \$20,000 in his aspiring career as a Christian rap musician. The money was used to record songs with Felton Pilate, a former member of the funk/R&B band Con Funk Shun, and vinyl copies of Burrell's first single ("Ring 'Em") now attributed to "MC Hammer" were pressed at the Macola Records factory. Hammer personally delivered copies of his single to local music stores and radio stations, which then led to a series of in-store performances in 1986-87 at the Wherehouse Records store in Los Angeles. Reportedly, Hammer's incessant self-promotion and the positive audience reaction to his highly energetic dance moves helped to attract increasingly larger crowds for each performance (Charnas 2011, 272-4).

MC Hammer recorded his debut independent album Feel My Power (1987) and was able to sell 60,000 copies regionally on the strength of his work ethic, self-promotional abilities, and flashy live performances (Charnas 2011, 221, 272-4). Joy Bailey of Capitol Records attended a MC Hammer concert at the Oak Tree Cabaret in May 1988, and Hammer's abilities as a live performer led to Bailey's recommendation that the label sign Hammer to a recording contract. Capitol Records re-released Feel My Power using Let's Get It Started (1988) as its new title and funded a music video for the song "Pump It Up," which caught the attention of Ted Demme and Fab Five Freddy of the Yo! MTV Raps program. Demme and Freddy thought that Hammer's dancing skills greatly exceeded the inventiveness of his rapping. Unlike many other hip-hop musicians who did not demonstrate a wide range of physical movement, however, they thought Hammer's enthusiastic dance maneuvers would be ideal for the visual age that was being ushered in by MTV. On the strength of high rotation play for the music video and a guest hosting appearance on Yo! MTV Raps, sales of Let's Get It Started ultimately exceeded 500,000 copies (Charnas 2011, 225, 242, 274).

Meanwhile, in Texas, Tommy Quon was one of the first to recognize the emerging rapping and dancing talents of Robert Van Winkle, in addition to the star-in-the-making aura of this young musician. After winning a talent competition at his Dallas nightclub in 1987, Quon signed Van Winkle to his Ultrax Records label, changed his stage name from MC Vanilla to Vanilla Ice, and attempted to transform his image into one that was more palatable for a pop audience. Highlighting the importance of practice (Bennett, 1980; Watson, 2008),

this transformation was aided by daily rehearsals and by observing the showmanship of other hip-hop musicians who performed concerts in the area. Quon helped finance the recording of a Vanilla Ice demo cassette featuring the songs “Play That Funky Music” and “Ice Ice Baby” (Charnas 2011, 277-8).

Rather than touring as a live performer, Quon and Vanilla Ice travelled throughout the United States in order to play the demo for gatekeepers such as radio station DJs and nightclub talent-booking agents. Most individuals they encountered were largely uninterested in Vanilla Ice, until Dave Morales at WOHT-FM in Grenada, Mississippi and Darryl Jay at WAGH-FM in Columbus gave “Ice Ice Baby” a trial run on their respective radio stations. Listener response from both Caucasian and African-American audiences was very strong, prompting Quon to fund an \$8,000 music video for the song. Increasing radio play also attracted the attention of major record labels, but it was the personal relationship that Morales had with Charles Koppelman (the CEO of SBK Records) that led to their signing of a \$325,000 recording contract with SBK. By this time Vanilla Ice had finished recording a number of other songs that would comprise his debut album Hooked (1989) for Quon's Ultrax label. After signing with SBK these songs were re-packaged as To The Extreme (1991) and then re-released with distribution assistance from EMI Records (Charnas 2011, 278-80).

Early music career observations

In the early music career developments of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice we find parallels to the careers of contemporary rappers that will be examined with more detail in later chapters. Like the mentoring roles of Jaz-O and Benjy Grinberg in the careers of Jay-Z and Wiz Khalifa, respectively, Quon was the first music industry intermediary to notice and nurture the talent (Coulson, 2010) that Vanilla Ice supposedly possesses. As a nightclub owner, it seems reasonable to presume that Quon also retained social connections to other individuals in the music and entertainment industries (Murdock, 2003) that could potentially help advance Vanilla Ice's career. Some retrospective accounts of the early career of Hammer portray him as mostly autonomous, but individuals with music industry experience like Felton Pilate are important for their roles in helping musicians navigate the complexities of the recording studio environment (Kealy, 1990). Additionally, if it were not for the financial loan from Dwayne Murphy and Mike Davis, Hammer may have had difficulty funding his

early recording sessions. Thus acquiring the support of friends or music industry personnel at the entry level is key.

We can also find evidence of Becker's (1982) theory of the art world in the roles performed by music industry gatekeepers and intermediaries. In addition to the individuals referenced above, Ted Demme and Fab Five Freddy were gatekeepers of hip-hop programming on MTV and their approval helped MC Hammer earn national television exposure. Similarly, Dave Morales and Darryl Jay initiated the regional radio play of "Ice Ice Baby" and as other national radio stations began playing the song, it helped intensify the major label courtship process of Vanilla Ice. Further demonstrating the importance of establishing social connections with increasingly influential intermediaries in the music industry, it was the relationship between Morales and Koppelman at SBK Records that helped Vanilla Ice secure a more lucrative recording contract than other labels were initially offering. Similarly, Joy Bailey was instrumental in promoting awareness of MC Hammer to those individuals with signing power in the A&R department of Capitol Records. We see how the tastes and the values of these gatekeepers influence popular tastes, in addition to determining whether or not a performer will move to the next level of their career, and thus it is crucial to have their support if a musician hopes to achieve mainstream music career success.

The breakthrough successes of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice

Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em (1990) was the sophomore album by MC Hammer, and he premiered the first single "U Can't Touch This" on The Arsenio Hall Show in late 1989 (Pastorek 2010, 24). The accompanying music video was added to high rotation on MTV, and like the nationally televised talk show appearance, it depicted Hammer's frenetic dance moves, his distinctive attire, and large posse of backup dancers. The musical foundation of "U Can't Touch This" was borrowed from the Rick James song "Super Freak," which was a hit in 1981 when it spent ten weeks in the top 40 of the Billboard "Hot 100" chart (Christian 2011, 96). The moderately recognizable source material helped Hammer's song earn radio play on influential hip-hop stations like Hot 97 in New York City that had previously ignored his music (Charnas 2011, 274-6). Charnas refers to this sample usage as "perhaps the most shrewd commercial move in hip-hop since Run-D.M.C.'s remake of Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" (2011, 276).

The copious amounts of radio and music video play helped the album top the Billboard album sales charts for 21 weeks in 1990, selling 18 million copies worldwide and breaking all previous hip-hop sales records. As a promotional strategy Capitol Records reportedly sent hand-signed letters from Hammer to 100,000 children in the United States with the appeal that they request his music video on MTV (Hyden, 2011). Hammer was also amenable to altering his touring schedule in order to satisfy the wishes of MTV producers and he mentioned the hosts of Yo! MTV Raps in song lyrics, as two additional ways of increasing his visibility on the popular cable network (Marks and Tannenbaum, 2011). As MC Hammer fervor continued to build, corporations like Pepsi and KFC offered Hammer spokesperson opportunities, he had two dolls manufactured in partnership with Mattel's Barbie toy collection, and he agreed to license his image and voice for the Hammerman (1991) Saturday morning cartoon on the ABC television network (Charnas 2011, 287, 493; Rosen 1991, 88).

Likewise, To The Extreme was an unprecedented success for Vanilla Ice in 1991 with 16 consecutive weeks at the top of the Billboard album sales chart. It had worldwide sales of 15 million copies, and "Ice Ice Baby" became the first hip-hop song to reach the top of the Billboard pop singles chart (Charnas 2011, 280-2, 286). Much like the Rick James sample on Hammer's hit single, one major reason for the popularity of "Ice Ice Baby" was the recognizable sampling of the Queen and David Bowie song "Under Pressure," which peaked at #29 on the Billboard "Hot 100" chart and was one of only four songs by Queen to appear within the top 40 (Ressner 1992, 13). In order to capitalize on his ubiquity in North American and international popular culture, licensed Vanilla Ice merchandise appeared in the form of a comic book, a board game and a toy doll. Vanilla Ice also made a cameo appearance in the film Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze (1991) and took the lead role in Cool As Ice (1991), which was written for him (Ehrlich 2011, 51; Neumaier, 1998, 104). Vanilla Ice was added as a supporting act on a tour with MC Hammer in 1990 (Charnas 2011, 280), which offered Vanilla Ice exposure to a wider audience and allowed him to prove to audiences that his rapping and dancing skills were on par with those of another superstar of rap music. In some ways this tour foreshadows contemporary hip-hop package tours that will appear in upcoming chapters, like the Jay-Z/DMX "Hard Knock Life" tour and the Wiz Khalifa/Mac Miller "Under The Influence Of Music" tour, but it should also

be noted that grouping likeminded live performers is not necessarily unique to the hip-hop genre.

Breakthrough success observations

The rapidly rising popularity of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice in the early 90s can primarily be attributed to each musician having one hit single that openly sampled a recognizable song from a previous era of music. Nelson George claims that, in addition to this practice of sampling, music videos as a promotional tool made it possible for these two rappers to compensate for what some critics heard as their mediocre rapping talents (1988, 95, 113). Unlike Vanilla Ice's To The Extreme album, Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em included a number of other songs like "Have You Seen Her" and "Pray" that nearly matched the popularity of "U Can't Touch This." The overall album sales for Hammer and Vanilla Ice are both quite impressive, but as we will see in more detail below, multiple hit singles better positioned Hammer to compile a greatest hits or career retrospective album later in his music career, and to continue financially profiting from the sale of his back catalogue.

Targeting the youth market by licensing the images of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice for use in consumer goods was a revenue generating strategy more commonly utilized by the so-called "boy bands" of the same era like New Kids On The Block. While it may appear taboo for contemporary hip-hop musicians to market dolls and other seemingly trivializing items, rappers like Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Chuck D, and Master P have more recently sold toys that were created in their likeness without attracting claims of being inauthentic. Pop music often serves as the binary to the rock genre, where it is assumed that musicians must disavow the commodity status of rock in order to remain authentic. Hip-hop may offer another articulation of authenticity in the sense that hip-hop musicians can be celebrated for making money without facing charges of inauthenticity just as long as it happens on their own terms (Hess 2007, 13).

Ideally a film role can provide a hip-hop musician with the opportunity to demonstrate their star charisma on-screen and to place one or more new songs onto the accompanying soundtrack, which could help satiate fan interest until the release of their next studio album. Hammer mostly chose to avoid acting, but he did release a long-form music video titled Please Hammer, Don't Hurt 'Em: The Movie (1990), which was likely inspired by Michael Jackson's Moonwalker (1988), and finds a contemporary parallel in Jay-Z's

Streets Is Watching (1998). Conversely, Vanilla Ice's film Cool As Ice was released on 393 screens in North America, grossing \$638,000 in its first week of availability, and it only earned \$1 million in box office revenue before leaving cinemas a few weeks later. Menze provides statistics to document how Cool As Ice is one of the lowest grossing Hollywood motion pictures with a musician in the starring role, and in addition to the unanimously poor reviews from critics (2006, 26), the film provides one of the first indications of Vanilla Ice's declining popularity. As a direct-to-retail release, Hammer's long-form music video was an extension of his already popular album and thus a low risk opportunity to sell a product to his existing fans. Whereas the decision to pursue an acting role in a Hollywood motion picture was a miscalculation of Vanilla Ice's talent as an entertainer and his fan support, and the poor film reviews reinforced his growing reputation as being merely a novelty.

The declining music career of Vanilla Ice

Many aspects of the music career development of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice reflect the methods that have proven, and continue to be, effective for numerous other rappers. Hammer and Vanilla Ice were two of the most famous figures in popular music in 1990-91, and they were transitioning into other, non-musical pursuits with the hope of extending the longevity of their careers. Hammer continued as a successful musician for a few more years and retained a level of fame that briefly rivaled that of Michael Jackson, but Vanilla Ice's absolute failure to sustain the popularity that accompanied the peak of his career makes him a case study of great interest. His failure was so great that it negatively affected, or perhaps ruined, hip-hop career opportunities for other Caucasian rappers over the next five or more years.

In seeking to chart the downfall of Vanilla Ice, one must first examine his loss or lack of credibility as an authentic hip-hop musician. The markers that define hip-hop authenticity regularly evolve in relation to larger social and political developments, and while hip-hop theoretically offers significant possibilities for expression (Ogbar 2007, 38-9), in the late 1980s and the early 1990s a rapper was usually deemed authentic if he possessed some of the following characteristics: an African-American or Latino racial background, an upbringing in a poverty-stricken environment, the presentation of a masculine or aggressive persona, and some involvement in or bearing witness to criminal or oppositional culture. Considering that crossover success for authenticated hip-hop musicians was still a relatively new concept at

the time¹, many gatekeepers of hip-hop culture were suspicious of Vanilla Ice because he was both a clean-cut Caucasian rapper and he appealed equally to pop and hip-hop music audiences. This initial hesitation to embrace Vanilla Ice as an authentic contributor to hip-hop culture seems to support McLeod's claim that hip-hop, and other musical cultures like it, call upon discourses of authenticity when "threatened with assimilation by a larger, mainstream culture" (1999, 134).

Hip-hop musicians can authenticate themselves by describing experiences of social struggle and how their lives overlap with their lyrical themes (Hess 2007, 14-16). The press materials supplied by SBK Records to help promote To The Extreme falsely claimed that Vanilla Ice grew up in a poor neighbourhood and attended the same school as Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew. However, a November 1990 investigative report by The Miami Herald uncovered Vanilla Ice's true biographical details and the subsequent media coverage focused on these inaccuracies more than his music career activities (Mack 1990, 89; Neumaier 1998, 104). Hess summarizes the situation: "Vanilla Ice asked the listener to look past his whiteness to see a kind of social blackness that would authenticate him because his rise to stardom fit with black rappers' success stories. He failed, however, because his lying and his selling of hip-hop to the pop charts made his performance look like an imitation of black artists to make a white artist rich" (2007, 14).

On the other hand, a rapper like Rick Ross demonstrates that it is possible for some contemporary hip-hop musicians to remain very popular following the discovery of a fabricated past (Kreps, 2008). Perhaps Vanilla Ice was unable to recover from the scandal pertaining to his personal background because he was also widely criticized as a sellout and one-hit wonder. Leach observes how the discourse of authenticity often relies on establishing "an opposition between 'authentic' and 'commercial,' based on a suspicion of a popularity that makes the recipient part of an undifferentiated mass rather than one of the select initiated few" (2001, 144). Just as pop music represents a commercialized and inauthentic binary opposite of the supposedly "organic" relationship that musicians have with the country and rock genres (Leach 2001, 146-7), it also functions in a similar, but not identical, role with hip-hop music and culture.

¹ The Run-D.M.C. and Aerosmith collaboration for "Walk This Way" (1986) was still one of the only hip-hop songs embraced by rap, rock and pop audiences four years later when MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice were beginning their crossover successes.

Issues of race and the discrediting of Vanilla Ice

The history of popular music in the United States reveals insight pertaining to race relations. It is a common practice for musicians to borrow inspiration from their forbearers and, in many instances Caucasian performers have imitated African-American musical innovation without crediting the originators, while simultaneously achieving greater levels of success (Phinney, 2005). We can trace this trend back to the 19th century when African-American jubilee ensembles faced competition from Caucasian minstrel performers in blackface makeup (Abbott and Serof, 2003; Gilroy 1993). These Caucasian minstrel groups and their audiences were utilizing their privileged racial positions to emulate and colonize cultural activities that were forbidden to them (Lott, 1993), and the trend of appropriating African-American culture exists in many other popular music genres (Ramsey Jr., 2003).

A unique quality of hip-hop is that it “prioritizes Black voices from the margins of urban America” (Rose 1994, 2), while creating a space to critically examine the ongoing problems of blackness as marginalized and whiteness as normalized (Best and Kellner, 1999). As the first Caucasian musicians to take part in hip-hop at a level of wide recognition, The Beastie Boys were initially deemed inauthentic in the late 1980s because their stage personas played upon their whiteness, and many individuals assumed that the group was only interested in hip-hop music for its potential to generate economic reward. While The Beastie Boys connection to hip-hop pioneer Russell Simmons eventually helped to accredit the group and lead to hip-hop cultural acceptance (Tanz 2007, 88-9), the presumed inauthenticity of a Caucasian rapper was still very much present during the rise of Vanilla Ice in the early 1990s. Once his biography was discovered as fraudulent, many compared Vanilla Ice to Elvis Presley as two Caucasian musicians who supposedly co-opted African-American musical expression for financial profit (Charnas 2011, 281). Recent scholarship (Kitwana, 2006) seems to indicate that the protective culture of hip-hop continues to remain suspicious of white performers more generally.

Further theorizing the declining music career of Vanilla Ice

While the cumulative effect of these criticisms disgraced Vanilla Ice in the hip-hop community, they cannot fully explain the drastic decline of his music career. For instance, he

was already accepted by a pop music audience that is historically much more willing to support a seemingly inauthentic musician, hip-hop or otherwise, so long as his songs remain catchy. Additionally, a lesser examined yet very important failing on the part of SBK Records and Vanilla Ice was not recording and releasing a new studio album quickly enough to capitalize on the remaining pop fans that might have ignored the attacks on his rapper image. Aside from the Extremely Live (1991) concert album and a few new songs on the Cool As Ice soundtrack, by the time Mind Blowin (1994) was available for purchase, most of his fans had moved on. Beginning in 1992 the dominant trends in hip-hop music were shifting toward the hardcore and gritty aesthetic initiated by performers like Dr. Dre, 2Pac, Wu-Tang Clan, and The Notorious B.I.G. In attempting to follow this trend Vanilla Ice drastically changed his persona to a Rastafarian cannabis enthusiast, but a more subdued image with an emphasis on lyrical excellence (Smith 1994, 55) might have garnered some critical praise or radio play necessary to sell albums. Ultimately, Mind Blowin did not produce even moderately popular songs and it has yet to receive gold certification by the RIAA for sales exceeding 500,000 copies.

As discussed in the literature review, publishing and licensing royalties associated with the back catalogue often allow a popular musician to sustain long-term economic wealth, particularly when the catalogue includes one or more hit singles (Keightley, 2004). Unlike the multiple hit singles of MC Hammer, “Ice Ice Baby” is the only Vanilla Ice song that has retained long-term popularity. Vanilla Ice is immediately at a disadvantage economically because the song interpolates “Under Pressure” by Queen and David Bowie, so he must split the songwriting credit with these five musicians (Hess 2007, 118). Furthermore, at the height of Vanilla Ice's popularity, Marion “Suge” Knight and a number of his associates repeatedly breached Vanilla Ice's security team at various locations in California. Knight's goal was to intimidate Vanilla Ice into signing over a portion of the publishing royalties for “Ice Ice Baby” and a number of other songs on To The Extreme to Mario Johnson, who claimed that he was not receiving payment for his contributions (Charnas 2011, 286). While Vanilla Ice downplays the popular rumour that Knight threatened him with physical violence, Johnson was later added as a co-writer for six songs on To The Extreme (Boehlert 1997, 28; Ehrlich 2011, 108; Sullivan 2003, 56).

The key failure here was Vanilla Ice's inability to protect the most valuable asset in his back catalogue from an individual who might or might not have had a legal claim to it.

From the first moment that Knight aggressively violated Vanilla Ice's personal space, his management should have increased the security surrounding the rapper and forced Johnson to bring the songwriting copyright issue to court. Vanilla Ice often explains that he indirectly helped fund the legendary hip-hop music that was later released on Knight's Death Row Records label (Fischer 1998, 43; Ehrlich 2011, 53), but this is simply a retrospective attempt to justify his failure to properly protect his greatest asset. While historical accounts of “Ice Ice Baby” accurately recognize it as a novelty and the song does not appear to generate many contemporary sales of To The Extreme, it does retain some economic value in licensing its use for commercials and film soundtracks.

The declining music career of MC Hammer

Unlike the failure of Vanilla Ice to quickly record an album of new music or to successfully rebrand his image, MC Hammer released Too Legit To Quit (1991) approximately one-and-a-half years after his previous album. While his physical appearance remained mostly unchanged, Hammer dropped the first two letters from his stage name because he believed that the MC prefix “take[s] away a certain connotation that is associated with just being an ordinary everyday rapper” (Rosen 1991, 88). To further strengthen the perception of Hammer as a multi-faceted entertainer, an effort was made during the recording process to avoid sample-based compositions and instead focus on live musicianship that could eventually be incorporated into his live performances. Many of Hammer’s previous songs featured uplifting lyrical themes, and in the spirit of hip-hop self-mythologizing, he likened the tracks on Too Legit To Quit to the socially conscious music of Marvin Gaye (Rosen 1991, 1, 88).

There is truth to the claim that using live instrumentation on Too Legit To Quit was intended to further enhance MC Hammer’s reputation as an exciting live concert experience (Griffin 1990, 32) because including a number of musicians on-stage creates extra visual flair and provides concert-goers with an added sense of value built into the ticket price. Yet it goes unmentioned that recording original compositions also helps to eliminate or reduce the number of ways in which royalties are divided and dispersed. The most popular songs on Please Hammer, Don’t Hurt ‘Em were either cover versions or they included samples from other popular songs. In addition to sharing the profits of “U Can’t Touch This” with Rick James and Alonzo Miller, the song “Pray” incorporated a sample of “When Doves Cry” by

Prince, and the album also included covers of The Jackson 5, Earth, Wind & Fire, and The Chi-Lites. In comparison, “Addams Groove” was the only sample-based song included on Too Legit To Quit, but considering that it was written for the motion picture adaptation of The Addams Family, usage of the titular theme song was a necessity. This suggests that MC Hammer and Capitol Records were anticipating issues pertaining to sample usage in hip-hop music, and seeking to make the album as profitable as possible.

The marketing campaign for Too Legit To Quit was the largest in the history of Capitol Records at the time, as the label invested \$1 million in advertising and the multi-million dollar music video for the title track remains one of the most expensive ever made. Demonstrative of his immense popularity, Hammer’s international tour began with two sold out concerts in March 1992 at the 50,000 capacity Tokyo Dome and Capitol Records was prepared to allow the tour to continue for at least two years (Rosen 1991, 1, 88), although it ultimately would run for slightly less than that. The large-scale advertising campaign and world tour indicates that Capitol Records was expecting Too Legit To Quit to replicate or exceed Hammer’s previous successes and were strongly supportive of his career. The album did manage to sell more than 5 million copies and two of its singles exceeded 500,000 copies sold (Norment 1994, 24), but given the recording and promotional costs in relation to music sales, Too Legit To Quit was not likely as profitable as Hammer or Capitol Records may have hoped. However, ticket and merchandise sales for Hammer’s Pepsi- and MTV-sponsored world tour likely generated massive exposure and millions of dollars in revenue, thus allowing Hammer to sustain his reputation as a very popular performer.

Having fulfilled his recording commitments for Capitol Records, Hammer negotiated a new deal with the Reprise Records sub-division of Warner Bros. On his subsequent album The Funky Headhunter (1994), Hammer borrowed elements from the west coast hip-hop aesthetic that was growing increasingly popular at the time and reinvented his image as a streetwise rapper (Norment 1994, 24). In spite of its poor reviews, the album did produce two more relatively popular singles, but Hyden (2011) asserts that The Funky Headhunter only sold its one million copies on the strength of Hammer’s former popularity. Perhaps sensing the decline of his recording career, he returned to the clean-cut MC Hammer persona and rushed to release Inside Out (1995) a little more than a year later. The album was unable to sell more than a few hundred thousand copies and it largely marks the end of MC Hammer’s relevance as a popular hip-hop performer.

Comprehending the downfall of MC Hammer's music career is slightly more difficult than it is for Vanilla Ice's because Hammer followed a logical progression of activities that theoretically should have sustained some of his popularity. He quickly released a follow-up to his breakthrough album that was stylistically compatible with listener expectations, and he promoted the album by utilizing traditional methods like radio-friendly singles, eye-catching music videos, and conducting interviews with print and television journalists. Taking into account the duration of his world tour in support of Too Legit To Quit, the gap between that album and his subsequent release of The Funky Headhunter was not so long that it could have been responsible for Hammer's sharp decline in popularity circa 1995. In an interview with Hyden (2011), the respected rap author Jeff Chang theorizes that Hammer's downfall was the result of sudden shifts in radio and music video programming habits and, as a result, artists like A Tribe Called Quest and Ice Cube now captured the attention of hip-hop fans that preferred more lyrically inventive music. If Hammer had continued to focus on singing and dancing, rather than adopting the laughable, hardcore rap image of The Funky Headhunter, perhaps he could have sustained his popularity as a musician for a number of years or retired from music-making gracefully. The case study of MC Hammer might suggest that so-called mainstream "pop rappers" have a shorter shelf-life than more traditional styles of hip-hop, and that it is often difficult to establish a music career premised on long-term artistry once a musician has been partially or wholly identified as a novelty act.

A subsequent chapter will examine the early careers of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller, two emerging hip-hop musicians with sizable groups of supportive fans currently willing to purchase albums and other merchandise; these two performers are also working to lay the foundations for long-term careers. MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice offer an interesting parallel because they also had large fanbases and sold millions of albums, but neither was able to sustain a successful music career for more than a few years. This reveals that early evidence of career success and strategic planning for the future does not necessarily guarantee career longevity. However, as we will see below, even after a severe music career decline it is still possible to retain some semblance of a career in the music and entertainment industries. This reminds us that a "career" can encompass mainstream success as well as less remunerative professional activities.

The contemporary career activities of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice

With the peaks of their respective music careers now in the past, both MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice continue to record and release new music. Hammer returned to Capitol Records for one lackluster album and has since released a few more albums independently, but his most recent moment of notoriety occurred when he released a music video dissing Jay-Z in November 2010. Vanilla Ice has spent the last fifteen years continually pursuing a music career by releasing albums on various record labels and attempting to incorporate the latest trends into his musical aesthetic. Following a short-lived attempt at rap-rock, Vanilla Ice re-recorded “Ice Ice Baby” in 2005 to little fanfare, and in more recent years his affiliation with Insane Clown Posse helps him to attract small crowds as a live performer. The recent bids of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice to re-enter popular consciousness as musicians have been largely unsuccessful, and neither appears likely to ever achieve album sales exceeding a few thousand copies. However, while they may no longer be considered successful musicians, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice will have music careers for as long as they continue releasing new music and performing live. In large part due to their earlier fame, activities like these will be available for the indefinite future.

MC Hammer claimed bankruptcy in April 1996 with creditors seeking \$13.8 million of his approximate \$9.7 million in assets. Attempting to become financially stable again, Hammer began transitioning into non-music career activities in October 1997 by agreeing to host a televised Christian talk show on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (Dam 2000, 47). Joining the cast of the first season of The Surreal Life in 2003 was MC Hammer’s first prominent re-entry into the mainstream of popular culture, and like most former celebrities, his decision to appear on this reality television show was likely motivated by a lack of other work opportunities (Huff 2006, 41, 53). Further employment was limited over the next few years and this perhaps explains Hammer’s decision to sell the rights to his back catalogue to EverGreen Copyrights for \$2.7 million (Donahue 2008, 6). In 2007, Hammer was a partner in the Internet startup website DanceJam which raised \$4.5 million in venture capital but has since shut down (Arrington, 2009), and after becoming an early user of Twitter, Hammer now lectures as a social media and business expert. Most recently, Hammer and his family were the focus of the Hammertime (2009) reality television program, and currently he is the CEO of Alchemist Management, which represents the careers of mixed martial arts athletes.

Desiring a similar return to the popular culture spotlight and temporary employment, Vanilla Ice followed MC Hammer's lead by appearing in the second season of The Surreal Life in 2004 and he later followed it with appearances on other lowbrow television shows like Celebrity Boxing, Celebrity Bull Riding Challenge, Hollywood Squares, and Dancing On Ice (Hess 2007, 128). In recent years Vanilla Ice has experienced a small resurgence as the host of The Vanilla Ice Project (2010), which is a cable television program that follows his secondary career in real estate acquisition and development. Vanilla Ice accidentally discovered the lucrative possibilities of real estate after selling a number of the unused properties that he initially purchased during the peak of his fame, and he claims that the program is the result of a casual comment he made to a television producer a number of years earlier (Caramanica, 2012).

Some will rightfully argue that Vanilla Ice and MC Hammer retain careers because they continue to remain active in the entertainment industry. By some accounts Vanilla Ice possesses a strong knowledge of real estate trends and demonstrates skill at property restoration (Bellafante, 2010), so he deserves credit for leveraging his hip-hop name recognition into a public exhibition of these talents. In some ways The Vanilla Ice Project represents a successful approach at extending his hip-hop career into other endeavours, unlike the film Cool As Ice or the Vanilla Ice licensed merchandise that were released during the peak of his popularity. The music career of MC Hammer was more successful and longer-lived than Vanilla Ice, but he has found it more difficult to translate his reputation as a rapper into secondary career opportunities. MC Hammer's reality television series was cancelled after its first season, DanceJam could not compete with similar websites like YouTube, and his work with both the Trinity Broadcasting Network and Alchemist Management is based more on his long-time interests in religion and physical fitness, rather than his skills or reputation as a musician.

MC Hammer's biggest personal failure was continuing to overspend and live extravagantly as his music career was becoming increasingly less profitable. Declaring bankruptcy appears to have forced Hammer to prematurely sell his back catalogue in order to establish immediate financial security, rather than allowing the profits associated with the future use of his hit singles to help fund a modest lifestyle. Hammer's financial mismanagement was so great that it now defines his reputation just as much as his music career successes (Hyden, 2001) and we can find evidence of this in popular television shows

like *The Simpsons* and *In Living Color*, in addition to the 1993 film *CB4* (Donalson 2007, 46). The bankruptcy has become such a key point of interest in the career narrative of MC Hammer that it often overshadows his status in popular music history as one of the key artists responsible for exposing hip-hop to a wider audience. Without the long-term economic security that ownership of his back catalogue could provide and also lacking the high levels of cultural capital that traditionally accompanies a groundbreaking musical career, retrospective accounts of hip-hop culture more often compare Hammer to the novelty acts of the late 1970s and early 1980s, rather than the contemporary hip-hop moguls.

In the case studies of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice we find two individuals who developed successful hip-hop music careers, and while they continue to pursue careers in music-making on a much smaller scale, Hammer and Vanilla Ice have primarily transitioned into secondary careers. Their reputations as formerly successful rappers has allowed Hammer and Vanilla Ice to primarily acquire working opportunities in reality television, which has helped many other celebrities find exposure and career redemption (Huff 2006, 45). The ability translate name recognition into secondary career opportunities should not be surprising because one-time, star status often results in some level of sustained public interest (Aho, 2005). However, is it possible for hip-hop musicians with less successful careers to transition into secondary careers that are in some way premised on their past activities? In Hot Karl and J-Zone we will examine two musicians with niche hip-hop careers who at one time appeared to be following trajectories toward greater success. Various circumstances led both individuals to abandon the pursuit of rapping as a primary career, but each has used their experiences to transition into secondary careers that are mostly unrelated to hip-hop culture.

Hot Karl as a short-term major label and independent career

Hess argues that Vanilla Ice's career failure was so great that it negatively affected the potential for Caucasian rappers to have hip-hop careers (2007, 119-20), and it was not until the rise of Eminem in 1999 that a Caucasian rapper would return to widespread prominence with hip-hop and pop music audiences. With a career now exceeding ten years in length, strong critical evaluations, numerous music industry awards and some of the best selling hip-hop albums of all time, Eminem's accomplishments demonstrate that he has clearly escaped the stigma of Vanilla Ice. I invoke the success of Eminem because it is also responsible for

renewing the interest in Caucasian musicians as credible hip-hop performers, and creating new opportunities for hip-hop careers in the process. Participants in the recording industry (major record labels, music publications, booking agents, etc.) often seek to capitalize on emerging trends by signing, marketing, promoting or working with performers who share aesthetic similarities with the types of music that are currently profitable. As one example, we can look to the rising popularity of British electronic music in the United States during the late 1990s, where interest in groups like The Chemical Brothers and The Prodigy helped to create opportunities in the North American market for other electronic performers like Orbital and Underworld. Similarly, many music industry participants began seeking the next Caucasian rapper who might replicate the successes of Eminem, and this created an opportunity for white rappers like Hot Karl to pursue hip-hop careers.

Jensen “Hot Karl” Karp began rapping while enrolled at the University of Southern California in the latter half of the 1990s, and he won a nightly phone-in freestyle competition on the KPWR-FM radio station. This attracted the attention of numerous musicians and major record labels that wanted to work with Hot Karl, and he ultimately decided to accept a recording contract with Interscope Records. Hot Karl’s album featured contributions from a number of well-known musicians like Kanye West, will.i.am and Redman, but when he approached Interscope executives in late 2000 to set a release date, Hot Karl was informed that the label lacked confidence in the album and that it was not ready for release. Despite investing a few hundred thousand dollars into Hot Karl’s album, Interscope granted his request to have the contract terminated. After recording new songs without high profile guest appearances, Hot Karl released The Great Escape (2005) on the independent Headless Heroes/BBE Records label, but mediocre reviews and very poor sales resulted in his decision to quit making hip-hop music (Gordon and Nanjiani, 2012; Kremer and Vilaysac, 2012; Leeds, 2002).

Hot Karl’s experience with Interscope Records resulted in a major record label investing resources into the recording of an album that will likely never receive a high profile release. If the songs on The Great Escape are indicative of Hot Karl’s unreleased music, then his rhyming style is characteristic of the nerd-rap sub-genre and the lyrical content often reflects Hot Karl’s affluent upbringing, which is the antithesis of the rags-to-riches narratives more common in hip-hop (Hess 2007, 112). This could suggest that, as a Caucasian rapper with quirky lyrics, Hot Karl was initially signed by Interscope for his potential to cross over

to a popular audience as a novelty act more comparable to Vanilla Ice than Eminem. More likely, Hot Karl's ability to freestyle battle did not translate very well into traditional hip-hop song structure, or his songs were simply not marketable enough for hip-hop or pop audiences. Skits on The Great Escape allude to a tension between Hot Karl and A&R personnel at a fictional record label, which may indicate that Interscope wanted to mould him into a more marketable image and that Hot Karl was unwilling to follow their management. Regardless, his decision to abandon hip-hop music-making following the poor reception of The Great Escape seems to suggest that he failed to take advantage of his major label recording contract, and also failed to endure the hardships associated with building a hip-hop career as an independent artist.

Hot Karl currently has a secondary career as the owner of the Gallery1988 pop-culture inspired art gallery, and he hosts a weekly podcast on the SModcast Internet Radio network owned by filmmaker Kevin Smith. In recent interviews he claims to have used the money earned from signing with Interscope to fund the creation and development of Gallery1988, but this claim cannot be verified given his upper-middle class background. Yet just as much as Hot Karl discusses some of the benefits of his short-lived hip-hop career, he also downplays his rap past by sharing anecdotes about actively seeking the removal of all Hot Karl content from websites like YouTube (Gordon and Nanjiani, 2012; Kremer and Vilaysac, 2012). This suggests that like MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, Hot Karl currently pursues secondary career activities by relying on his non-music skills and interests, just as much as he is willing to reference his music career failures as a form of self-promotion.

J-Zone as a short-term independent career

Jay "J-Zone" Mumford's early hip-hop career is comparable to the rappers we have encountered thus far. For instance, initial fan interest in J-Zone's music was generated by local radio play, performing live helped promote the sale of his music and other merchandise, and record labels were uninterested in working with J-Zone until he had already demonstrated some ability to be successful on his own (J-Zone 2011, 37-52, 62-5). While Hot Karl represents a failed hip-hop career as both a major label and independent recording artist, J-Zone offers a case study of a rapper who experienced burgeoning success at an independent level, declined the opportunity to record for a major record label, and was then unable to sustain his primary career in music. Unlike Vanilla Ice and Hot Karl, J-Zone more

openly embraces his failure, and like Bordowitz (2007), he acknowledges the less desirable practices and aspects of the music industry.

Beginning his career as an independent hip-hop musician in the mid-1990s, J-Zone claims that it was easier to gain recognition from fans and record labels because fewer rappers were utilizing the Internet to promote their music. As we will see in the final chapter, this is unlike contemporary hip-hop career development where musicians like Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller must compete with hundreds of other aspiring rappers not just to sell albums, but to give away free mixtape downloads. J-Zone's self-released debut album Music For Tu Madre (1998) sold and reviewed well enough to earn him a recording contract with the independent Fat Beats Records label, and the follow-up album Pimps Don't Pay Taxes (2002) began selling approximately one thousand units every month (J-Zone 2011, 64-5).

When Atlantic Records presented J-Zone with a multi-album recording contract proposal in 2002, he maintains that their A&R staff requested that he write songs that would appeal to a mainstream audience and to showcase his personality instead of his rapping skills. Uninterested in losing his creative autonomy and satisfied with his current ability to earn a living as an independent musician, J-Zone declined the contract offer (J-Zone 2011, 66, 95). It would not be surprising to discover that many of the famous guest appearances scheduled to appear on Hot Karl's unreleased album for Interscope were conceived by the label as they sought to market him to a crossover audience. We can reasonably speculate that J-Zone would have a similar experience had he signed with Atlantic because his musical aesthetic, creative impulses and personal appearance are rather antagonistic to what is generally palatable to a mainstream audience.

Following a couple more years of steadily releasing new music, the declining album sales of A Job Ain't Nuthin' But Work (2004) offered the first indication that J-Zone's career was experiencing difficulties. Attempts to widen his fan base by collaborating with slightly more well-known hip-hop musicians and hiring a publicist were ineffective because J-Zone had become typecast as a novelty act. Where he could previously expect to sell a few thousand albums in the first month of release, J-Zone allegedly only sold 46 copies of Live @ The Liqua Sto (2008), and physical copies of his back catalogue were accumulating at the Fat Beats warehouse because they had also stopped selling. The label terminated their working relationship with J-Zone, offered to return thousands of his unsold albums or to have them destroyed at a recycling plant (J-Zone chose the latter option), and a few days later he

was also dropped by his digital distributor due to poor sales (J-Zone 2011, 88, 98, 104-5). In observing this experience we see how sales goals are often used to determine the outcome of a musician's career (Goldberg, 2005), and evidence that record labels have the power to terminate contracts when musicians are no longer profitable (Toynbee, 2003).

J-Zone had a moderately-sized fan base in Europe, Asia and Australia, but he was never an incredibly popular touring musician in North America. Considering the state of his album sales it was not surprising that attendance at J-Zone concerts was also shrinking. He was scheduled to perform at medium-size concert halls during a short tour of the southern United States in 2004, and yet the number of nightly spectators reportedly ranged from four to thirty individuals. J-Zone was earning a guaranteed payment regardless of the ticket sales, but he claims that building a career as a live entertainer requires performing to a large audience, attempting to convert new fans who will pay to see you again, and impressing promoters so that they will schedule more shows for you (J-Zone 2011, 81, 89-90).

Performing to increasingly smaller and apathetic audiences provides visual evidence of a career in decline, and unless a musician can proactively find a way to revert this trend, concert promoters will have little incentive to continue booking them in the future.

Poor album sales and a shortage of live performance opportunities led J-Zone to mostly abandon his hip-hop career by 2007, but a rare concert booking with a reputable Los Angeles promoter marks the moment where J-Zone claims that he finally lost interest in making or performing music. He describes the disappointment of audience members leaving the venue prior to his headlining performance, the spontaneous decision to reduce the length of his set, and his inability to convey enthusiasm during the shortened concert (J-Zone 2011, 101-3). Autobiographical descriptions of career-altering moments like these offer evidence of how a musician's subjective interpretation of a given situation or circumstances may affect their decision to continue taking part in music-related activities, and thus decisively shape their careers.

Much like Beeching's (2010) advice that musicians create their own definitions of success, J-Zone recognizes that he was able to turn a hobby into his primary source of income for a number of years, to receive critical acclaim from journalists, and to earn respect from musical peers like Danger Mouse and Cee-Lo Green. J-Zone also appears to find solace in understanding that while he did not achieve the high levels of wealth or fame that commonly indicate success, he claims that all of his accomplishments were attained without

compromising his autonomy, values or personality (2011, 10, 105). Yet while J-Zone celebrates these decisions, a number of his choices are also responsible for his career failure. Disillusioned by the false promises and business ethics of music industry participants, J-Zone declined the opportunity to work with a well-known independent hip-hop label. He also ignores the advice given by Danger Mouse that, in order to avoid being typecast as a novelty, J-Zone must broaden the appeal of his music to a wider audience (J-Zone 2011, 74-6, 101). J-Zone is unable to develop or sustain his meager successes as an independent musician because he apparently behaves in an unprofessional manner, he lacks seriousness, and he continually treats his music career like a hobby – three behaviours that Stebbins (1977) would claim are indicative of an amateur rather than a professional.

As in the cases of MC Hammer, Vanilla Ice and Hot Karl, J-Zone demonstrates how even rappers with declining or abandoned hip-hop careers can use those experiences to transition into secondary career opportunities. Unlike Vanilla Ice and Hammer, J-Zone was only ever known by a small number of underground hip-hop enthusiasts and yet he chose to self-publish a book documenting his failed hip-hop career. While J-Zone's book will likely appeal to a niche audience and sales will be relatively minimal, working as an author is a secondary career path that transpired as a result of his initial desire to pursue rapping. Likewise, despite his claims of quitting his hip-hop career entirely, J-Zone recently produced a song on the *Incredibad* (2009) album by The Lonely Island, and he makes sporadic live appearances at underground hip-hop festivals. More closely resembling the contemporary music-making activities of Hammer and Vanilla Ice, this demonstrates that a music career can theoretically endure for as long as a hip-hop musician actively commits to its ongoing pursuit.

Conclusion

MC Hammer, Vanilla Ice, Hot Karl and J-Zone represent four examples of hip-hop musicians who have (or had) careers in the music industry, but who were ultimately unable to sustain their peak accomplishments. MC Hammer worked hard to become one of the most popular hip-hop performers, but altering his image in response to wider changes in the programming habits of radio and music video stations failed to sustain his initial level of popularity. Vanilla Ice poorly rebranded his hip-hop persona in response to challenges to his authenticity and he waited too long to release his sophomore album, which resulted in loss of

interest from the pop crossover audience that helped make him a star. Hot Karl attempted a career as both a major label and independent recording artist, but poor outcomes resulted in his decision simply to quit. J-Zone wisely rejected the opportunity to sign with a major record label, but an unprofessional approach toward maintaining his independent success led to a decrease in the already small number of fans supporting him. With the exception of Hot Karl, who does not appear interested in music-making, we must acknowledge that the other three musicians examined in this chapter have sustained music careers because they have continued to make new music at a sporadic intervals. However, it would be incorrect to classify their current music careers as successful because they do not have album sales, concert attendance, or other objective measurements of music career success that rival other contemporary rappers.

Despite their inability to sustain hip-hop careers at levels of success greater or equal to previous career peaks, each of these rappers has found some way to turn hip-hop failure into secondary career opportunities. MC Hammer used his former hip-hop fame to temporarily work in reality television, but his current endeavours as a Christian television host and as the CEO of an athletic management company are primarily the result of his long-standing interests in religion and physical fitness. Vanilla Ice created the opportunity to host his own reality television program by combining his secondary career as a real estate developer with his status as a one-hit wonder. Hot Karl occasionally addresses his failed rap career when conducting interviews, but his decision to quit hip-hop simply provided him with more time to pursue a more suitable career as the owner of a specialty art gallery. J-Zone works as a high school sports journalist and primarily treats hip-hop music-making as a leisure activity, but he was able to transform his experiences as a failed musician into an instructional book for aspiring rappers. Focusing on hip-hop as a primary career is a fleeting experience for many, but the preceding case studies demonstrate that it is often possible to convert experiences accrued as a rapper into secondary career opportunities that may or may not be related to hip-hop culture. While short-term music-making experiences with varying levels of success may constitute a career, as we will see in the next chapter, hip-hop musicians like Jay-Z represent a more fully-formed model of the career as extended professional success in both music and other endeavours.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LONG-TERM AND PROFESSIONAL HIP-HOP CAREER OF JAY-Z

MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice were two of the first individuals to have incredibly popular hip-hop music careers after crossing over to mainstream pop audiences. However, they were unable to sustain their peak accomplishments, and now offer evidence of short-term hip-hop career success. These two rappers still pursue less successful hip-hop careers, and as a result, they must engage in non-musical career activities in order to earn a living. As a counterexample, this chapter will examine how Jay-Z has developed an incredibly successful, enduring, and professional hip-hop career. His career narrative also begins with a primary emphasis on music-making, but unlike MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, Jay-Z has remained a very successful recording artist. Sustaining success as a musician created alternate career opportunities in areas such as co-owning a line of branded apparel, working as a high-level record label executive, and as a corporate spokesperson. While many of these activities began as secondary sources of revenue and required less time commitment than Jay-Z's music career, they now rival or surpass music-making as his primary career, and strengthen his reputation as a hip-hop mogul. The accomplishments of hip-hop moguls like Jay-Z are responsible for elevating the reputation of hip-hop music and culture from its former status as a fad or novelty, to its current status as a professional and long-term career path.

A recently published Forbes article ranks Jay-Z as the second wealthiest hip-hop musician of all-time (Greenburg 2012c), which is an accomplishment he nurtured over a career that now exceeds twenty years. He accumulated this impressive level of wealth from recording and live performance activities, in addition to a lengthy list of business endeavours that are closely connected to his status as a superstar of hip-hop and popular music. More than any of his peers with comparably large amounts of economic capital, we may consider Jay-Z's career a success because it also includes a high evaluation of cultural capital. Fans and critics believe that Jay-Z is one of the most skillful hip-hop lyricists of all-time, numerous rappers respect and emulate his verbal flow, and both hip-hop and rock publications have awarded his albums with canonical status (Jenkins et al 1999, 331-7; "The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time" 2003, 83-178). Multiple award show victories and music

industry sales records that exceed or compare with legendary musicians like Elvis Presley and The Beatles also assess and confirm Jay-Z's talent and popularity. His career not only includes these objective and quantitative/economic criteria, but as direct quotes from Jay-Z throughout the remainder of the chapter will indicate, he regularly contemplates issues of career and success, offering us widely-circulated accounts of the hip-hop career from a subjective perspective.

The career trajectory of Jay-Z exemplifies what it means to have a successful and long-term hip-hop career, and the following aspects of his career help explain why he is an exemplary case study. This chapter will explore how early influences can inspire the pursuit of rapping as a career path, the importance of practice for developing and sustaining musical skills, and how aspiring musicians may have to work in other forms of employment before fully committing to a career in music-making. It will show how career development often depends on establishing relationships with powerful intermediaries, which may lead to new career opportunities and increasingly influential connections within the music industry. Performing live and touring on an increasingly national or international scale is also very important for reaching new fans and for providing a source of revenue. Jay-Z's recording history charts the evolution of moving from a self-funded, independent album to a long-term contract with a major record label, and demonstrates how a hit single that crosses over to a pop audience can have a very strong impact on music sales. One of the final ways in which the case of Jay-Z is instructive for the analysis of the hip-hop career is the way in which he successfully uses a hip-hop music career to cross-promote various properties and build outwards in order to financially benefit from non-musical activities.

Early interest in hip-hop and the importance of practice

Jay-Z fondly recalls watching rappers publicly perform and battle one another in a freestyle circle, and credits this experience for sparking his interest in hip-hop. From that moment he began writing down rhymes in notebooks and recording his lyrics onto a portable cassette recorder, and claims that he became very good at rapping because he practiced it like a sport (Jay-Z 2010, 4-7). One of Jay-Z's first encounters with an established hip-hop musician occurred when mutual friends arranged a rap battle with Jonathan "Jaz-O" Burks in

1984. Jaz-O recalls being impressed by “the things that people may have as far as raw talent, but never really pay attention to, [Jay-Z] had it” (Greenburg 2011, 14). As the two rappers spent more time together Jaz-O claims that he taught Jay-Z how to refine those talents through practice: “I taught him that in order to be the best, you don’t have to outwardly hone your craft. But in privacy, hone your craft. People don’t have to know how hard you work to get something” (Greenburg 2011, 15). As is true in all popular music genres, a musical performance is deemed more authentic if it appears as a natural expression of artistic talent (Barker and Taylor 2007, ix-xiii), but in this and most other instances, we can see how performance is the result of intense cultural labour.

Jaz-O’s comments highlight the importance of practice and honing skills early in the career of a popular musician. One of the more long-standing and romantic notions in hip-hop is that practice occurs spontaneously during freestyle sessions and rap battles (Greenburg 2011, 19), but many fail to recognize that musical skill development for aspiring rappers also takes place in private. Skill development includes an unspoken commitment to numerous hours of practice time (Bennett, 1980; Watson, 2008), which draws attention to the extended temporal characteristics of the popular music career. Furthermore, the hip-hop freestyle emphasizes spontaneity as a value and yet Jay-Z’s seemingly natural dexterity in this area is the result of practice. Dyer (1991) examines spontaneity as a key marker of authenticity, and throughout the duration of Jay-Z’s career many will point to his ability to be spontaneous as a mark of his greatness as a rapper.

Jaz-O signed a recording contract with EMI in 1987 and invited Jay-Z to join him on the two month trip to London (Greenburg 2011, 21). In the recording studio and during meetings with record label executives, Jay-Z remembers using every day as a learning experience. When Jaz-O’s album Word To The Jaz (1989) failed to sell many copies, EMI staff ceased communication and terminated his contract, while secretly attempting to sign Jay-Z at the same time. Demonstrating how record labels continually reassess the potential profitability of their artists (Negus, 1999) and revealing the sometimes dishonest practices of the music business (Bordowitz, 2007), this turn of events also offers insight into Jay-Z’s declining interest in pursuing a hip-hop career. As a result, he was instead contemplating selling drugs as a means of earning a living (Jay-Z 2010, 78, 246). This demonstrates how aspiring musicians may learn about various aspects of the music industry by observing the

experiences of their peers, and how these formative moments may affect the desire to continue pursuing a music career – or not. Jay-Z analyzed the benefits and risks inherent to both career paths, ultimately determining that drug trafficking offered the greatest short-term economic rewards at this moment in his life, which presumably constrained his desire to pursue a hip-hop career.

DJ Clark Kent as a music industry intermediary

As a popular New York DJ, Rodolfo “Clark Kent” Franklin was both a gatekeeper of the east coast hip-hop scene and a friend to Jay-Z. When Clark Kent was hired as a member of the A&R department at Atlantic Records in 1992, he repeatedly asked Jay-Z to consider a return to rapping by appearing as a guest on a remix to “Can I Get Open” by Original Flavor (Greenburg 2011, 25-6). This recalls the concept of the art world (Becker, 1982) where a number of individuals within a social organization (e.g. the popular music industry) utilize their respective skills and knowledge in order to help one another create artistic products (e.g. songs or albums). Adding a guest appearance to an original song or remix is a popular way in which a hip-hop musician can court the attention of new fans or record labels (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009) in lieu of making a more traditional demo tape, which is a strategy more commonly used by rock musicians. Ultimately, Clark Kent hoped that if Jay-Z recorded enough songs they would help generate interest in a recording contract with a major or independent label (Greenburg 2011, 27). While friendship was likely the primary motivation for inspiring Jay-Z’s return to music-making, it is important to note that Clark Kent had the potential to financially benefit if he could help Jay-Z secure a recording contract with a major record label, as it may include a signing bonus.

By his own account and others (Greenburg 2011, 24-5), Jay-Z was earning a sizable income selling drugs, and focusing on a music career would not only result in miscellaneous recording costs, but it would also reduce the time that he could otherwise spend on the street earning more money. Like many aspiring musicians who must balance employment and the pursuit of a music career, Jay-Z had to analyze the potential outcome of each career path and make decisions about how to utilize his time and energy accordingly. Jay-Z could theoretically return to drug dealing if he failed to achieve a music career, but drug trafficking

is an undesirable contingency plan because of the inherent risks of injury or incarceration, which provides him with greater incentive to become a successful rapper. Greenburg theorizes that Jay-Z ultimately abandoned drug dealing to fully commit to a music career after nearly getting shot in a gunfight and after noticing the potential to earn significant amounts of money if he could establish a successful hip-hop career (2011, 30).

Big Daddy Kane as a music industry intermediary

Working with Antonio “Big Daddy Kane” Hardy was another opportunity that strengthened Jay-Z’s commitment to rapping. Initially it was Clark Kent’s music industry connections – in this case with Kane’s DJ Mister Cee – that helped earn Jay-Z a more direct working relationship with legendary rapper (Jay-Z 2010, 16, 236), and this demonstrates how social connections may lead to continual employment (Murdock, 2003). Greenburg describes how Jay-Z spent four unpaid months in 1989 touring with Big Daddy Kane in a role where he performed freestyle raps during intermissions and costume changes (2011, 21). In 1994 Big Daddy Kane would feature Jay-Z in the song and music video for “Show & Prove” with a number of other up-and-coming rappers like Sauce Money, Shyheim, and Ol’ Dirty Bastard (Jay-Z 2010, 38-9).

The tour with Big Daddy Kane also highlights the free or low-wage labour that many musicians engage in during the early stages of a popular music career. In this scenario, Jay-Z was earning little more than free food, somewhere to sleep, and brief opportunities to impress new fans. Much like his experience observing Jaz-O’s dealings with EMI, Jay-Z claims that watching Big Daddy Kane also taught him showmanship and how to structure a concert set list (2010, 38; Bennett 1980, 149-53), which are two important skills that he continues to use in concerts. While the career of Big Daddy Kane was on the decline, the song and music video for “Show & Prove” provided Jay-Z with the opportunity to showcase his lyrical ability to a wider audience, and it created the appearance that Big Daddy Kane was passing his legacy down to Jay-Z and the other rappers that appear on the song. The importance of mentorship in promoting and developing the careers of emerging rappers dates back to the early 1980s when Marley Marl’s The Juice Crew helped create career opportunities for Big

Daddy Kane, MC Shan and others, and it continues today in cases such as Dr. Dre's involvement in the careers of Eminem, 50 Cent, The Game and Kendrick Lamar.

Roc-A-Fella Records and Jay-Z's debut recordings as a solo artist

In addition to encouraging him to pursue hip-hop music, Clark Kent was also responsible for introducing Jay-Z to Damon Dash, who is arguably the most important intermediary in building Jay-Z's career. Dash had previous experience as a party promoter and after becoming Jay-Z's business partner, he and Clark Kent used their social connections to help Jay-Z obtain recording sessions with a number of relatively well-known hip-hop producers. Jay-Z also claims that appearing on mixtapes helped him develop the reputation of being a skilled lyricist, and this subsequently helped him secure very coveted beats by DJ Premier (2010, 252). Here we see the importance of utilizing music industry connections to network and solicit the services of experienced and noteworthy musicians who may help with recording an album (Murdock, 2003). Similar once again to the function of the demo tape in rock music, this is another reason why hip-hop musicians appear on mixtapes: to demonstrate their skills, which may in turn lead to future working relationships with established producers or recording engineers.

Despite Clark Kent's A&R role at Atlantic Records and his gatekeeping role within the New York hip-hop scene, he was unable to negotiate a major label recording contract for Jay-Z and this demonstrates how musical talent and connections to music industry intermediaries do not always guarantee success (Petti, 2006). Instead, Jay-Z and Dash teamed up with Kareem "Biggs" Burke as a silent financial partner to form Roc-A-Fella Records as an independent label (Greenburg 2011, 34). As we saw in the early careers of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, it is a common practice for musicians to self-fund the recording and release of music, while hoping that sufficient sales will ultimately allow the musician to recoup the associated costs. Like the two baseball players who invested in Hammer's early career, we also see the importance of Burke's pre-major-label financial assistance. Jay-Z also claims that he, Dash and Burke read Hit Men: Power Brokers and Fast Money Inside the Music Business (Dannen, 1991) to help prepare for independent label ownership (2010, 246), which

highlights how it is possible to learn about the music industry via a combination of firsthand experience and by reading the stories of others.

In lieu of an expensive recording studio, Jay-Z recorded his first single “In My Lifetime b/w I Can’t Get With That” in Clark Kent’s home studio in 1994, and likely paid Kent an undisclosed amount of money in exchange for the use of his equipment. Jay-Z later paid for the manufacturing costs as well, and negotiated a distribution deal with the New York independent label Payday Records (Brown 2006, 47). Influential radio DJs in region were the primary recipients of the 12-inch vinyl single, and Jay-Z and Dash tried selling the remainder in New York clubs, in barbershops, on street corners, and from their respective vehicles. The goal was to build personal relationships with music industry gatekeepers and fans, which would hopefully lead to promotion and sales of Jay-Z’s forthcoming full-length album. After realizing that Payday had a miniscule promotional budget, Jay-Z hired his friend Abdul Malik Abbott to film a music video for \$5000 (Jay-Z 2010, 247, 251; Greenburg 2011, 35). The majority, if not all, of these tactics are very traditional methods of developing the early stages of a popular music career, and again, we can draw parallels to the early career developments of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice. The emphasis on establishing personal relationships long pre-dates the contemporary emphasis on Internet-based social networking, which is a topic of discussion in the next chapter.

Commitment and early career development

Performing live is another traditional method of courting new fans, demonstrating musical abilities, and creating an opportunity to sell music and merchandise, but it also served another purpose for Jay-Z. Still very much drawn to the allure of drug dealing, Jay-Z was admittedly not fully committed to pursuing a music career and he claims that Dash organized a makeshift tour of the northeastern United States to keep him focused on music. Jay-Z describes the tour in an unglamorous fashion as he, Burke and the two members of Original Flavor travelled in a Nissan Pathfinder and shared double rooms to minimize costs (2010, 239). His story recalls the experiences of many musicians who discover through the experience of touring that the popular music career is not as easy or recreational as it may

seem (Bennett 1980, 72-3) because luxuries like tour buses and individual hotel rooms are more customary for successful musicians.

Jay-Z recognizes that radio play is still important for developing a hip-hop career, as he claims that “radio love puts you in the hood for real” (2010, 128). This suggests that, despite changing music industry trends, the repetition associated with regular radio play was, and continues to be, the most effective way to reach new listeners and develop a hit single. As another friend who played a key role in Jay-Z’s career, Irving “Irv Gotti” Lorenzo Jr. repeatedly asked Funkmaster Flex to play Jay-Z’s second single “Dead Presidents” on his Hot 97 radio show until the taste-making New York DJ eventually gave into the pressure. Irv Gotti was also responsible for giving a copy of the single to the equally influential DJ Clue. Noticing growing fan interest and music industry buzz generated by the radio play, Jay-Z observes how there was a window of opportunity to record an album, create the packaging, and develop a marketing plan (2010, 251). This again recalls the career of Vanilla Ice, as radio DJs in gatekeeping roles helped to generate early fan and music industry interest in his career, which was quickly followed by the release of his debut album To The Extreme.

The recording and the release of Reasonable Doubt

In order to capitalize on his rising popularity, Jay-Z recorded his debut album Reasonable Doubt (1996) at D&D Studios in Manhattan with production work by friends such as Clark Kent, DJ Premier, DJ Ski (of Original Flavor), Jaz-O, and Irv Gotti. Jay-Z and Dash were dissatisfied with the level of professionalism of Payday Records and set out to find a new record deal. Throughout this process Dash claims that he was unwilling to give away ownership of Jay-Z’s master recordings and Will Socolov of the independent Freeze Records label was the only individual willing to agree to this condition. Socolov then arranged for a distribution deal with Priority Records, which was still operating as an independently owned company prior to its sale to EMI in 1997. Priority earned 20 percent of the wholesale value of each sale, Freeze acquired a 24 percent share, and the remaining 56 percent was split between Jay-Z, Dash, and the musicians who contributed to the creation of the album (Charnas 2010, 569-70). Greenburg also recognizes that Jay-Z and Dash entered into a contractual relationship with Freeze Records and Priority Records, but he offers a

counterclaim that the terms of the agreement included giving away ownership of the master recordings (2011, 35-7). Freeze Records did not disburse the expected royalties after Reasonable Doubt sold more than 400,000 copies during its first year of release, which led to Jay-Z and Dash negotiating a release from the contract.

On the business side of the music industry, a popular musician often benefits from close associations with music industry intermediaries who possess specialized knowledge and skills in areas such as contract negotiation (Jones 2003, 150-1). In one of the numerous instances when Greenburg mythologizes Jay-Z's drug dealer past, he claims that Jay-Z used his skills as a hustler to persuade Socolov to return ownership of the master recordings (Greenburg 2011, 37). However, it is important to recognize that Dash also has a reputation for being very business-minded (Jay-Z 2010, 237) and if it is true that Freeze Records ever had ownership of the master recordings, Dash likely played a key role in the negotiation process. Regardless, as we will see momentarily, Jay-Z and Dash emerged from this situation with ownership of the masters, and were able to use them in future contract negotiations.

Reliance on independent or semi-independent record labels to provide assistance with manufacturing and distribution of music is another common practice among hip-hop musicians during the early stages of their respective careers. In California during the late 1980s, for example, Macola Records was the first company to help independent hip-hop musicians with pressing and distribution. Similar to the situation of Jay-Z and Dash, in the previous chapter we noticed how MC Hammer used Macola to release his debut album and its independent success partially helped lead to his eventual recording contract with Capitol Records. Other rappers like Too \$hort, N.W.A, and The Geto Boys have also relied on pressing and distribution deals to achieve similar results (Quinn 2005, 63-4), and this strategy is also common in other popular music genres (Roberts 2005, 32).

Free to pursue new opportunities and now receiving interest from a number of major record labels, Jay-Z and Dash ultimately decided to sign with Def Jam Recordings in 1997 because of its reputation for supporting hip-hop music. Def Jam agreed to purchase a 33 percent stake in Roc-A-Fella Records for \$1.5 million and to fund the production costs for future Jay-Z albums and music videos. In exchange, Def Jam gained ownership of the master recordings to Reasonable Doubt and a cut of the subsequent albums that Jay-Z would record for the label. Dash deserves praise for recognizing that they could use Reasonable Doubt to

help leverage a better arrangement than a relatively unproven musician might otherwise receive, as retaining 67 percent ownership of Roc-A-Fella Records is significantly higher and more profitable than the 50 percent artist-label split typical of these recording contracts. As an added incentive, Def Jam created the boutique Roc-A-Fella Records label, and granted Jay-Z and Dash limited power to sign emerging rappers to it (Brown 2006, 50; Greenburg 2011, 38-9). Other hip-hop musicians like Sean “Diddy” Combs of Bad Boy Records and Bryan “Birdman” Williams of Cash Money Records have also used early career successes to bring their labels into lucrative partnerships with major labels like Arista/BMG and Universal Records, respectively (Charnas 2010, 466, 522), but, again, this practice is not unique to hip-hop.

In 1997, nine months before the release of his next album, Jay-Z participated in his first crossover hit by singing the chorus and contributing some rapping to the Foxy Brown song “I’ll Be.” The single peaked at #7 on the Billboard “Hot 100” chart and was certified gold for sales exceeding 500,000 copies. Frequent play of the music video established a visual presence for Jay-Z in tandem with Foxy Brown, while introducing both as up-and-coming hip-hop stars. The shared success likely made executives at Def Jam optimistic about the Jay-Z’s forthcoming album and his long-term potential with the label. Sharing the songwriting credits on a popular song also provided Jay-Z with one of his first tastes of financial success via music-making, and likely had a positive effect on his subjective understanding (Stebbins, 1970) of the viability of his hip-hop career.

In My Lifetime, Vol. 1 as Jay-Z’s major label debut

In My Lifetime, Vol. 1 (1997) was Jay-Z’s debut album for Def Jam, and while some producers like DJ Premier and DJ Ski returned for one or two songs, musicians more commonly associated with Bad Boy Records handled the majority of production duties. Bad Boy was a key contributor to the rise of the so-called “jiggy era” of east coast hip-hop, and while many described their musical aesthetic as favouring style over substance, it was incredibly popular (Greenburg 2011, 39-40). Yet, having previously established his rap persona based on a mafioso-like image with a fast and intricate rhyming style, Jay-Z’s shift to what we might call a “jiggy era” style of dress and music drew some criticism from

journalists and fans. In the previous chapter we noticed how MC Hammer's career declined after he followed the trend of west coast gangsta rap in the mid-1990s, and this demonstrates the potential consequences of adopting a hip-hop persona that is incompatible with fan expectations. While it varies on a case by case basis, the common belief in rock culture is that musicians risk accusations of selling out and a possible decrease in the number of fans if they engage in similar practices.

Crossing over to mainstream pop audiences

In My Lifetime, Vol. 1 earned platinum status in its first year of availability, it established Jay-Z as an increasing priority for Def Jam executives, and allowed him to avoid the poor treatment that Jaz-O received when his album for EMI failed to sell. Thus, it appears as if the significant increase in Jay-Z's album sales justify his decision to work with the Bad Boy production team from an economic perspective. A little less than one year later, Jay-Z released Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life (1998), which blends the influences of his first two albums while downplaying the pop-focused production style of In My Lifetime, Vol. 1. The short window of time between releases is a pattern that will continue for much of Jay-Z's career, as he rarely allows more than a year to pass before recording new music. Given the constantly changing listening habits of popular music fans, this strategy allows Jay-Z to keep his name, music and image active in the music industry and to develop a reputation for his ability to consistently record at a high level of quality. This is very much unlike the failure of Vanilla Ice to release his sophomore album quickly enough to sustain his fleeting popularity.

The album was Jay-Z's first to debut at #1 on the Billboard album sales chart with over 350,000 units sold and over one million units shipped (Def Jam Recordings, 1998). The first single "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)" crossed over to pop radio stations partially thanks to its use of a familiar sample from the Broadway musical Annie. The popularity of the song also deserves credit for boosting album sales during the third and fourth weeks of release (Mukherjee, 1998) and promoting long-term sales that eventually exceeded five million copies. Greenburg claims that a typical major label contract provides musicians with \$1 or \$2 in royalties for every album sold, but Jay-Z was earning closer to \$3 or \$4 per album because of his status as a co-owner of Roc-A-Fella Records (2011, 40). While it is difficult to

locate substantiating data, the enduring popularity of “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)” likely helps to sell copies of Jay-Z’s greatest hits compilation and his back catalogue (Keightley, 2004) because he had a career prior to this crossover hit, which produces a kind of retroactive synergy.

As a hip-hop song that derives its chorus from a popular Broadway musical, “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)” is nearly as much of a novelty song as MC Hammer’s “U Can’t Touch This” and “Ice Ice Baby” by Vanilla Ice. However, Jay-Z was not widely criticized for this stylistic decision because the cute chorus was juxtaposed with vivid lyrics that depicted the popular hip-hop narrative of growing up poor and overcoming adversity, and this worked to authenticate Jay-Z’s own early life experiences. By the mid-1990s, the practice of sampling hit songs from other genres was a popular trend in mainstream hip-hop, and as such, it was likely interpreted as an acceptable way for a rapper to seek wider exposure. Additionally, Jay-Z already experienced some crossover success with the release of the song “Can I Get A...” one month prior², and unlike Hammer and Vanilla Ice, Jay-Z had a number of minor hits that preceded “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem),” so it was more difficult to typecast him as a novelty.

National touring as a headlining performer

Jay-Z claims that “tours are the most lucrative aspect of a recording artists’ career; you have a lot more control and fewer people are in your pockets compared to album sales” (2010, 142), but in the years leading up to his crossover success, Jay-Z had mostly neglected the possibility of touring. He was scheduled as one of the support acts for Puff Daddy’s headlining “No Way Out” tour in late 1997, but unspecified conflicts with promoters resulted in Jay-Z leaving the tour after a few shows (Brown 2006, 72). With his fan base growing exponentially in 1998, Jay-Z was now in a position to tour with headlining status in large venues on a national level. Adding DMX as a co-headliner and including Method Man, Redman and Ja Rule as supporting acts, the 48-city, “Hard Knock Life” tour grossed \$18

² While the song later appeared on Jay-Z’s *Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life* album, it was originally released to promote the film *Rush Hour* and its accompanying soundtrack. As a collaboration with Ja Rule and Amil, it would be incorrect to classify this as Jay-Z’s first pop crossover hit as a solo artist.

million and was one of the most financially successful hip-hop tours of its time (Greenburg 2011, 47). However, the tour was not as lucrative as it may initially appear because Jay-Z was splitting the nightly ticket sales of \$375,000 with DMX and the supporting acts. After deducting expenses for venue insurance, travelling, sound engineers, stage technicians and a number of other costs, Greenburg theorizes that Jay-Z was earning \$60,000 per show, or an overall tour gross of \$3 million before taxes (2011, 191). While earning a few million dollars on a three month tour is certainly impressive, we will later see how these revenues are rather tiny in comparison to Jay-Z's current touring income.

Recognizing the talent and scope of the "Hard Knock Life" tour, Dash hired the filmmaker Chris Fiore to create the Backstage (2000) documentary which had modest success in cinemas and on the DVD retail market. This was the second time that he commissioned a film as a promotional tool for Jay-Z's hip-hop career, as two years earlier Dash collaborated with Abdul Malik Abbott to combine Jay-Z's unreleased music videos into a long-form video titled Streets Is Watching (1998). Greenburg reveals that Streets Is Watching sold 100,000 VHS and DVD copies to earn \$2 million in revenue, and while he does not speculate upon the profit margin for Backstage, it is reasonable to predict that it was also profitable (Greenburg 2011, 48). Music documentaries depict the amount of creative labour associated with building a successful music career (Stahl, 2008), and as the title of Backstage suggests, providing a behind-the-scenes glimpse of Jay-Z's work ethic strengthens the viewer's perception of Jay-Z as an authentic hip-hop star in the making.

Rocawear as a secondary career opportunity

After achieving a certain level of career success, popular musicians often attempt to develop artist-branded merchandise, and in addition to selling t-shirts at concerts, Jay-Z expanded his career into the apparel industry in 1999. Jay-Z and Dash initially hired employees to create the first run of Rocawear clothing, but they were unhappy with the speed of production and level of garment quality. The pair consulted Russell Simmons for advice after noticing the growing market presence of his Phat Farm clothing label. Simmons suggested that they strike a licensing deal with Alex Bize and Norton Cher because these two veterans of the apparel industry had the existing infrastructure to manufacture and distribute

Rocawear (Jay-Z 2010, 80-3). This again demonstrates Jay-Z's rising level of influence and how social connections to powerful intermediaries often lead to more profitable working relationships (Murdock, 2003). The decision to work with Bize and Cher was a good one, as Rocawear earned \$80 million in revenues during the next 18 months (Greenburg 2011, 46).

Mid-career recordings and retirement

Jay-Z continued to release new albums on a yearly basis and remained quite successful at it. Album sales of Vol. 3... Life and Times of S. Carter (1999) exceeded three million copies, The Dynasty: Roc La Familia (2000) and The Blueprint (2001) each sold more than two-and-a-half million copies, while The Blueprint 2: The Gift & The Curse (2002) and The Black Album (2003) both exceeded three million copies. Jay-Z credits some of this success to his ability to make the songs accessible for pop audiences, while including subtle yet complex wordplay that will appeal to fans of hip-hop (2010, 129-30). This appears to indicate a "struggle between two principles of hierarchization" (Vandenberghe 1999, 53) that Jay-Z and many other popular musicians share. On one hand, Jay-Z wants to have a successful and enduring music career that is premised on the autonomous pursuit of artistic creativity. However, he also recognizes the heteronomous aspects of mainstream music industry participation: economic forces determine career success and endurance, thus musicians must meet specific sales goals that will allow the record company to recoup the costs of recording and marketing an album. If a musician fails to remain profitable, the label may terminate the recording contract. In order to achieve sales goals and exceed profit margins, Jay-Z must create songs that seem lyrically simplistic because they will appeal to popular audiences³. True to this subjective self-evaluation, all of these mid-career albums included one or more singles that crossed over to mainstream radio, while maintaining Jay-Z's reputation as one of the most lyrically talented musicians in hip-hop.

Jay-Z has written that competition from other rappers was his inspiration for continuing to make music at a level of high skill, but he also claims that a perceived decline

³ Lyrics to the song "Moment of Clarity" from The Black Album partially address this issue: "If skills sold, truth be told, I'd probably be / Lyrically Talib Kweli / Truthfully I wanna rhyme like Common Sense / But I did 5 mill' / I ain't been rhyming like Common since."

in the quality of the competition helped lead to his decision to retire from rapping (Jay-Z 2010, 71, 296). Whether or not that was the case, Jay-Z used The Black Album and his “Fade To Black” retirement concert at Madison Square Garden on November 25th, 2003 as the moment to move out of the spotlight as a rapper (Greenburg 2011, 83-9). More importantly, The Black Album era signified the end of his relationship with Dash, which allowed Jay-Z to claim full control of his music and business careers. This helped to create an increase in his perceived autonomy, and as a direct result, his authenticity as a hip-hop mogul. Greenburg suggests that this incident highlights a larger claim that Jay-Z is successful at collaborating with his mentors (Jaz-O) and business partners (Dash) until he outgrows their usefulness and moves on to new opportunities (2011, 48-9, 67, 92-3). Many interpret this negatively, but as demonstrated by the Russell Simmons/Rocawear example, popular musicians frequently network with increasingly influential music industry intermediaries (Zwann et al, 2010), and doing so often requires leaving others behind.

Def Jam Recordings presidency

Jay-Z accepted a three-year contract in 2004 to become the President of Def Jam, which paid him an annual salary of \$8-10 million dependent on performance bonuses. Prior to publicizing this new career direction, Jay-Z offered Dash and Burke full control of the Roc-A-Fella name in exchange for exclusive rights to the master recordings of Reasonable Doubt, but recognizing it as a valuable asset, they declined the offer (Greenburg 2011, 89-91). A few months later Jay-Z, Dash and Burke sold their remaining 50 percent of Roc-A-Fella to Island/Def Jam for \$10 million (Hall, 2004), and Jay-Z purchased Dash’s stake in Rocawear for \$22 million (Greenburg 2011, 91). As an incentive associated with the Def Jam presidency, Jay-Z will reclaim ownership of his master recordings in 2014 for all of the albums he recorded for the label, which have an estimated minimum value of \$50 million (Greenburg, 2010). Record labels traditionally prefer to retain ownership of master recordings for as long as possible because they are a key source of music industry profit (Stahl 2011, 668-9). For an immensely popular musician with a number of enduring hits, it is somewhat surprising that Def Jam would return the masters to Jay-Z so quickly, which provides evidence of his power in the industry. Much like his initial signing to Def Jam as a recording artist, this is another instance where Jay-Z used his cachet and prior history of

success as leverage in the negotiating process. Or as he claims, "...in business, like they say, you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate" (Jay-Z 2011, 131).

Greenburg claims that Jay-Z and Dash were rather good at talent scouting and development for their Roc-A-Fella label (2011, 43-4), but Kanye West was the only Roc-A-Fella musician to sell more than one million albums or to receive widespread critical acclaim. For every mid-level success like Memphis Bleek, Freeway or Beanie Sigel, there is a failed attempt at developing careers for Amil, Christion, Da Ranjahz and Sauce Money. However, much as he uses his hip-hop star status to cross-promote the Rocawear brand, a musical guest appearance by Jay-Z acts as a "stamp of approval" (Zwann et al, 2009) that effectively helps generate music sales and media attention for artists with whom he collaborates, in addition to his own career. During his tenure as the President of Def Jam, the signings and subsequent successes of Young Jeezy, Rick Ross, Rihanna, and the career revitalization of Nas, demonstrate that Jay-Z is adept at mentoring and developing the careers of emerging and established hip-hop musicians, and this further strengthens his authenticity as a hip-hop mogul.

Post-retirement recordings and product endorsements

Jay-Z emerged from retirement with the release of the Kingdom Come (2006) album, and his return as a recording artist would not only result in artist royalties from sales, but also performance bonuses due to his position as President of Def Jam. The music video for the lead single "Show Me What You Got" greatly enhanced Jay-Z's economic capital by adding two more revenue streams: it prominently promotes the Armand de Brignac champagne brand and was later edited to become a Budweiser commercial, as Jay-Z had recently signed an endorsement deal with Anheuser-Busch (Greenburg 2011, 106-7). Despite conducting extensive research Greenburg is unable to prove that Jay-Z has a financial stake in Armand de Brignac, but he presents a lengthy paper trail, conflicting evidence regarding the history of the brand, and anonymous sources to make a very compelling argument otherwise (2011, 122-33).

The critical and fan reception to Kingdom Come was middling, but the album still sold more than one million copies (Greenburg 2011, 106-7). Recalling Hyden's (2011)

assertion in the previous chapter that Hammer only sold one million copies of the poorly-reviewed The Funky Headhunter album, one might cynically argue that the same was true for Jay-Z at this point in his music career. However, even if his latest solo album did not restore Jay-Z to his previous level of career success, he did retain a presence on pop radio stations thanks to very popular guest appearances on songs by Beyoncé (“Déjà Vu”) and Rihanna (“Umbrella”). One year later, Jay-Z reestablished his status as one of the most talented hip-hop lyricists with the release of the American Gangster (2007) soundtrack, which many believe was a return to the mafioso-inspired form of his highly-regarded Reasonable Doubt album. While MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice did not experience a music career revitalization, this moment allowed Jay-Z to eliminate any doubt that he was still one of the most talented hip-hop musicians and very much committed to continuing his hip-hop career.

360 deal with Live Nation

Nearing the end of his contractual obligations with Def Jam as a label executive and recording artist, Jay-Z decided to seek a different arrangement for advancing and profiting from his previous successes – a multiple rights deal, or what is more commonly known as a “360 deal.” Taking advantage of the much publicized dilemma of declining album sales in the face of music piracy, a relatively recent trend sees record labels attempting to compensate by participating in more profitable and formerly off-limit areas, like the touring and merchandise revenues of musicians (Karubian, 2009). As 360 deals become more prominent in the music industry, some are concerned that they will extend the power of record label over musicians to even greater levels than the traditional option contract (Stahl, 2011; Stahl and Meier, 2012). Like pop and rock musicians such as Robbie Williams, Madonna and Korn before him, Jay-Z signed away the rights to a number of his revenue streams in exchange for substantial amounts of guaranteed money. Much like his earlier arrangements with Def Jam, both as a musician and then as the President of the company, Jay-Z was able to wield his hip-hop superstar status during the negotiation process in order to leverage a profitable and non-exploitative deal, which is not a bargaining position available to emerging musicians.

In April 2008 it was announced that Jay-Z had prematurely ended his contract with Def Jam by paying the label a \$5 million buyout fee, and he promptly signed a ten-year, \$150

million deal with the concert promoter Live Nation. As terms of the deal, Jay-Z will be paid \$10 million by Live Nation for each of the four albums he is contractually obliged to record for the company. He also “received an upfront payment of \$25 million plus an additional \$20 million for certain publishing and licensing rights... \$50 million to cover costs of starting a new record label and talent agency called Roc Nation, as well as a general touring advance of \$25 million” (Greenburg 2011, 189-9). The contract ensures that Jay-Z will remain committed to recording and performing music for the next decade, it allows him to continue working as a music industry executive at his own Roc Nation label, and it further establishes the perception that Jay-Z is an autonomous hip-hop mogul. Earning a multi-million dollar profit simply by leaving one long-term contract for another also demonstrates his perceived value and superior bargaining position.

Jay-Z claims that “being a recording artist on a major label is the most contractually exploitative relationship you can have in America and it’s legal” (2010, 246). However, it appears that the enormous financial profits associated with the Live Nation deal easily trumped his disapproval of entering another contractual relationship with a massive corporate entity. With other very popular (Nine Inch Nails, Radiohead) and mid-level (Amanda Palmer) musicians choosing to avoid more traditional record label arrangements and instead primarily using Internet-based distribution and promotion (Stahl and Meier 2012, 10), it is perhaps surprising that Jay-Z did not attempt a similar course of action. After all, he already has a very sizable amount of wealth with which to cover the initial costs of independently recording, promoting and distributing an album, in addition to being able to absorb any potential financial losses should the experiment fail. Additionally, he has more record executive experience – at both the independent and major label level – than most. However, it appears that Jay-Z was more comfortable taking the least risky option that would not only allow him to function as a recording artist, but also as a talent scout and music industry mogul at Roc Nation.

Contemporary career activities

The Blueprint 3 (2009) was Jay-Z’s eleventh U.S. number-one album, obtaining first week sales of 476,000 copies and cumulative sales nearing two million, receiving mostly

favourable reviews and featuring two of Jay-Z's most commercially successful songs ("Run This Town" and "Empire State of Mind"), in addition to three other singles that performed very well on radio. He also used the \$25 million touring advance to develop a visually intricate stage production and to hire a multi-member live backing band for the 62-date, international "The Blueprint 3" tour. Greenburg estimates that Jay-Z and Live Nation split the tour earnings of \$60 million in ticket sales and \$8 million in merchandise revenues. Estimated at more than \$1 million, Jay-Z's average gross per concert is nearly twice as much as the next most successful live rapper (2011, 185-7, 190-4) and it clearly exceeds the revenue he was generating as a headlining performer on the "Hard Knock Life" tour in 1998. Despite the popularity of The Blueprint 3 album, the emphasis on touring suggests that hip-hop superstars now earn greater financial profits from live performance than they do from recording, particularly when their concert attendance drawing power eliminates the need to rely on a co-headliner to help sell tickets.

One might describe Roc Nation as an entertainment conglomerate because it offers management services for musicians and sound engineers, song publishing, and other forms of creative consulting. Roc Nation most prominently functions as a boutique record label created in partnership with Live Nation that signs one-album distribution deals with existing major record labels to save on the costs of developing their own infrastructure. J. Cole was the first musician to sign with Roc Nation in February 2009 (Greenburg 2011, 197-8), and his debut album Cole World: The Sideline Story (2011) on Roc Nation/Columbia Records was the sixth highest selling hip-hop album of the year with more than 600,000 units sold. Jay-Z works closely to help promote the career of J. Cole by making guest appearances on his songs, offering him opening act status on tours, and when Jay-Z appeared on the cover of the October 2009 issue of XXL magazine he negotiated a package deal that would include editorial content focusing on J. Cole in addition to more than twenty pages of Rocawear advertisements (Greenburg 2011, 199-201). This once again demonstrates the level of influence and bargaining power that Jay-Z possesses in the music and entertainment industry.

Jay-Z found another way to earn substantial revenue within a superstar musical partnership with Kanye West. The duo released Watch The Throne (2011) to critical acclaim and album sales nearing one-and-a-half million copies on the strength of three commercially successful radio singles. Greenburg notes that their Live Nation-sponsored North American

tour earned \$48.5 million in ticket sales over 35 concerts, and after factoring in estimated merchandise profits he predicts that each artist earned \$1 million each night due to the relatively low budget visual effects and no opening musicians (2011c). The “Watch The Throne” tour will expand to include another 24 international dates, which should be even more profitable because hip-hop and dance music are incredibly popular in Europe (Greenburg, 2012).

Observations

While the answer should already be apparent, perhaps it is useful to explicitly ask, does Jay-Z have a career? As a musician Jay-Z continues to record new music on a regular basis, and even during the downtime between albums, he regularly contributes guest verses to high-profile song collaborations with other artists. While he has yet to exceed the peak sales of Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life in 1998, Jay-Z’s albums unfailingly sell in excess of one million copies. That consistency also extends to Jay-Z’s activities as a live performer, as his concert tours regularly sell out large arenas, he earns top billing as a festival performer, and he generates millions of dollars in additional revenue from the sale of concert merchandise. When critics, fans and peers evaluate Jay-Z’s albums and live performances they consistently praise his lyrical skill and musical vision. During rare moments when his musical activities do not live up to this previous standard of excellence or his personal expectations, it often inspires Jay-Z to improve his subsequent activities. Analyzing these quantitative and qualitative evaluations of Jay-Z’s music-making activities clearly indicates that he has a successful and long-term music career, to which he remains committed.

Many of Jay-Z’s other career activities are the direct result of this success as a musician. The creation of Roc-A-Fella Records, as one of the incentives associated with signing a record contract with Def Jam, allowed Jay-Z to scout and develop the careers of musicians like Kanye West, Memphis Bleek and Beanie Sigel. He later nurtured the successful careers of Rick Ross, Young Jeezy, Rihanna, and numerous other Def Jam recording artists during his three-year role as President of the label. Revenues generated by Jay-Z’s recorded and live music endeavours provided the start-up capital for Rocawear apparel, and his social connections to Russell Simmons led to working relationships with

leading apparel manufacturers. As a recognizable superstar of hip-hop and popular music, Jay-Z also earned lucrative endorsement deals with corporations like Budweiser and Armand de Brignac champagne. He also owns the 40/40 Club chain of sports bars, has co-ownership roles with the Brooklyn Nets NBA team and the Carol's Daughter line of beauty products, and Jay-Z was a co-producer of the Broadway musical Fela. The successes associated with these opportunities create extra sources of income for Jay-Z, but more importantly, they establish his popular cultural reputation as a hip-hop mogul.

We can once again state with confidence that Jay-Z has a long-term hip-hop career, and the combination of both music and other activities supports his distinction as a hip-hop mogul. Jay-Z's career success and professionalism is evaluated by sustained economic wealth, his consistent ability to sell large quantities of albums and concert tickets, strong qualitative evaluations of his musical skills, his ability to develop the careers of emerging musicians, and expansion into promotional and entrepreneurial opportunities. In contrast, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice also accumulated wealth on account of album sales, concert tickets and other merchandise, but, particularly in the case of MC Hammer, they were unable to sustain it. While these two rappers were popular with fans, most critics did not review their albums favourably and very few musical peers were willing to defend their artistry. MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice also did not attempt to promote the careers of emerging rappers, and the career-extending strategies established near the height of their fame were short-lived. We also see how Jay-Z has redefined the potential heights of hip-hop career success, as previously established by rappers like MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice. Finally, Jay-Z demonstrates how a continuous series of well-executed career activities may allow a hip-hop musician to sustain longevity near peak levels of career success, well beyond the shorter-term successes of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice.

As this chapter demonstrates, the career development of Jay-Z shares much in common with other rappers, so it is instructive to analyze why it is Jay-Z who possesses a long-term career and not MC Hammer or Vanilla Ice. Becker's (1982) art world perspective makes clear the importance of networking with individuals who possess the skills and social connections that may lead to career development opportunities. Jay-Z, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice each demonstrate this, but it appears that Jay-Z is much better at jettisoning these intermediaries once they outlive their usefulness or begin to affect his career development.

For example, Greenburg notes how sharing in Jay-Z's success was inflating Dash's sense of importance in the late 1990s, and cites a number of examples where this alleged unprofessionalism was possibly slowing Jay-Z's career growth (2011, 92). Recall how Jay-Z ended their working relationship by temporarily retiring from music in November 2003 and by purchasing Dash's share of Rocawear in 2004. Not only did Jay-Z free himself from Dash's supposedly negative influence, but he also turned the experience into great financial gain by selling the Rocawear brand to Iconix in 2007 for \$204 million (Greenburg 2011, 178-9). This suggests that not only is Jay-Z a skilled collaborator, but he also recognizes when it is appropriate to sever ties with individuals who negatively affect his career. As a counterexample, remember a discussion in the previous chapter of how Hammer failed to downsize his entourage and personal spending habits as his music career was in decline, and how this resulted in his eventual bankruptcy.

In Jay-Z, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice we also see the importance of working quickly and remaining active as a musician. In the previous chapter we theorized that the music careers of Hammer and Vanilla Ice declined when they failed to quickly record and release new albums. Discarding his temporary retirement from music, 2008 was the only year since 1996 when Jay-Z did not release an album of new material. Yet, even without a solo album to his credit in 2008, Jay-Z collaborated with Rick Ross, T.I., Lil Wayne, Young Jeezy, and Coldplay on highly successful singles, which allowed Jay-Z to retain a presence in popular culture. Jay-Z also brings this work ethic to his business ventures – many of which maintain a synergistic relationship with his music career – and this suggests that continually working and seeking new opportunities are necessary for career longevity.

The career peaks of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice were too brief to analyze, but Jay-Z's continual commitment to his music career helps explain his longevity as a hip-hop mogul. We previously established that Jay-Z has successfully monetized his music career, in large part thanks to remarkable consistency in terms of album, concert ticket and merchandise sales. The 18 month period in 1999-2000 when Rocawear earned \$80 million in revenue likely indicates that Jay-Z earned more from his business ventures than from his music-making activities. If not at this moment, then perhaps it was Jay-Z's November 2003 retirement from music in order to begin his new role as President of Def Jam, which indicates the blurring of Jay-Z's primary and secondary career activities. Jay-Z did not have to return

to hip-hop music-making because his cultural capital as one of the most talented rappers was already secure, and he was accumulating a large amount of economic capital from business pursuits. However, returning to the concept of synergy, Jay-Z recognizes that his music career activities support the longevity of his business career and vice versa.

Perhaps the final criterion that enables Jay-Z's career longevity, particularly in relation to MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, is his authenticity. In the previous chapter we learned that Vanilla Ice falsified his biography because he believed that establishing a hip-hop persona premised on criminality would help sell albums, and he was ultimately exiled from participating in hip-hop culture once these lies were uncovered. Conversely, Jay-Z grew up poor, worked as a drug dealer, and he has a number of other lived experiences that traditionally represent hip-hop authenticity, which is a form of cultural capital. When his lyrics reference these themes, even within the context of a novelty song like "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)," listeners trust that they are truthful, which ultimately can help Jay-Z sell albums and other music-related merchandise. Establishing and maintaining the perception of authenticity is also important for Jay-Z's business pursuits. Recognizable as a successful rapper who overcame adversity, Jay-Z's early appearances in Rocawear advertisements and donning the apparel in his music videos likely helped encourage initial sales, as fans seek to emulate the appearance of their favourite rapper. As a hip-hop mogul, Jay-Z continually earns endorsement deals with corporations who hope his association will imbue their products with hip-hop authenticity.

Conclusion

Jay-Z's accomplishments as a musician and as a businessperson have helped expand notions of professionalism, success, and longevity in relation to the hip-hop career. His career and his successes are defined by quantitative sales of music and items associated with his other business ventures, qualitative assessments of his skills as a rapper and as an entrepreneur, and estimations of his net worth as a hip-hop mogul. Jay-Z's early biographical details, the authenticated narrative of his rise to prominence, in addition to his ability to sustain a long-term and diverse hip-hop career, has also instilled Jay-Z with high evaluations of cultural capital.

The ability to endure, while sustaining and building upon previous accomplishments, is the key factor differentiating Jay-Z from the short-term hip-hop careers examined in the previous chapter. It is true that MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice once had successful careers that could rival some of the most popular musicians in other genres, but they failed to sustain their achievements for more than a few years. In the same way, Jay-Z's early career and success were also measured against the standards of other popular musicians. However, he has endured for such a long period of time and sustained such high levels of success that he is now the benchmark for which other popular music careers are measured. As a result, Jay-Z has helped hip-hop culture shed its earliest reputation as a fad, and has allowed it to be recognized as a site of successful, long-term careers.

CHAPTER FIVE: NEW MEDIA AND THE NEW CAREER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES OF ODD FUTURE, WIZ KHALIFA AND MAC MILLER

The previous chapter examined the development and the significance of Jay-Z's long-term, professional hip-hop career, in relation to the short-term career successes of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice. While the career of Jay-Z can be viewed as among the most successful in hip-hop history, do aspiring performers in the second decade of the 21st century necessarily follow in his footsteps? A question of this nature is important because the music industry continues to undergo changes that have made it remarkably different in comparison to the early 1990s when Jay-Z was beginning his career. For instance, while the sales of popular music increased slightly in 2011⁴ they still remain lower than previous years (Caulfield, 2012), distribution and consumption habits are changing (Warr and Goode 2011, 126), and opinions regarding the societal value of music and what it means to support the musicians we enjoy seem to be shifting (White, 2012).

This chapter will use Odd Future, Wiz Khalifa, and Mac Miller as the primary case studies in which to examine how contemporary musicians develop hip-hop careers. The online hip-hop mixtape, social networking, and video blogging are emerging promotional tools, which appear to grant musicians greater autonomy over their careers. However, in many ways these activities turn out to be variations of traditional, offline industrial/promotional practices, and the manner in which hip-hop careers are established will be seen to have mostly remained the same. These Internet-based activities also reflect wider labour trends in the "The New Economy" such as intensifying workloads, non-traditional work scheduling that extends into evenings and weekends, and labouring without pay in order to demonstrate talents and expertise.

In addition to Odd Future, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller, the careers of emerging hip-hop musicians such as A\$AP Rocky, Big K.R.I.T., Big Sean, Childish Gambino, Curren\$y, Danny Brown, Das Racist, J. Cole, Kendrick Lamar, Kreayshawn, Lil B and Yelawolf have experienced remarkable prominence in the last two years. For each musician the initial hope

⁴ U.S. consumers purchased 330 million albums in 2011 (Caulfield, 2012) in comparison to 785 million units in 2000 (Ellis 2002, 4).

is that releasing large quantities of free music in the form of online mixtapes, distributing low-budget music videos and career-in-progress updates on video blogging services, and using social networking websites to communicate directly with fans and musical peers will ultimately lead to an increase in their reputational value. Once a growing number of fans begin to notice the Internet-based activities of these aspiring rappers, taste-making music websites and other media organizations may help direct even greater levels of attention by sharing editorial content that seeks to accredit (Gendron, 2002) these musicians as future stars of the hip-hop genre. As their online reputations become more prominent, these rappers will then likely attempt to establish offline relationships with reputable music industry intermediaries (record labels, tour booking agents, etc.) with the goal of monetizing their career-to-date successes via more traditional activities (selling albums or branded merchandise, touring, etc.). In analyzing a number of case studies we will see how contemporary hip-hop career development strategies are evolving even as they represent continuity with many strategies of the past.

The growing importance of online career development

As cultural, economic and technological trends change, we can see how the discourses of how to develop a career in popular music are also altered. We can identify different theories about how to best accomplish contemporary career development by examining topics discussed at professional music industry conferences. For instance, during Canadian Music Week 2012, first day panel discussions included topics such as “The Fanbase Phenomenon: Engaging The Online Music Community,” “Sweet Tweets: Social Music Changes The Indie Game,” “Going Viral Via Social: Can “Free” Help Sell Music And Market An Artist?,” and “Music And The Social Web.” Participants in the music industry are clearly interested in how to use online activities to create promotional attention for musicians, how to establish and grow a fanbase, how to utilize social networking websites to interact with fans, and most importantly, how to monetize the popular music career in an era of dwindling sales.

This shift in understanding the contemporary development of the popular music career is evident in other areas as well. While Billboard airplay and music sales charts remain

major indicators of a successful popular music career, interest in measuring the online popularity of musicians has increased over the last few years. Recognizing the emerging fascination with gathering and analyzing “music intelligence,” companies like The Echo Nest, We Are Hunted, and Next Big Sound typically monitor quantitative metrics such as the weekly fan activity on websites like Facebook or Twitter, and the number of song or video plays on streaming services such as YouTube and SoundCloud. Major record corporations may then purchase this data in order to identify unsigned musicians with an emerging fanbase, or to assess the popularity of the musicians currently under contract. When Billboard created the “Social 50” and “Uncharted” charts in December 2010 and January 2011, respectively, it signaled the growing importance of these metrics for musicians and other music industry participants (Hyatt and Hall, 2011).

A common assumption within these discourses is that if a musician engages in an activity that manages to generate a significant online “buzz,” this increase in reputational value has the potential to act as a catalyst for future career-building opportunities, including sales. As they search for this elusive breakthrough Plagenhoef (2012) observes how “musicians [are] threatening to become content-producers, churning out a steady stream of conversation topics and half-formed ideas without quality control.” Plagenhoef’s use of the term “content producer⁵” is a suitable way to describe the rapper Lil B who has released hundreds of free songs and low-budget videos online during the last few years, and who also operates highly active Twitter and Facebook accounts (Caramanica, 2010). Here it is important to call attention to the fact that giving away free music is a long-standing practice of the music industry via radio and music video play, and that musicians traditionally take part in some promotional activities. What makes Lil B and others like him representative of a new model of career development is the large amount of free songs that are created relative to what is available for sale, and the frequent creation of promotional texts on a daily (if not hourly) basis. Additionally, contemporary hip-hop musicians are mixing time-honoured

⁵ In order to avoid potential confusion around the use of this term, it should be noted that previously it was the primary duty of musicians to create musical content. Musicians were also expected to be available for interviews, photo shoots and other types of promotional activities, but other individuals (journalists, publicists, photographers, etc.) were ultimately responsible for preparing the content of these promotional items for publication. As a rather recent development, emerging musicians are now responsible for creating music and for promoting their career activities via self-produced advertising content. Once a musician reaches a certain level of success they will begin offloading the promotional and other duties to other individuals, as we can now see in the case of Lil B (Westhoff, 2011).

artistic content (songs, music videos) and promotional texts with new media distribution methods (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook).

If self-generating an online buzz is understood as the new entry point for careers in popular music-making, this way of thinking tends to overlook how traditional career-building strategies (Bennett, 1980) and music industry intermediaries (Becker, 1982) nonetheless remain essential for developing and maintaining a music career that may eventually allow a musician abandon traditional forms of employment. For instance, many rappers who recently experienced an online reputational⁶ rise must credit taste-making music websites and magazines (e.g. Pitchfork Media, Fader) for directing initial attention to casual music fans, and then providing regular editorial content that emphasizes the subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) of these hip-hop musicians as noteworthy newcomers to the music industry. These rappers will very likely then use this increase in reputational value to establish professional relationships with record labels, managers, publicists, entertainment lawyers, and tour booking agents who can assist with locating, developing, and monetizing offline opportunities for the musician (Murdock, 2003).

Privileging the importance of early Internet buzz, however, can mystify understandings of the length of time necessary to develop a popular music career. In fact, as the discourse of online music career development intensifies it becomes more and more like a new media version of the myth of “overnight success.” It is also important to note that achieving an online and an offline buzz does not guarantee success because, in the current environment, listeners are more eager to download free songs or stream online videos than they are willing to purchase recorded music or other merchandise. As a number of the upcoming case studies will demonstrate, nurturing and monetizing a successful hip-hop career often requires one or more years of work after the initial rise in online reputation. Many of these career development and monetization strategies will include activities such as

⁶ As electronic commerce continues to grow as an economic phenomenon, reputation becomes an increasingly crucial concept. Auction websites like eBay, which allow buyers and sellers to rate one another following the conclusion of a transaction, offer some of the earliest examples of online reputation management as marketing strategy. For example, some researchers have determined that sellers with positive reputations are able to sell goods for a higher price than those sellers with average or low reputations (Cabral and Hortacsu, 2010; Mickey, 2010). The online reputation of traditional businesses is also an emerging concern because that reputation is often determined by the circulation of the opinions that clients and consumers convey via the Internet (Rosso, 2011).

performing live, touring on an increasingly wider scale, or signing a deal with a record label (Bennett, 1980), which are long-standing practices in the music industry.

The hip-hop mixtape, social networking and video blogging as career promotional tools

As we will see in a number of upcoming examples, the mixtape is a cultural form that serves an important promotional function in hip-hop⁷ because, in addition to activities like performing live, the mixtape allows a rapper or DJ/producer to demonstrate musical skill. Beginning near the mid-to-late 1970s, DJs like Ron G and Kool Herc would record their live performances to cassette and distribute these tapes around the neighbourhood with the hope that it would help lead to future bookings. This is comparable to the way that rock groups give demo tapes to music venue owners and booking agents as they seek new performance opportunities. The production quality and public awareness of hip-hop mixtapes improved in the 1990s when DJs like Funkmaster Flex and DJ Clue began releasing them as major label retail albums with new songs by an assortment of popular and emerging rappers, which is a trend that DJ Khaled and others still continue. Following the arrests DJ Drama and DJ Don Canon in January 2007 for alleged copyright violations, leading mixtape DJs and hip-hop musicians are increasingly distributing mixtapes as free online downloads. By releasing the music for free they are able to avoid the legal issues associated with using copyrighted samples, and making use of the Internet as a distribution method allows hip-hop musicians to promote their careers to a potentially vast audience (Horowitz, 2011).

Utilizing social networking (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Formspring, Tumblr) and video blogging (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo) websites to communicate with fans is another modern trend shared by popular musicians of all genres (Cohen, 2009). Twitter has become the most prominent social networking tool because the 140-character limit of each message allows a musician to quickly send a reply from a mobile phone or laptop whenever time permits. While social networking provides more immediacy, video blogging provides greater intimacy because the combination of sound and imagery offer more creative possibilities, thus allowing the musician to better express their personality to viewers. Some musicians use

⁷ Hip-hop mixtapes are unlike homemade cassette tapes containing various songs that were curated from one individual's music collection and given to another as a declaration of love or as exposure to new musical experiences (Moore, 2005).

online videos to respond directly to fan queries, to share daily updates from their personal lives, to provide behind the scenes footage of recording or touring activities, or to create music videos for songs that might not have otherwise received one prior to the ubiquity of low cost filmmaking.

Much like online mixtapes, social networking and video blogging offer a contemporary and digitally-mediated replacement for more traditional music industry activities. When a fan receives a Twitter reply from a musician, it can resemble a brief moment in which to ask a question or make a comment at a meet & greet or autograph session. For very popular musicians with overly excitable fans or those musicians who are not currently touring, the distancing effect provided by electronic communication allows for fan interaction during moments when it may not be otherwise feasible. When a musician shares updates via video blogging perhaps it most resembles, but does not replace, the moments when fans read interviews, feature-length journalism, gossip or musician biographies, as all of these forms of documentation provide detailed insight into the working and leisurely lives of popular musicians.

In the hip-hop genre, where it is common for rappers to create alternate identities (Hess, 2005), these tools offer a relatively affordable way of developing and disseminating an idealized version of their hip-hop persona to an extensive audience. Previously a hip-hop musician would begin developing a persona on a local level, and might at first be limited to using lyrics, a stylized appearance, or live performances for this purpose. These methods are still very effective, but in this present moment, an aspiring rapper with Internet access can sign up for a free Twitter or Facebook account and begin sharing updates (either real or fictional) to help cultivate a particular image as they accumulate new fans and followers. This also has the potential to occur well in advance of engaging in more traditional early career activities like recording music. In a sense, social networking and other technologies are reordering some, but not all, of the potential paths to developing a hip-hop music career.

Odd Future as a case study of online career development

Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All (often abbreviated as Odd Future or OFWGKTA) offers one of the best examples of how the early development of the hip-hop

career has shifted online. Formed in Los Angeles in 2007, Odd Future is a collective that consists of ten or more young men and one woman who primarily began releasing free albums via the Tumblr microblogging service, either in a group format, in other offshoot pairings, or as individual solo artists. While Odd Future lack a definitive leader, their figurehead is the rapper/producer/visual artist Tyler “Tyler The Creator” Okonma, and other recognizable members include Frank Ocean, Earl Sweatshirt, Hodgy Beats and Syd Tha Kid. In addition to providing listeners with free music, most group members are very active on Twitter and Formspring, and their YouTube account features a number of low budget music videos and behind-the-scenes lifestyle footage.

Unlike more traditional narratives associated with career development, the group began receiving an increasing amount of media attention on the Internet well in advance of offline activities like performing live, signing a recording contract, seeking professional management, or releasing any kind of saleable music or merchandise. The Arctic Monkeys offer a comparable example of a rock career that was quickly advanced after the group became quite popular on the Internet. Unlike Odd Future, The Arctic Monkeys were already performing live, had a demo recording that was available at their concerts, and were otherwise following a traditional, offline music career development strategy (Sexton 2009, 98).

If we identify a Pitchfork Media article from October 18, 2010 (Fennessey, 2010) as one of the first introductions of Odd Future to a larger readership, it becomes possible to chart how quickly an emerging hip-hop musician or group can convert online activities and popularity into tangible commodities in the recorded music and live performance marketplaces. On February 14, 2011 Tyler The Creator used his Twitter account to announce that he had signed a solo recording contract with XL Recordings, and he provided a link to a new music video for the first single from this upcoming album. His debut album Goblin (2011) would see a release in May, and this moment marks the first time that anyone affiliated with Odd Future had recorded music available for sale. The seven months (October 2010 – May 2011) separating Tyler’s initial ascension to wider awareness as a member of Odd Future and the day his solo album became available for purchase is a relatively brief timeframe. However, album liner notes indicate that some of the songs on Goblin date back to 2008 and the re-packaging of unreleased music is advantageous because XL Recordings

did not have to help fund the costs of recording new music, and it allows them to capitalize on Tyler's blossoming popularity by quickly releasing an album to the marketplace.

Taking advantage of scandal as a means of generating free publicity is a popular offline career development strategy that has been utilized by numerous musicians and other celebrities. Tyler The Creator often uses his Twitter account to publicly criticize pop musicians like B.o.B and Chris Brown in order to create a so-called "hip-hop beef," which attracts attention from individuals who might not otherwise be concerned with the careers of Tyler or Odd Future. Tyler also creates scandal using more traditional offline methods like controversial song lyrics and music video imagery, and the on- and off-stage antics of Odd Future attract mainstream, non-music news coverage because they push the boundaries of legality, sexism and respectability. This behaviour is reminiscent of the tactics used by current superstar rappers like Eminem and 50 Cent during the earlier moments of their respective careers, and branding Odd Future as rebellious appeals to a teenage audience that is more likely to buy merchandise and concert tickets.

Establishing and nurturing personal or working relationships with existing hip-hop stars is another way in which the career development of Odd Future has moved online. Tyler The Creator again utilized his Twitter account to quickly establish friendships with superstars like Mos Def, Diddy, N.E.R.D. and Kanye West, and it also led to guest appearances on songs by Pusha T and The Game. In the contemporary culture of self-branding (Hearn, 2008), these guest appearances allow Tyler The Creator and other rappers to promote their persona at the same time as they are collaborating on a piece of music, and spending a few hours recording a guest verse for another rapper is also a quick way to earn revenue. The emerging careers and successes of Nicki Minaj, Big Sean, Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole provide further evidence of the importance of co-signings and mentorship by Lil Wayne, Kanye West, Dr. Dre and Jay-Z, respectively. This offers a good example of how social capital can increase cultural capital and then, eventually, be converted into economic capital. While interpersonal networking and the multi-guest star rap song have been core components of developing a hip-hop career, coordinating these activities via social networking websites occurs at a faster pace and makes them much more visible to the public.

Converting online popularity into a marketable commodity

For those musicians who seek to earn a living from hip-hop music, virtual success must be converted into material exchanges, however, it is important to briefly recognize alternate definitions of the hip-hop career that may be uninterested in this process. Odd Future did seek to monetize their online reputation, and so they began integrating traditional endeavours like touring and merchandise sales into their career development strategy. Following a scattering of concert dates in small clubs, the most high profile Odd Future performance was at the “Pitchfork Music Festival” on July 17, 2011. Festival performances are typically a source of revenue for bands (Grose, 2011), but considering that Pitchfork Media is a key site of cultural accreditation in the world of independent music, Odd Future just as likely agreed to perform in order to increase their cultural capital. It is also a reciprocal relationship because scheduling a performance by Odd Future (in addition to other African-American musicians) allows the Pitchfork Media organization to downplay its reputation as a website that focuses on a primarily Caucasian genre like indie rock, and simultaneously helps to enhance their status as a gatekeeping publication that discovers unique and new musical talent. Adding a total of 44 tour dates in mid-sized North American, European and Australian venues throughout Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 allows Odd Future to expand their reputation internationally, and most importantly, provides an opportunity to sell merchandise.

Echoing a tactic used by Jay-Z and Kanye West to promote Watch The Throne, Odd Future created so-called “pop-up stores” near concert venues a few hours prior to their performances. A pop-up store is an emerging trend in the retail industry where a short-term sales space is opened in a non-traditional location with the intended goal of encouraging impulse purchases. In addition to the opportunity to purchase Odd Future merchandise, fans also get to meet and interact with group members on a more intimate level than a concert or virtual environment might allow. In partnership with the Dickhouse production company responsible for the Jackass series of television and films, Odd Future created the Loiter Squad sketch comedy show for the Adult Swim cable television network. While terms of the two-year television deal are not available, the show provides an additional source of non-musical revenue, and it increases the number of media platforms for promoting their music and merchandise.

Tyler The Creator's Bastard has album sales exceeding 180,000 copies after one year of availability, which is in part thanks to relatively consistent sales throughout the height of the group's initial rise in popularity. In comparison, The OF Tape Vol. 2 (2012) was the first Odd Future album as a collective to reach the retail market on March 20, and while it achieved sales of 70,000 copies in its first two months of release, the velocity of sales steadily declined in the following months. The sales of The OF Tape Vol. 2 are undoubtedly lower than those of Bastard, but as of July 2012 it remains one of the best selling hip-hop albums of the year, so it should not be considered a sales failure by any means. In fact, the sales of The OF Tape Vol. 2 are particularly impressive because they are not the result of having a major hit single that crosses over to a mainstream audience, large amounts of radio play, a popular music video, or any other of the core focuses of the traditional music industry. This is not to suggest that these traditional career-building practices are unimportant – Nicki Minaj's Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded is currently the top selling hip-hop album of 2012 thanks to hit singles and music videos – but rather to demonstrate that it is possible to sell albums without them.

Odd Future observations

In the case of Odd Future we see how many online career-building activities replicate or offer minor variations on traditional, offline industrial/promotional practices. Utilizing the Internet allows hip-hop musicians the possibility of bypassing more traditional activities, like learning how to perform live or engaging in regional touring in order to develop a core group of fans (Bennett, 1980), and thereby potentially speeding up the development of the career. However, there are limitations to how far a career may progress via the Internet alone. Most musicians will ultimately transition into traditional endeavours (Sexton 2009, 98) such as using touring as an opportunity to sell merchandise, entering business relationships with managers, publicists and other music industry intermediaries, and developing social relationships with musical peers (Murdock, 2003). We also see how the contemporary hip-hop career takes advantage of multiple revenue streams and monetization opportunities that extend beyond the sale of recorded music.

The art world perspective (Becker, 1982) remains an important concept here, even as we see how online publications are increasingly functioning in an intermediary role. Following their earliest feature story on Odd Future, Pitchfork Media began publishing a very high number of news stories and editorial content, which contributed to building the reputational status of Odd Future as future stars of hip-hop. Additionally, Tyler The Creator uses Twitter to establish relationships and new working opportunities with other hip-hop musicians, and co-signings from these popular rappers further increases his reputational value. Relationships of this kind are symbiotic because they also allow online publications and other rappers to appear at the forefront of recognizing emerging talent. These digital relationships are unlike those of Jay-Z who built the beginnings his career via face-to-face interactions with Clark Kent, Jaz-O, Damon Dash and others, in addition to directly approaching influential radio DJs and record label personnel in the hope of exciting their interest in his music.

While utilizing the Internet for career-building matters as never before, we see how Odd Future also relies on traditional music industry infrastructure to support and build their career. As one of the largest independent record labels, Tyler The Creator selected XL Recordings to support the production, distribution and promotion of his Bastard album, and the group created the Odd Future Records label via a partnership with Sony's RED Distribution. Rather than film and distribute their own sketch comedy programming on the Internet via free services like YouTube, we also see how Odd Future teamed with a reputable production company like Dickhouse and the irreverent Adult Swim cable network. Working with XL Recordings and RED Distribution supports Toynbee's (2003) belief that musicians must rely on the assistance of record labels if they ever hope to reach a mass audience, just as partnerships with Dickhouse and Adult Swim assists with obtaining wider viewership. As a possible sign of Odd Future's growing power and perhaps mirroring the shrewd negotiating of Jay-Z's early contracts, it appears that the group was able to leverage their emerging popularity to help them avoid signing a more traditional recording arrangement with a major record label.

Another way in which Odd Future demonstrate the crossover and similarities between online and offline activities relates to self-branding as a career-extending strategy. Much of the early interest in the group stemmed from the outrageous behaviour depicted on their

Twitter, YouTube and Tumblr accounts. If they could establish this nonconformist attitude as authentic it had the potential to lead to increased sales of music and merchandise by a largely teenage audience that is often drawn to rebellious forms of popular culture. Group members effectively demonstrated their unruly online personas during offline activities like performing energetic and carefree concerts, by inciting rambunctious behaviour with fans outside of pop-up stores, and by disrespecting police and other authority figures. In a very creative move, Odd Future filmed tour antics in one city, then quickly edited and published the footage on YouTube in order to heighten the excitement for the tour date in the next city. With the introduction of the Loiter Squad comedy program it appears that Odd Future are expanding their brand into other areas of the entertainment industry.

By examining the online activities of Odd Future we see how self-branding is a form of labour. Hearn (2008) examines how the construction of a branded persona was once a corporate marketing strategy, and it has now moved into realms such as reality television, websites that link photographs of nightclub patrons with online advertisements, and social networking websites like Facebook. She concludes that self-branding activities blur and erase the boundaries between capitalist-industrial practices and notions of the private self. Hearn's self-branding is relevant to a discussion of Tyler The Creator and his Odd Future group members because they reverse this process by using social networking and other Internet activities to replicate and brand the private self with an image of youthful rebellion as a means of developing a presence in the music industry. As in the case of rappers like Eminem and popular musicians of other genres before and after him, this image of defiance has the potential to yield great financial, reputational and cultural value. Yet the dissemination of Eminem's image took place via forms such as song lyrics, music videos, and music journalism where there exists an extra degree of mediation placed between the musician and the audience. In the case of Odd Future we see how aspiring musicians now have the opportunity to use contemporary technologies to publicize an image – be it an authentic or manufactured representation of self – that they feel best typifies or coexists with their musical output.

To some degree the ease and relative affordability of recording and releasing music online also makes the practicing and refinement of musical skills (Watson, 2008) more visible to the public. We might say that this particularly occurs when aspiring musicians rush

to release sub-par music that might not otherwise be suitable for a retail album. Essentially many contemporary rappers are outwardly documenting their musical development while simultaneously courting the attention of fans and record labels (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). This is again unlike Jay-Z who spent much of his early career practicing in private before spending his own money on expensive recording studio sessions and pressing vinyl singles to send to radio stations. To some degree this demonstrates, or at least gives the appearance of, how activities that Goffman (1959) would describe as “back stage” are now being pushed to the front.

Kreayshawn and Shabazz Palaces as two contrasting case studies

In order to avoid the impression that all emerging hip-hop musicians are following Odd Future’s rapid pace of career development, it is instructive to quickly highlight two alternative examples. When her video for “Gucci Gucci” went viral in May 2011 and accumulated 35 million plays on YouTube, it was only a matter of weeks before Kreayshawn signed a recording contract with Columbia Records (Johnson, 2011). A few months of frequent online media coverage (Abebe, 2011), a MTV Video Music Award nomination in the “Best New Artist” category, and a small number of poorly reviewed live performance showcases (Rosenthal, 2011) followed, but then Kreayshawn dropped out of public awareness. Considering that she has yet to release her debut album more than one year after the rise in reputational value created by “Gucci Gucci,” Kreayshawn reminds us of Vanilla Ice’s failure to release a sophomore album near the height of his popularity. Furthermore, many music industry (Powers, 2011) and hip-hop gatekeepers (Crawford, 2011) compare Kreayshawn to Vanilla Ice’s status as a Caucasian one-hit wonder, and in addition to a secondary bias based on her gender, this could negatively affect Kreayshawn’s career once she does have music for sale.

Some emerging hip-hop musicians are choosing not to use the Internet to generate early career interest. The Seattle group Shabazz Palaces anonymously released two EPs to local record stores and journalists in an attempt to cultivate a mystique that would match the sonic density and lyrical complexity of their music. The duo disavows social media and other forms of online promotion, and while this can also be read as a marketing ploy, it was indeed

effective for initiating early journalistic attention (Zwickel, 2011). Shabazz Palaces signed to Sub Pop Records and released their debut full-length album Black Up (2011) to much critical acclaim – ranking at #10 on the 2011 New York Pazz and Jop Critics Poll (Johnston, 2012) – but it has only sold a few thousand copies. In addition to shunning contemporary forms of promotion, the group rarely performs live and is only beginning to launch a small club tour nearly a year after the release of Black Up.

Shabazz Palaces offer a contrast to some of the previous case studies while suggesting that, similar to groups like De La Soul or The Roots, some hip-hop musicians have faith in a model of long-term careers where innovative musicianship and following artistic inspiration is of greater importance. This model shares more in common with rock music, as Will Straw (1999) suggests that rock audiences privilege artistic career development across multiple full-length albums. Shabazz Palaces demonstrate their autonomy by renouncing the new forms of online hip-hop career development and the economic rewards associated with a successful hip-hop career. However, the music industry is heteronomous by nature because it is ruled by economic forces, and as participants within the industry, Shabazz Palaces must still concern themselves with selling albums if they wish to remain signed to a semi-independent label like Sub Pop. Fortunately, when Shabazz Palaces emphasize their creative autonomy, gatekeepers bestow them with cultural capital, which Bourdieu claims has the potential to be converted into economic capital (1984, 125).

The preceding case studies help us understand how the development of a hip-hop career requires much more than the production of online content, and how one breakthrough moment does not necessarily lead to long-term success or even a career. We see how touring acts as an opportunity to convert the rap persona into a tangible presence, how solidifying social connections with powerful hip-hop musicians may create greater career opportunities, and how giving away free music can generate publicity for the musician with the hope that it will turn fans into customers willing to purchase merchandise. In other words, capitalizing upon the initial success of achieving public awareness involves monetization (if not of the music itself, then of related commodities) and then the development of more traditional elements of a long-term career. This often require drawing upon strategies and techniques historically practiced in the music industry, such as signing to a major label, touring on an increasingly wider scale, or hiring music industry professionals to support music career

development. Odd Future functions as one of the most noteworthy examples of this, and the rising careers of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller will demonstrate how to combine online and offline activities into remarkably successful, long-term career-building strategies.

The early career development of Wiz Khalifa

Cameron “Wiz Khalifa” Thomaz met Benjy Grinberg, the CEO of the newly-formed Rostrum Records label in the Fall of 2004 after a friend of Grinberg directed his attention toward the rapper (Bouwman, 2011; Meadows-Ingram, 2011). Grinberg claims that his interest in working with Khalifa was piqued because “you could just tell that he was a diamond in the rough, and that with some polishing, guidance and backing he could become something special. We’ve spent the last seven years developing...” (Bouwman, 2011). Illustrating the findings of Zwaan and ter Bogt (2009), record label owners and A&R scouts are likely to use their professional network to locate new talent, and once a musician is identified, it is the estimation of their potential to be molded into a marketable product that often determines the likelihood of signing a recording contract. Grinberg’s comments about recognizing Khalifa’s talents also echo the discussion in the previous chapter where Jaz-O discusses his role in noticing and helping to develop Jay-Z’s early career skills (Greenburg 2011, 14).

Wiz Khalifa released his first mixtape Prince of the City: Welcome to Pistolvania (2005) and followed it with his debut retail album on Rostrum Records, Show And Prove (2006). Despite relatively minimal sales of 10,000 copies, the 3 million collective plays of Khalifa’s songs on MySpace were instrumental in leading to his signing with Warner Bros. Records in 2007 (Richards, 2008). This demonstrates how recorded music sales (Calt, 2005) are losing some of their prominence in measuring the success of a music career, and how quantitative figures that measure online activity can assist record labels in spotting talent. Over the next two years Wiz Khalifa distributed a few more online mixtapes, and Grinberg negotiated the amicable termination of the contract with Warner Bros. in July 2009 after numerous delays prevented the release of Khalifa’s debut retail album for the label (Mervis, 2009). Comparable to the relationship between Jay-Z and Damon Dash, here we see how Grinberg provides Khalifa with music industry experience and negotiation skills that will

help Khalifa find the best opportunities to advance his hip-hop career. Demonstrating Khalifa's strong work ethic, his ability to quickly record new music and his commitment to a music career, Rostrum Records released his second retail album, Deal Or No Deal (2009), just four months after leaving Warner Bros. and reached approximate sales of 55,000 copies.

It is difficult to determine why Warner Bros. did not believe that Wiz Khalifa's music was worthy of release on its label. However, this experience confirms the claims made by Jones (2003) and Negus (1999) that major record labels regularly appraise and prioritize their roster of musicians based on the likelihood of success, and how "the stability of a large record company rests, in the long run, on its choice of whom to record and market" (Stratton 1983, 152). While executives and staff at Warner Bros. may have initially viewed Khalifa as an emerging and marketable hip-hop artist in 2007, their portfolio management techniques, financial forecasts, release strategies, and the uncertainty of demand (Toynbee, 2003) appears to have resulted in a diminution of his status and long-term future at the label. Khalifa's experience appears similar to Hot Karl's signing with Interscope Records and negotiating the termination of his contract after the label refused to release the music he recorded.

In addition to the strategy of supplementing retail albums with the release of free online mixtapes, Wiz Khalifa began promoting his career by embarking on multi-city tours of the United States. The 20-date "Deal Or No Deal" club tour in the first quarter of 2010 was followed by the sold out, 50-city "Waken Baken" national tour of mid-sized venues in the fourth quarter of the same year (Eustice, 2010). While rock bands were the analytical focus for Bennett (1980), his observation of the importance of making the transition from performing as a local group, to earning steady money by playing regular gigs on the road can be equally true for hip-hop musicians. The positive fan response during these concert tours, and more importantly, the increasing revenue generated by their ticket and merchandise sales, were key indicators (Giuffre, 1999; Roberts, 2005) that Khalifa's career was gaining substantial momentum. If the failed recording contract with Warner Bros. was responsible for shaking Khalifa's confidence in any way, it seems reasonable to assume that performing a sold out national tour had a positive influence on his subjective interpretation (Stebbins, 1970) of career success.

The increasing media attention and download statistics associated with the release of the Kush And Orange Juice (2010) mixtape was another marker of Wiz Khalifa's increasing

popularity, and his grassroots fanbase was initially credited with helping make it a popular topic on Twitter and Google (Vozick-Levinson, 2010). However, anonymous sources indicated that Grinberg and Khalifa had entered into a partnership with Atlantic Records, and Khalifa offered vague answers whenever asked about his major label affiliation. Ramirez (2010) suggests that rappers are often unapologetic about the decision to sign with a major record label, and that many hip-hop fans also interpret it as an inevitable step in the development of the hip-hop career. However, for those hip-hop musicians who nurture a grassroots fanbase prior to signing a recording contract, it is often the preferred strategy of the record label to conceal their involvement because they believe that doing so will imbue the hip-hop musician with the greater authenticity of a self-made success. Masking the possible marketing and promotional assistance of Atlantic Records allows Khalifa's seemingly autonomous rise in popularity to function in a number of ways: it becomes an inspirational story for subsequent media coverage (Breihan, 2010), it allows fans to develop an emotional bond with Khalifa if they perceive their direct participation as responsible for his success, and it allows Khalifa to maintain authenticity by avoiding the perception of being nothing more than a manufactured hip-hop star.

While it is impossible to know if Atlantic Records provided any kind of behind-the-scenes marketing assistance for Kush And Orange Juice, this situation may offer evidence that there is a devolution of services that major record labels offer to their artists (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005; Hull et al 2011, 229-90). The time and energy that Wiz Khalifa, Tyler The Creator and others spend engaging in social networking offers insight into this moment of transition for the music industry where musicians are now increasingly responsible for self-promoting their career activities. Yet, for hip-hop artists, I believe it is possible to link this type of digital hustling back to the romanticized authenticity inherent in the practice of rappers like Jay-Z attempting to sell music directly from their automobiles. The key difference is that contemporary hip-hop musicians must engage in this self-promotional hustle in order to give away their music for free because the culture of the 21st century devalues the worth of aspiring and mid-level musicians, while superstars remain mostly unaffected. It also seems to represent a widening of the elapsed time between building up the cultural capital of a hip-hop musician and the moment when the musician can convert their reputational value into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The label partnership was confirmed when “Black And Yellow,” the first single from his Rolling Papers (2011) album, was released via Rostrum/Atlantic Records. In addition to marking Wiz Khalifa’s return to working with a major label, the single is notable for featuring musical production by Grammy-winners Mikkel Storleer Eriksen and Tor Erik Hermansen, otherwise known as Stargate. Following a number of successful singles for Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Ne-Yo, a New York Times profile compared the Norwegian duo to the Brill Building songwriters of the past, and noted that they work on the priority releases that record labels expect to be well-liked and lucrative. The article also claims that the appeal of working with Stargate is their speed of work and generic production style, which seemingly allows for the interchangeability of the vocal performer (Sisario, 2011). Stargate would ultimately earn production credits for four of the sixteen songs on Rolling Papers (including the second single “Roll Up”) and other notable pop music producers contributed a number of other songs to the album. The I.D. Labs production team who previously worked very closely with Khalifa would only have six songs make the album, with none receiving significant promotion as a radio single.

Shifting away from the producers responsible for Wiz Khalifa’s early albums likely indicates that there were expectations of crossing over to pop music audiences, and that Khalifa was willing to work with producers who would change his sound toward achieving that end. This recalls Jay-Z’s decision to work with the in-house producers for Bad Boy Records on his first major label album because of their past successes at creating hit songs (Greenburg 2011, 39-40). Grinberg discusses how he and members of I.D. Labs helped Khalifa transform his writing style from a focus on intricate and technically precise raps, to an emphasis on song structure and arrangement, particularly the inclusion of strong hooks during the chorus (Bouwman, 2011). Jay-Z again provides a comparison because he recognizes that “a big chorus and a great beat and easy-to-follow lyrics can get you a hit” (Jay-Z 2010, 129). To extrapolate this idea further, a captivating chorus also plays an important role in attracting new fans, and for allowing concert audiences to feel an imaginary bond with the performer as they sing along with the songs (Nosnitsky, 2009).

The crossover was a success as Rolling Papers made its debut at #2 on the Billboard “Top 200” chart with 197,000 copies sold during the first week of release, and three months later the album earned a gold certification for selling more than 500,000 copies. Three of the

four official singles earned platinum certification for exceeding digital sales of one million copies, with “Black And Yellow” leading the way with 3x platinum status on the strength of heavy radio play. Unlike Odd Future and many of the hip-hop musicians that have risen to some degree of prominence over the last few years, “Black And Yellow” is a crossover hit single that serves as Wiz Khalifa’s introduction to a wider audience of pop music fans, much in the same way that “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)” is recognized as one of Jay-Z’s biggest crossover hits. The most significant challenge in Khalifa’s future will be establishing his longevity as a popular recording artist and live performer. If his next album includes a few more hit songs then the popularity of “Black And Yellow” and the other three singles from Rolling Papers should help to establish the ongoing value of his back catalogue (Keightley, 2004).

The comparable career development of Mac Miller

Just as Wiz Khalifa was in the process of crossing over to a wider audience, Grinberg and the staff at Rostrum Records were nurturing the career of Malcolm “Mac Miller” McCormick using similar development strategies. A working relationship with I.D. Labs and reasonably good download statistics associated with The High Life (2009) mixtape helped Miller attract Grinberg’s attention and eventually sign with Rostrum in early 2010 (Todd, 2010). Over the next two years, Miller used the K.I.D.S. (2010), Best Day Ever (2011), and I Love Life, Thank You (2011) mixtapes to help promote the release of the On And On And Beyond EP (2011) and Blue Slide Park (2011) retail albums. Selling out smaller scale concert dates on the “Incredibly Dope” North American tour (Bouwman, 2011) led to an extension throughout the European market, and the “Blue Slide Park” tour targeted mid-level venues throughout the United States during the final months of 2011. The key difference in the careers of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller to date is that Grinberg is confident that Miller can be successful without major label affiliation (Maloney 2011, 16).

Wiz Khalifa’s and Mac Miller’s use of social networking and video blogging

In addition to utilizing the Internet to distribute their mixtapes, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller have a reputation for responding to fan queries via Twitter and regularly posting video blog entries. As a sign that he recognizes the importance of social networking, Miller often sets specific targets of Facebook “likes” and Twitter “follows” and once enough fans help him achieve these goals, Miller rewards them with the release of free music. For example, the *I Love Life, Thank You* mixtape was framed as a gift to fans upon reaching one million Twitter followers. As fans discuss the careers and share the music of Khalifa and Miller online, their fan commitment becomes free marketing labour for the two rappers. Khalifa and Miller were previously responsible for filming their own video content using cameras built into laptops and cellular phones, but in recent years those duties have shifted to other individuals using high-definition equipment. While these activities remain important for communicating with fans, the ability to offload social networking responsibilities to other individuals (Cohen, 2009) perhaps offers an alternate way in which we can measure the success of emerging hip-hop music careers.

Merchandising and branding the careers of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller

Like other business-minded hip-hop musicians with blossoming careers, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller are very much aware of, acknowledge, and promote their branding potential. Khalifa created the term “Taylor Gang” to refer to his love of Converse Chuck Taylor shoes – he began appearing in official advertisements for the company in 2011 – and Taylor Gang now acts as a call-and-response phrase used during concerts and it appears as a logo on tour merchandise. Most recently Khalifa created the Taylor Gang/Rostrum Records vanity label to help develop the careers of Chevy Woods, Juicy J and other members of his entourage. Miller uses the term “Most Dope” to refer to his line of merchandise, and encourages his fans to emulate the thumbs up gesture that he often makes in music videos and which appears as the Most Dope logo. Some of these ideas relate back to the activities of Jay-Z who used his Roc-A-Fella label to support the careers of Memphis Bleek and others, and who also requests that fans hold their hands in the shape of a diamond formation in order to demonstrate their support of Roc-A-Fella Records.

Khalifa and Miller utilize recreational drug use as key components of their rap personas, but Khalifa is more successful at using it to help promote the sale of his merchandise. Tour dates allow fans to purchase logo-branded rolling papers (\$10), a “420 Kit” (\$42, contains rolling papers, a herb grinder, baggie and a t-shirt), or a limited edition hooded sweatshirt (\$60) with a hidden pocket that is designed to store marijuana. These items complement more traditional merchandise like temporary tattoos (\$5), posters (\$10), t-shirts (\$20), and hooded sweatshirts (\$40). Sales totals for every item are not available, but Khalifa was reportedly selling 150-200 packages of the rolling papers and approximately 700 t-shirts at every concert (Greenburg, 2011). To put these numbers into perspective, Greenburg notes that an average hip-hop musician might gross \$2-3 per attendee per show and Khalifa ranges between \$5-15, which is a level typically achieved by pop vocal acts (Greenburg, 2011). Detailed analysis of Miller’s touring revenue currently does not exist, but Greenburg (2011) projects that the rapper “rakes in tens of thousands per night in merchandise sales, thanks largely to the wealthy suburban high school and college students who are the primary consumers of his music.” A partnership with Mountain Dew for his Spring 2012 tour (Maloney 2011, 17) should also allow Miller to earn slightly more revenue from nightly performance fees and merchandise sales. The \$75,000 he received from the branding deal will cover some costs associated with touring (e.g. venue insurance), which are normally deducted from the musician’s nightly revenue.

In addition to the lucrative tour revenues, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller merchandise is also available in traditional retail environments, including the Hot Topic chain of stores where Wiz Khalifa is their all-time, top-selling hip-hop musician (Greenburg, 2011). The Naughty Gear store in New Jersey was the first location entirely dedicated to selling artist-branded hip-hop t-shirts and miscellany for the group Naughty By Nature. Using the meager clothing budget for an early Wu-Tang Clan music video to screen print the group logo onto t-shirts, Oliver “Power” Grant perfected this idea a few years later. He reinvested the earnings from the sale of the t-shirts into an entire artist-branded clothing line available for purchase via mail order, regional Wu-Wear shops, national urban apparel stores like Dr. Jays, and eventually within the Macy’s chain of department stores (Charnas 2011, 481-7). While Wiz Khalifa and Miller rely heavily on touring to promote merchandise sales, establishing a presence in retail stores has proven to be an important source of longer-term revenue for hip-hop musicians when touring occurs with much less frequency.

This approach is distinct from the high-end clothing of Jay-Z's Rocawear brand that incurs significant costs for seasonal redesigns, premium fabrics, intricate stitching, and national advertising. More traditional musician merchandise needs only an attractive graphic design, a mass manufactured garment on which to screen print the image, and retail shelf space. While this may not necessarily lead to greater profit per unit of clothing sold, there is less risk involved with traditional merchandise because it is less likely to go out of style and leftover stock has the potential for resale at a small discount on a subsequent tour. This also parallels the concept of continued back catalogue single and album sales (Keightley, 2004) for musicians who continue to retain some level of popularity.

“The Team” as music industry intermediaries

A number of music industry professionals support and coordinate the activities of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller, and the rappers classify these individuals as members of the team – Miller's *Blue Slide Park* album even includes a song titled “My Team.” These include core members like Rostrum Records CEO Benjy Grinberg, the label publicist Arthur Pitt, Miller's manager Quentin Cuff, and Peter Schwartz of The Agency Group concert booking company. Tour managers, merchandise managers and salespersons, studio producers, and the content producers for the YouTube channels of Khalifa and Miller also perform important roles. These individuals help constitute the art world (Becker, 1982) and play an active role in helping hip-hop musicians create, market and monetize their musical careers. In another instance where back stage activities appear to move to the front (Goffman, 1959), many of these individuals use Twitter to broadcast the minutiae of their experiences working for and touring with the rappers who employ them.

Watson (2008) suggests that locating subjective analyses allows us to better understand the occupational career. A cursory examination of quotes from recent interviews (Diehl, 2011; Graham, 2011; Greenburg, 2011; Maloney, 2011; Meadows-Ingram, 2011) reveals that Khalifa, Miller, and their team members espouse similar ideologies when attempting to explain contemporary hip-hop career development. Some key ideas include following a plan or formula, working every day, trying new things, favouring the slow yet long-term growth of the career, connecting with fans (primarily via social media), providing

fans with music or live performances of a consistent quality, and behaving like a traditional rock group in terms of supplementing album releases with a large number of tour dates (Wiz Khalifa and Miller each exceeded 130 concerts in 2011). These comments demonstrate how the hip-hop career is a form of labour that includes a number of predictable or standardized activities in which a musician will take part. Furthermore, achieving a successful career is more often the result of engaging in music-making activities on a long-term basis. Comparing the touring habits of Khalifa and Miller to those of rock musicians also demonstrates the flexibility of the term “rock” (Keightley, 2001).

The important roles of these intermediaries and the inventive promotional strategies that Internet distribution makes possible are visible in the marketing campaign leading up to the release of Blue Slide Park. Rostrum Records staff successfully orchestrated an album pre-order campaign addressed to Miller’s large fanbase on Twitter and Facebook by establishing a few tiers of incentives. These included the release of the album’s title track if album pre-orders exceeded 25,000 units, a \$50,000 donation to the Make-A-Wish Foundation at the 50,000 mark, and the early release of the album upon reaching the goal of 100,000 pre-orders. Grinberg claims that organizing the idea required multiple months of negotiation, because the fan-brokered release model was a first for iTunes and the idea resulted in some initial reluctance from Apple. At the same time, Grinberg and the other members of the promotional campaign credit the flexibility and speed of reaction that the digital landscape of the Internet provides (Maloney, 2011; Meadows-Ingram, 2011).

This style of incentive-based planning is quite clever because an early release of the first single from the album results in little-to-no financial cost to Rostrum Records or Mac Miller. The excitement surrounding its release provides the Rostrum Records publicity department with another way of marketing the song to national radio stations, and it encourages fans to promote the pre-sale online. The incentive is not entirely unique because pre-ordering most albums on iTunes includes early download access to the first single without requiring a certain pre-order goal. The deal also works well for Apple because they are not dealing with a physical product, and do not have to worry about miscalculating the demand for music by a rapper like Mac Miller who lacks a proven, long-term sales history. If the digital pre-order campaign is successful, Apple will earn a 30 percent commission from every album or individual song sold (Hansell, 2008; Port, 2011). Rostrum and Miller also

benefit from prominent exposure on the front page of the iTunes Music Store, and the ability to flaunt early sales numbers if and when the album appears near the top of the iTunes sales charts. Much like the obsessive quest in music piracy to acquire new albums before their release date (Dibbell, 2004), this pre-release strategy reminds us of the hyper focus on the “now” in marketing in general and the speeded-up timeframes discussed above.

Trusting the loyalty of their fans, musicians like Radiohead, Nine Inch Nails, Amanda Palmer and Prince have released albums via the digital marketplace without relying on iTunes, and have avoided the corresponding 30 percent commission in the process. Yet, for all the emphasis on social media as promotional tool for Miller’s career and his status as an independent artist (Maloney 2011, 16), it is somewhat surprising that Grinberg did not suggest an alternative distribution method like Bandcamp, which has much lower commission fees. Perhaps the reasoning is that iTunes is the most popular online retailer of music, it can offer prominent advertising placement on its main page, and many of Miller’s fans likely already have an iTunes account to facilitate easy or spontaneous purchases of the album. It could also suggest that Rostrum and Miller were seeking crossover success and wanted to use a digital retailer recognized by the Recording Industry of America.

The security for Blue Slide Park impressively prevented it from appearing online until four days before its proper release date. However, since most record labels and musicians expect albums to “leak” weeks or months in advance (Dibbell, 2004), even if the campaign surpassed 100,000 pre-orders, an early release by the label likely would not affect online piracy or physical CD sales at traditional retail locations. Ultimately the album slightly exceeded 33,000 digital pre-orders (Maloney 2011, 16), and the combined first week total for physical and digital sales was 144,000 copies, which helped make it the first independently-distributed debut album to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard “Top 200” chart since 1995 (Caulfield, 2011). Blue Slide Park became one of the best selling hip-hop albums released in 2011 with just over 300,000 copies sold in the days leading up to Miller’s Spring 2012 tour, which qualifies it as a major success for an independent musician. It is slightly more contentious to claim that Blue Slide Park was a crossover success because the album only contained one or two songs that were moderately well-received by commercial radio and music video stations, and none of the songs made the same kind of cultural impact as Wiz Khalifa’s “Black And Yellow,” which inspired many remakes and parodies.

The future role of the mixtape

Despite a large and continually growing collection of fans that are willing to buy music, concert tickets and merchandise, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller continue to use the release of free mixtapes to promote upcoming endeavours. Khalifa released the Taylor Allderdice (2012) mixtape as a precursor to the release of his next retail album and Summer 2012 tour, while Miller's Macadelic (2012) mixtape promotes his Spring 2012 tour of North American college campuses. As with the demo tape in rock music, Grinberg notes that "you don't make any direct money off of [mixtapes]. But the benefits of building the reputation of the artists are pretty amazing," while Al Branch of the Hip-Hop Since 1978 management company recognizes that mixtapes turn fans into active consumers who are more likely to spontaneously purchase concert tickets or merchandise (Horowitz, 2011). Miller's website makes impulse purchases easy, as links to his online store and the Ticketmaster website are located immediately beside the download link for the Macadelic mixtape.

There exists a divide in opinion regarding the effectiveness of mixtapes after a hip-hop musician has become successful. For instance, Rostrum Records invited a small group of journalists to a Wiz Khalifa-hosted listening party for Taylor Allderdice, which is a promotional tactic more commonly used in anticipation of retail albums by star musicians. It suggests that, in addition to interacting with fans on social networking websites and releasing free online mixtapes, Rostrum is seeking other, more traditional ways of promoting Khalifa's career to music industry gatekeepers. Some hip-hop musicians like Nicki Minaj, who was once proficient at utilizing mixtapes to promote her early career, no longer appears interested in releasing mixtapes now that she has established a reputation as a crossover star in both hip-hop and pop music. Instead, promotional tactics for Minaj's sophomore album Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded (2012) included a reliance on multiple crossover hit singles, music videos and high profile interviews. Considering that the album is currently one of the highest selling releases of the year, it appears that mixtapes outlive their usefulness once a hip-hop musician achieves a certain level of popularity.

Mixtape observations

As expressed at the beginning of this chapter and supported by the preceding case studies, the mixtape serves a promotional function for hip-hop musicians. However, it is also conceptually similar to the demo tape in rock music (Allen, 2009) and the pre-recorded DJ mix in electronic/dance culture (Brewster and Broughton, 2000), in the sense that the goal of creating and distributing musical compositions is to attract the interest of record label personnel and other music industry intermediaries, which will then ideally lead to greater career opportunities. In hip-hop perhaps more than other genres – particularly since its transition to Internet distribution – fans are intended to hear the mixtape just as much as gatekeepers in the music industry. Yet the strategy of giving fans free music as a method of cross-promoting the popular music career is an older idea that simply reappears here in a new form via the Internet. For instance, AM/FM radio play is one of the most long-standing ways of broadcasting songs at little-to-no cost to a listening audience with the hope that they will ultimately purchase music, concert tickets, or other items by the musicians they enjoy. Radio stations also have a history of giving away CDs and other paraphernalia as promotional tools to support the careers of the musicians they play (Bordowitz 2007, 98-128).

One of the ways in which the contemporary hip-hop mixtape is unique is that websites like DatPiff allow for their free distribution, which results in shifting the power of music career development and promotion away from traditional gatekeeping institutions (radio stations, music video channels) and into the hands of musicians and their fans. The career of Mac Miller offers the most notable evidence of this because he strategically used free online mixtapes to help grow his online and offline fanbases, and then timed the release of his Blue Slide Park retail album approximately one month after the I Love Life, Thank You mixtape. Fan discourse on social media websites pertaining to the mixtape and the iTunes album pre-order campaign helped Blue Slide Park earn 144,000 sales in its first week of release. The contemporary hip-hop mixtape has also led to the trend of reproducing mixtape content on retail albums as a monetization strategy. For example, an early mixtape by Drake was so popular with fans that he released a slightly modified version of it as a retail EP, and Big K.R.I.T. recently reissued two of his mixtapes on CD and vinyl formats for the first time. Finally, we also notice how musicians in other genres like R&B (The Weeknd),

electronic/dance (Girl Talk), and rock (Atlas Sound) are adopting the use of the free online mixtape as a career-building strategy.

Online music career development and “The New Economy”

Stahl theorizes that cultural producers play “an important role in the production of refinements in the contemporary understanding of work and the working subject” (2008, 231). In his examination of rockumentary films, Stahl notes that many individuals romanticize music-making because they perceive it as an occupation that offers benefits such as autonomy and self-determination, which are less inherent in traditional forms of labour. As such, musicians and other types of artists are often recognized as innovators who represent “new model workers” (2008, 233, 242). In the so-called “New Economy,” Sweet and Meiksins observe how workloads are intensifying, and scheduling of labour often extends beyond the traditional ‘9-to-5’ hours into evenings and weekends. The authors also claim that contractual and salaried positions that often demand 50 or more hours of labour each week and flexible scheduling arrangements are becoming more common (2008, 157-8). In an increasingly competitive job market, more employers also expect prospective workers to complete some labour without pay in order to demonstrate their talents and expertise (Alsever, 2012).

We can find evidence supporting Stahl’s theory and these wider employment trends in our examination of hip-hop mixtapes and the other new forms of online career development. Musicians like Mac Miller demonstrate that it is possible to have a successful music career as an independent artist, but many others understand signing a record deal as a necessary step in the development of a truly music career. Within the context of these recording contracts, contemporary musicians more closely resemble salaried employees because they do not earn an hourly wage, but rather, work long hours in the hope that they might one day financially benefit from the eventual sale of their musical recordings⁸. Additionally, music-related activities like preparing song demos, recording in a studio environment and performing live have the potential to take place outside of traditional

⁸ Assuming that revenues from music sales exceed the initial costs of recording and promoting the songs.

workplace hours, and this is particularly true of the online self-promotional activities like using Twitter to share updates and to respond to fan queries at various times throughout the day. Yet the case studies examined in each thesis chapter reveal that rappers and most other popular musicians will not have the opportunity to sign with a record label until they have independently demonstrated their potential abilities to sell music, give away a large number of free mixtapes, attract crowds to live performances, nurture a growing number of followers on social media websites, or earn critical praise from journalists and other music industry gatekeepers. Perhaps one final link between the music career and the role of labour in the New Economy is the free work that fans willingly or unconsciously engage in while promoting the career activities of their favourite rappers on social networking websites.

Conclusion

The face-to-face networking and promotion that hip-hop musicians like MC Hammer and Jay-Z once used to nurture their careers has evolved into the online activities used by musicians like Odd Future, Wiz Khalifa, and Mac Miller. Where there was once a romanticized authenticity inherent in the hustle of selling 12-inch vinyl singles from the trunk of one's car and trying to meet influential radio DJs, contemporary rappers are more likely to flaunt the statistics associated with their Twitter followers and online mixtape downloads. Yet most emerging rappers will notice a limit to their online career development and eventually seek more traditional opportunities like signing with a major record label or booking national tour dates. The analysis of contemporary hip-hop career development is instructive because it allows us to see how musicians are increasingly responsible for promoting their career activities via self-produced advertising content, as these duties were once the responsibility of other participants (journalists, photographers) in the music industry. Finally, we notice interesting parallels between contemporary music industry labour and wider employment trends within "The New Economy."

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The case studies examined in the preceding chapters explore a variety of ways in which it is possible to conceptualize the hip-hop career. As the fullest example of a hip-hop career that demonstrates professional success over the long-term, Jay-Z combines high levels of cultural and economic capitals, longevity, commitment to music-making activities, expansion into entrepreneurial endeavours, and high degree of career autonomy. Recognizing his musical skills and contributions to hip-hop music and culture, music industry gatekeepers and other rappers bestow cultural capital upon Jay-Z. He is consistently recognized as one of the top financial earners in popular music, primarily thanks to current and back catalogue sales, tour revenues, product endorsements, and a diverse selection of other endeavours. As evidence of his career stability and longevity, Jay-Z was able to temporarily retire from music-making for a couple of years in order to accept an executive level position at Def Jam Recordings, and while reviews of his first post-retirement album were not exceptional, the sales matched those of his previous releases. Jay-Z has also been responsible for helping develop successful careers for a number of other musicians – most notably Kanye West, Rick Ross, Young Jeezy, and Rihanna. Lastly, Jay-Z's extended career success truly embodies the notion of the hip-hop mogul, as he has worked toward retaining autonomous control over seemingly every aspect of his career.

MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice demonstrate the possibility of achieving short-term, mainstream career success without acquiring cultural capital. They also show us how simply committing to music-making may allow a hip-hop career to endure without long-term success, and how failing to sustain initial music career success may force musicians to return to more traditional employment. As an independent recording artist, J-Zone reveals that it is possible to have a short-term career without crossing over to the mainstream or achieving high levels of economic success. The members of De La Soul do not rank among the wealthiest rappers, but they do have a successful and long-term career in large part thanks to the cultural capital that they established as early hip-hop innovators. Odd Future, Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller are emerging hip-hop career successes with some degree of economic and cultural capitals, but currently it is too early to determine if they will match the success and career longevity of Jay-Z, or instead emulate the short-term careers of MC

Hammer or Vanilla Ice. The career narrative of Shabazz Palaces is also still in progress, but they appear to be following the De La Soul model of privileging cultural over economic capital.

These case studies also illustrate that there are many different ways in which to develop and sustain a hip-hop career. However, we can identify several shared characteristics of early career development. The most common strategy involves a D.I.Y. or entrepreneurial ethos, where a hip-hop musician will typically self-fund the recording and manufacturing of an initial single or album, independently sell or give away copies via any number of creative methods, and attempt to cultivate a fanbase. When a hip-hop musician independently demonstrates economic value and marketability, it can provide them with the leverage necessary to secure a recording, production, or distribution deal with a major or independent record label. This contractual agreement makes available advantages such as improved promotion, distribution and access to a national or international market. If the hip-hop musician continues to flourish, they may potentially expand into other profit-making activities both within and outside the music industry. However, it is important to note that signing a recording contract in order to facilitate access to these opportunities often requires the hip-hop musician to yield a considerable amount of control and ownership to the record label.

Before moving away from the topic, let us briefly expand on the idea of funding a recording career. In the literature review, we observed how aspiring musicians often need to maintain traditional '9-to-5' employment in order to afford the associated costs of pursuing a music career. J-Zone provides a good example of this because he paid for rent and musical equipment by working in a recording studio and as an employee of the for AAA automotive services (Mumford 2011, 53, 65). We also saw how MC Hammer and Jay-Z drew upon pre-major-label financial assistance from friends and other associates, and loans of this nature often must be paid back. Operating in a very similar manner, major record labels provide musicians with a monetary advance against royalties with which to record an album, pay for promotional costs (music videos, photography), and other associated expenditures. Yet album sales must first break even before a musician earns any profit (Bordowitz 2007, 72-80). So we can see that even in the earliest stages of a career, musicians are effectively in business and expected to sell enough music and other associated merchandise so that their

debts can be repaid.

A number of the case studies presented in the final chapter demonstrate how some aspects of career development are shifting online, but in many instances these activities replicate traditional, offline, industrial/promotional procedures. For instance, recall how Tyler The Creator of Odd Future used Twitter to develop social relationships with successful rappers that would hopefully result in high profile song collaborations. Additionally, many contemporary rappers like Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller give away free music in the form of online mixtapes to promote their careers, and to encourage fans to purchase forthcoming retail albums, concert tickets or merchandise. Yet we find offline parallels to the manner in which Jay-Z and Damon Dash networked with rappers and local radio DJs, in order to hopefully establish future working relationships and commercial radio play. Rather than simply give away Jay-Z's earliest promotional singles for free, he and Dash personally tried to sell copies at various locations throughout New York, and hoped that purchasers would become fans and want to buy Jay-Z's forthcoming retail album. In drawing these comparisons, I would like to link the contemporary digital hustling of Odd Future, Wiz Khalifa, and Mac Miller to the romanticized authenticity inherent in the practice of rappers like Jay-Z attempting to sell music directly to fans in offline environments.

These online activities also appear to speed up the development of the music career, but they more likely reinforce the myth of the "overnight success." However, speed of recording and releasing new music, and quickly acting on emerging career opportunities have long been important. Vanilla Ice lost career momentum partially because he waited more than three years to release his sophomore album. Jay-Z demonstrates how releasing a new retail album nearly every year, in addition to making frequent guest appearances on songs by other well-known musicians, can help sustain public awareness of a musician's career. That same kind of speed remains important in timing the distribution of free promotional activities (e.g. mixtapes) in relation to saleable items (e.g. retail albums, concert tickets). Mac Miller offers some of the best contemporary evidence of this, as he strategically releases free mixtapes in order to promote the sales of his retail album and tickets for his national tours. We won't know the outcome of Kreyshawn's decision to delay the release of her debut album until August 2012, but her experience reminds us of the slow recording pace of Vanilla Ice.

Hot Karl is the only case study examined in the thesis who appears to have fully abandoned hip-hop music-making, and as such, he no longer has a music career. The concept of commitment is important here because it demonstrates that economic success is not the only definition of career. MC Hammer, Vanilla Ice, and J-Zone continue to have careers – although these are not careers that most would call successful – because they remain committed to music-making in some regard. De La Soul also remains committed to music-making and it is their cultural capital, not economic capital, which acts as the foundation of a long-term career whose success is not measured most effectively in economic terms. Economic success does, however, perform a role in the subjective analysis of the career because if a musician earns enough revenue to abandon traditional forms of employment, he may interpret it as an indication of a career.

A contemporary perception is that hip-hop musicians have established an important foothold in the mainstream music industry and in other economic sectors (Charnas, 2011), and that this offers evidence of hip-hop's growing hegemony in the wider culture. There is arguably much truth to this statement, as numerous hip-hop musicians are remarkably proficient at developing and branding a star persona, while engaging in activities that often outstrip their musical output. Yet this discourse of entrepreneurship does not accurately characterize actual economic practices and arrangements across the industry. Entering a contractual relationship in which the hip-hop musician supplies creative labour to an employer (a record label or other corporate entity, in this case) still requires the musician to comply with the demands of the employer, navigate intricate relations of power, and commonly give up important authorial and ownership rights – even as the star brand seems increasingly to imply autonomy from such relations of domination. The prevailing hip-hop mogul narrative positions the musician as a powerful and mostly autonomous actor within the corporate environment, but masks the often exploitative nature of these contractual obligations.

Contemporary music industry discourses also suggest that online career promotion tools give musicians greater autonomy over their careers, and offer the possibility of developing successful careers without the assistance of record labels. These tools are certainly proving useful for early career development, but as most of the case studies examined in the previous chapter demonstrate, emerging musicians will ultimately form

partnerships with record labels or other large corporations, which have the resources and infrastructure necessary to reach a mass audience. It also appears that these online activities reflect wider labour trends, such as extending work schedules into evenings and weekends, and labouring without pay in order to even have the opportunity to earn a paying gig. So while it may appear that emerging musicians are earning greater control over their careers, they are taking on the added promotional responsibilities that were formerly the responsibility of other individuals like journalists and photographers, and at times, working longer hours for less pay than in the past.

The novelty acts and one-hit wonders that defined the earliest years of hip-hop musical culture contributed to its wider dismissal as a trivial and ephemeral fad. Even as groups like Run-D.M.C. and The Beastie Boys focused on recording full-length albums instead of singles, experimented with a rock-inspired aesthetic, received positive reviews in popular music publications, and began selling a large number of albums in the mid-1980s, hip-hop lacked esteem within the mainstream music industry. In 1989, De La Soul created a hip-hop version of, what is otherwise known in rock culture as the concept album. Their music sold moderately well, but the group is most notable for receiving very positive critical evaluations by hip-hop publications and some rock journalists, which helped cultivate their cultural capital. MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice were the first two rappers to fully cross over to the pop music marketplace in 1990-91, earned large amounts of economic wealth despite relatively little respect due to widespread perceptions of them as novelties, and failed to sustain the peaks of their careers for more than a few years.

In the early-to-mid 1990s, Jay-Z proved that it was possible to have a hip-hop career that was respected by both hip-hop and pop audiences, and this career combined high levels of economic and cultural capital. As he experienced extended music career success, Jay-Z simultaneously began expanding into career-extending business opportunities that were initially related to his musical pursuits. It is difficult to locate an exact moment, but Jay-Z's music and business endeavours began to merge, and he was increasingly recognized as a hip-hop mogul, rather than simply a rapper or businessperson. Presently, Jay-Z is one of the wealthiest, most well-liked and most respected musicians in the popular music industry, and he is acknowledged using similar criteria for his roles in corporate realm and for his position as an unofficial ambassador for hip-hop culture.

If hip-hop was a career free zone at one time, the cumulative accomplishments of Run-D.M.C., The Beastie Boys, De La Soul, Jay-Z, and a long list of other participants, have helped redefine that notion. Hip-hop has been accredited (Gendron, 2002), as both a popular musical genre and as a culture, thanks to a combination of its increasing cultural capital and as a potential source of great economic capital. As the preceding case studies have shown, the career is one of the sites where these two forms of capital have been articulated successfully.

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