THE FASHION CHOICES OF BLACK WOMEN OF THE HIP HOP GENERATION IN THE ATLANTA METROPOLITAN AREA

by

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(Under the Direction of Katalin Medvedev)

ABSTRACT

The underground musical form rap and the Hip Hop culture that developed around it surfaced on the inner city streets of New York in the 1970's. Hip Hop fashion, also referred to as urban clothing or street wear, is the visual manifestation of hip hop culture. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of hip hop culture on the fashion choices of Black women in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Four focus group interview sessions were conducted with 27 middle-class African-American women ages 26-46. As members of the hip hop generation (those born between 1965-1984) they were expected to share a similar worldview. A thematic content analysis of data collected from each focus group session revealed several themes, such as considerable family influence and pronounced emphasis on personal adornment, that illustrate factors that influence the sartorial choices of middle class Black women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

INDEX WORDS: Hip hop, Fashion, African American women, Atlanta metropolitan area, African American culture, Focus groups

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The underground music form known as rap and the hip hop culture surfaced on the inner city streets of New York in the 1970's (Chang, 2005). However, the hip hop movement that first began in Black and Latino communities as an inexpensive outlet of expression against social and political oppression has since become immensely popular not only within the American mainstream, but around the world as well. The four main elements of the hip hop culture are graffiti (urban inspired art), deejaying (disc jockey artistry), b-boying/b-girling (break dancing), and emceeing (rapping) (Kitwana, 2002). Hip hop's extended elements include battling (the competition between two or more rappers in front of an audience), street language (slag), political activism, entrepreneurship and fashion, among others. My research focuses on the latter, the urban hip hop apparel market, which grosses $58 billion in sales annually (Grant Thornton, 2006).

While African Americans account for roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population they spend on average more than their White counterparts on apparel and personal care products (US Census, 2009; Target Market, n.d.). Women of color spend 80 percent more on cosmetics annually and nearly twice as much on skin care products than their White counterparts (Teal, 2009). The buying power of African Americans is projected to reach $1.1 trillion by 2012 and the buying power of African American women has grown to $7.5 billion annually (Teal, 2009; Target Market, 2009). Such spending habits suggest that African Americans place a high value on maintaining their appearance.

The importance of keeping up appearances in the Black community can clearly be seen among practitioners of the hip hop culture. As a major cultural movement of our time, hip hop (its music, fashion, attitude, style and language) is undoubtedly one of the core influences for African Americans born between 1965 and 1984, referred to as the hip hop generation (Kitwana, 2002). This study explores Black female consumers of the hip hop generation. More specifically, this study aims to answer the following question: How does the hip hop culture influence the fashion choices of Black women?

In answering this question, one's geographic and social location becomes critical, as hip hop typically takes on different forms in different settings and social contexts. The women involved in this research are residents of the Atlanta metropolitan area, often considered the Mecca of hip hop due to the fact that a vast amount of the music that is produced in the city. Thirty percent of the hits on the National Billboard charts in 2006 belonged to Atlanta-based hip hop artists, including Ciara, Ludacris, and Young Jeezy ("Billboard," 2006). Several hip hop artists including Keisha Cole, Nas and Kelis, have relocated to the area along with thousands of African Americans across the nation making Atlanta's Black population, currently at 52.61%, the highest figure for any major city in the United States (The Maroon Tiger, 2008). Many African Americans, especially women, who outnumber men in Atlanta by about 100,000 (Frankston, 2004), are drawn to the city, not only for the music, but for its educational, political and economic opportunities.

Atlanta is home to prestigious academic institutions such as the Georgia Institute of Technology and Emory University as well as the country's largest consortium of historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's), the Atlanta University Center (AUC). Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Spelman College, Clark Atlanta University, and the Interdenominational Theological Center have a combined enrollment of approximately 13,500 students (Atlanta University Center, n.d.). Perhaps the consortium's most distinguished alumnus is Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a graduate of Morehouse College.

Historically, Atlanta served as a site for many of the grassroots activities of the Civil Rights Movement in which the students of Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University) were heavily involved. After the Civil Rights Act became law in 1965, the political power of African Americans in Georgia rose to the national level with the election of Civil Rights veterans Andrew Young and John Lewis to Congress. In 1973, Maynard Jackson, a graduate of Morehouse College, became the city's first African American mayor. Every mayor elected in Atlanta since this time has been African American including the current mayor, Kasim Reed, and preceding mayor Shirley Franklin. Franklin is also the first woman to be elected mayor of Atlanta and the first Black woman to win a mayoral election in a major southern city.

In 1996 Atlanta became the first Southern city to host the Summer Olympic Games. The event established Atlanta as an international city and secured its place as the capital of the "New south" (Vaeth, 1998). Atlanta also ranks fifth in the nation among cities with the most Fortune 500 company headquarters including: Coca-Cola, Home Depot and the United Parcel Service (Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, 2008).

Georgia has the second-highest percentage of black-owned businesses in the nation at 20.4 percent with a majority of these businesses located in the Atlanta metropolitan area (Stafford, 2010). Consequently, Atlanta boasts a large middle-class to upper class Black population evidenced by the city's numerous predominately Black, wealthy suburbs. "Atlanta is said to be the only city in the nation that offers bus tours of the black sections of town" (Time, Inc., 1974).

Middle-class status is determined on the basis of annual household disposable income and is the portion of the population whose income is around the national average (Swanson & Everett, 2007). About half of the Black population in the U.S. is middle-class (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). The Black middle class however, can be divided into two distinct groups. The first group, the Black lower middle class (those who earn between \$30,000 and \$49,000 annually), constitutes a majority (65 percent) of the Black middle class (Lacy, 2007). Members of this group typically do not hold college degrees and are concentrated in sales or clerical positions rather than white-collar occupations (Lacy, 2007). The second group, the Black upper middle class, has a socioeconomic status that more closely resembles that of the White middle class (Lacy, 2007). Making up 35 percent of the Black middle class, these Blacks earn more than \$50,000 annually and occupy positions that require at least a bachelor's degree (Lacy, 2007). This study examines hip hop's influence on the fashion choices of middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Purpose

As a Black female of the hip hop generation, currently residing in Atlanta, with an avid fascination of all things considered fashionable, my interest in exploring the topic of hip hop dress among African-American women is twofold. First, I would like to educate others about the hip hop culture and describe the fashion, style, and dress choices common among females of the hip hop generation. Second, I hope to learn more about my identification with the hip hop culture throughout the research process.

Although there has been a great deal of research done to analyze the familiar elements of hip hop expression, little consideration has been given to the examination of hip hop dress. Therefore, this research will be especially beneficial to retailers as information gathered will help them better market merchandise to middle-class African American females of the hip hop generation. I also hope to fill a void in research pertaining to hip hop dress among African American women, significantly contributing to academic scholarship in the fields of Dress, Women's and African American Studies. Because hip hop style is at the forefront of setting trends in the multi-billion dollar fashion industry (Tan, 2010) it has become increasingly necessary to demystify the stereotypes associated with the hip hop culture and understand what drives the aesthetic of hip hop fashion, style, and dress practices. Therefore the objectives of this study are as follows:

Objectives

1. To describe the consumption habits of dress influenced by the hip hop culture among middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.
2. To determine what social, cultural, political and economic factors influence the sartorial choices of hip hop-inspired dress among middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

3. To describe the various methods of producing a distinctive style of hip hop dress among middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Definition of Terms

Fashion is defined as changing styles of dress and appearance that are adopted by a group of people at any given time and place (Welters & Lillethun, 2007).

Style is defined as the characteristic or distinctive appearance of a garment – the combination of features including silhouette, construction, fabric and details – that makes it unique and different from other garments (Stone, 2008; Welters & Lillethun, 2007).

Dress is viewed as both a material object and a process. As a material object, dress refers to items created by way of human ingenuity and/or technology. As a process, dress involves the actions undertaken to modify and supplement the body in order to address physical needs as well as social and cultural expectations. These actions include covering the body with clothing and accessories, the application of color, the addition or elimination of scents, as well as the sound that dress items make among others (Eicher, Evenson & Lutz, 2008).

Hip Hop is both the voice of alienated, frustrated youth and a multibillion-dollar cultural industry marketed on a global scale. Hip Hop is also a multifaceted subculture that transcends many of the popular characteristics used to describe other music-led cultures (Lewis, 2005).

Hip Hop Fashion/Urban Apparel refers to the clothing trends and styles associated with urban centers and hip hop culture. Hip hop fashion represents the prominence of all hip hop cultural codes, forms and customs (KRS One, 2009).

Urban Brands are clothing lines created by practitioners of hip hop culture or by hip hop artists themselves. Urban brands are also created by designers or manufactures that wish to appeal to the hip hop consumer by adhering to the aesthetics and sensibilities of the hip hop culture.

Street Wear represents the sartorial choices of an independent urban subculture influenced by skateboarding, punk, hardcore, reggae, hip hop, club culture, graffiti, travel and the art scene in downtown city centers. It is a combination of attitudes, aesthetics and activities that binds a group of people with similar interest together. Wearing street wear means choosing affordable and practical clothes that also look good in clubs. It is a do-it-yourself approach of dressing the body (Vogel, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

African American Culture and Dress

To understand hip hop culture, as it applies to fashion, style, dress, and mannerisms, one must understand how these elements relate to African American culture. African American dress is a combination of African cultural expression and a style created through the assimilation of Blacks in America; it is both African and American (Starke, Holloman, & Nordquist, 1990; White, 1998). "Long before the Europeans colonized Africa, people of the fourteenth and fifteenth century empires of Ghana, Mali, Egypt, Kush and Songhai developed fabrics and jewelry from indigenous resources" (White, 1998, p. 13). They adorned themselves in gold "collars, rings, necklaces, earrings, crowns and even gold-dipped fabrics" (White, 1998, p. 15). Members of the monarchy wore traditional *aso oke* fabric and kente cloth woven from silk obtained through trade with East Indians (White, 1998). Noblemen wore clothing made from cotton and leopard skins as a sign of bravery (White, 1998).

Prior to European invasion, some Africans wore items of European dress as a sign of wealth and prestige. Many West African leaders "creatively adopted European textiles and articles of clothing [obtained as gifts or through trade], mixing them with more traditional African attire" (Foster, 1997, p. 31). Still, European-style clothing was widely considered to be unattractive and a deceitful attempt to cover up a physical abnormality (Foster, 1997; White, 1998; White & White, 1998). Wearing clothes that revealed the body was a way for African natives to endure the hot African climate and they also allowed suitors to inspect the health of a prospective spouse (White, 1998). Upon arrival to the New World, however, "African slaves were quickly clothed in European garb and made to conform to European concepts of decency" (White & White, 1998, p. 6).

"The African American accentuation of the hair and the head [also] encompasses both African concepts and concepts derived from American experiences. This adornment of the head and adornment of the rest of the body cannot be separated" (Foster, 1997, p. 247). Hair grooming and ornamentation is a highly developed art form that has a lengthy historical past among the African Diaspora (Foster, 1997). For example, cornrowing (a type of hair braiding) is an ancient art form handed down from generation to generation that can be traced to Africa as far back as 3500 B.C. (Thomas-Osborne, 1992). Cornrows appear in countless variations, hold different meanings and are regionally specific. Traditionally, among the Yoruba, priestesses and queens wore the most decorative and intricate styles (Thomas-Osborne, 1992). Not only was cornrowing a symbol of status during these times, but they also denoted one's age. Young girls and older women wore simple, basic styles, while marriageable women wore the more elaborate versions (Thomas-Osborne, 1992).

The earliest accounts of Africans describe men wearing a variety of head coverings, including turbans (Foster, 1997). By the 1600's women were wearing headwraps as well, due to the influx of available and inexpensive cloth imported through trade with Europeans (Foster, 1997). Over the centuries, headwraps evolved from a mere cloth used to shield women from the climate to an important religious and socially significant fashion statement (Scott, 2003). During slavery, however, the headwrap became a symbol of servitude. Despite this, some slave women converted the head wrap from a simple head cover, which might be constructed as shameful into something uniquely their own by wearing it in particularly innovative ways (Foster, 1997).

> At its most elaborate, the African American woman's headwrap functioned as a 'uniform of rebellion' that encoded resistance, but as a head rag worn by millions of enslaved women and their descendants, it also functioned as a uniform of communal identity. The headwrap therefore acquired a paradox of simile: to the white overlords it was a badge of enslavement, but to the enslaved it was a helmet of courage that evoked an image of true homeland (Foster, 1997, p. 293).

Slave Dress

Dress is a significant aspect of African American culture because it is a form of expression that was severely restricted during slavery. "Among the 'slave codes' devised by Southern governments during the eighteenth century were those relating to dress" (Foster, 1997, p.134). Condemned to wearing plain garments made of coarse linen or cotton fabric, known as "negro cloth," available only in beige, brown, or blue-and-beige, the opportunities for slaves to adorn themselves were limited (White, 1998). In her examination of slave clothing and textiles in Georgia, Hunt (1996) found that male slaves usually wore a coat, in varying styles including round, roundabout, surtout, sailor or sack along with a pair of pants, which were also referred to as overalls, trousers, breeches or pantaloons. Slave women typically wore "a blue homespun frock or [a] plain or striped dress and a bonnet or handkerchief tied around the head" (Hunt, 1996, p. 201). However, sumptuary legislation proved to be unsuccessful as some slaves managed to assemble impressive wardrobes despite the intentions of slave owners.

Slaves acquired articles of better quality clothing through various methods. Runaway slaves often stole clothing items from the master’s house before fleeing the plantation (White & White, 1998). Some would secretly “borrow” the finery of Whites to make good appearances at special events (Foster, 1997). Slave owners would give cast-offs or new clothing to their slaves as a form of reward (White & White, 1998). Owners also allowed slaves to earn small amounts of money by doing work on the side or by farming small plots of land, not needed for commercial production (White & White, 1998). Slaves were then able to spend much of the money they earned on clothing.

A preoccupation with dress, similar to that of elite and middle-class Whites at that time, developed among the slave population (White & White, 1998). “On the days during which they labored for Whites, the enslaved gave little regard for their clothing…but on the days granted to themselves – Sundays and holidays – [they] put great care and thought into [their appearance]” (Foster, 1997, p. 182). Due to the religious beliefs of most slave owners, Sunday was the day off for slaves and thus became a day when they could freely express themselves. During the workweek slave women covered their hair, which was commonly wrapped in cotton strings, with a headwrap and on Sundays the strings were removed and the hair was combed out (Foster, 1997). Slaves also saved their best clothing for Sunday church services. The saying “Sunday best” is still used in African American culture to describe one’s finest clothing.

Slaves of higher status, those assigned jobs as artisan, housekeeper, or driver, had greater access to fine clothing than field laborers. “Although it defined them in relation to the task they performed for White people, many [slaves]…enjoyed the fancier clothes and appreciated the standing that these items of dress denoted" (Foster, 1997, p.138). While this dress code was more refined it was also designed and strictly enforced by white slave owners leaving no room for originality.

> From a white perspective, 'tidier and cleaner' might seem more important; but from a black perspective, "fantastically dress" may have been more in tune to the African Americans' own aesthetic sensibilities. Thus, although Blacks who worked at jobs away from the big house apparently received less clothing and of poorer quality than that worn by domestic servants, this inequality may have been offset by the fact that they had more freedom of choice in what they would wear than did the seemingly more privileged domestic servants and carriage drivers (Foster, 1997, p.145).

Slaves had little regard for adopting white standards of dress. Instead, European clothing was appropriated only when it would suit their own taste. There even appeared to be a sense of mocking or parody in the way slaves wore European garb (White & White, 1998). Using their clothes-making skills – spinning, weaving, dyeing and sewing – slaves were able to alter European clothing to their liking (White & White, 1998). Slaves tended to wear a combination of not only different pieces of material in one garment, but also various items of clothing within one assemble (White & White, 1998). For example, a fugitive slave notice from the *Columbian Sentinel* "described a slave 'brought to jail…wearing a red uniform coat, osnaburg overalls, black waistcoat, half boots'" (as cited in Hunt, 1996, p. 201). They also had an affinity for bright and vivid colors that "clashed violently" (White & White, 1998).

> The way in which slaves combined both colors and individual items of clothing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries revealed the polyrhythmic nature of their culture, a characteristic that also infused other expressive forms, ranging from quilting, dance, and music to speech, and that was illustrative of a particular way of seeing and ordering the world (White & White, 1998, p. 36).

Reconstruction

The ability for free Blacks in the Postbellum period (1866-1913) to express themselves was determined by whether they lived in the North or the South. In the North, newly liberated Blacks deliberately, consciously, and publicly tested the boundaries of freedom venturing out onto the city streets garbed in colorful and, what often seemed to Whites, bizarre combinations of clothes (White & White, 1998). As one somewhat indignant traveler observed of free Blacks in New York,

> the women wear bonnets decorated with ribbons, plumes, and flowers, of a thousand different colors, and their dresses are of the most showy description, while the men were attired in 'coats so open that the shirt sticks out under the arm pits; the waistcoats are of all colours of the rainbow; the hat is carelessly put on one side; the gloves are yellow, and every sable dandy carries a smart cane' (White & White, 1998, p. 94).

Although Northern Whites, particularly members of the respectable classes, expressed disdain toward Blacks and their attire, many were fascinated by their appearance and demeanor or, at least slightly amused by what they considered a failed imitation of white behavior (White & White, 1998). On the other hand, the dress of free Blacks in the South remained restricted as they continued to live under the shadow of slavery.

Slavery in the United States was abolished in 1865. In spite of this, Black Codes continued to limit the ways in which African Americans in the South could present themselves in the years following the Civil War. Southern Whites often reacted violently toward Blacks "who dressed too grandly, stood too proudly, approached too nearly, gazed too directly or walked too confidently" (White & White, 1998, p. 66). Determined to maintain the old social system and the racial ideology and etiquette that reinforced it, some Southern lawmakers resorted to declaring the use of such "insulting gestures" a criminal offense (White & White, 1998). This legislation marked the emergence of Jim Crow laws, enacted between 1876 and 1965. Under Jim Crow, "African Americans were required to dress, walk, comport themselves, and direct their gaze in a manner that registered uncomplaining subservience" to Whites (White & White, 1998, p. 154).

Racial tensions in the South as well as greater educational and employment opportunities for African Americans ultimately lead to the Great Migration in the early part of the 20th century. Approximately seven million African Americans migrated from the Southern U.S. to the Northern, Midwestern and Western regions of the country to escape social, economic and political repression. The Great Migration "was not merely a movement of the colored population from South to North, or from country to city; it was the sudden transplanting of a debased feudal folk from medieval to modern America" (Bone, 1970, p. 171). African American migrants brought a distinctly "Black," rural culture with them, involving traditional language, religion, music and dance. Juxtaposed to the new urban environment, these traditions evolved into "new musical…[genres], patterns of speech,…dances, gestures,…motor behaviors and [styles of dress]" (El-Kati, 2007).

The Harlem Renaissance

Beginning after World War I, “musicians, writers, poets, artists, dancers, actors, editors, publishers, critics, businessmen, professionals and intellectuals” joined the mostly poor, working class community of Harlem, creating the African American cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance (Wintz, 2006, p. 12). The Harlem Renaissance, originally referred to as the “New Negro Movement,” fostered black pride and provided racial uplift through culture; it was a time when African Americans sought to refashion themselves as a group (Miller, 2009). The “New Negro” was confident, optimistic, newly sophisticated, demanding equal rights and determined to remake themselves and their image (Miller, 2009).

The Harlem Renaissance occurred concurrently with the Jazz Age. As a result, Blacks began to dress in a manner that reflected the popularity of jazz music and its accompanying dances such as the Charleston and the Lindy Hop, both of which required freedom of movement. Black women cultivated a glamorous look that included furs and coats trimmed with fur collars, short and loose beaded flapper style dresses worn over “undergarments that fit more comfortably than the boned corsets of previous generations” (Thomas, 2000, p. 70). Outfits were accessorized with “cloche hats, long strings of beads,” (White, 1998, p. 19) and ankle-strapped shoes worn with sheer stockings (White, 1998, p. 19).

The fashions of the era’s most famous African American performers also influenced the dress of admiring fans. Blues singer, Bessie Smith was often photographed wearing furs, long beaded gowns, glittering jewelry, and well-coiffed hair (White, 1998). Entertainer Josephine Baker, famous for her “girdle of bananas” costume, was also “known for her hats [adorned] with fruits and flowers, beautifully striped Arabian gowns and scarves, mirrored and feather hairpieces, and…the flowing, seductive costumes she used in her dances” (Starke, Holloman, & Nordquist, 1990, p. 179). Baker also helped popularize the finger-wave hairstyle among Black and White women (White, 1998). Black men wore the finger-wave hairstyle as well and dressed in loose-fitting suits with wide shoulders and baggy pleated pants. The look was finished with fedoras (White, 1998).

The Zoot Suit

As the favored genre of music changed from swing and classic jazz to the more rhythmic bebop style in the 1940’s, so did the favored style of dress. Dress styles became more eclectic and silhouettes more exaggerated (White, 1998). The zoot suit became popular among young African American and Latino men, however women and Whites wore the style as well (White & White, 1998). Women wore the zoot suit as a political statement and as a way of challenging normative gender binaries while young White men did so to signify their defiance to authority figures (Ramirez, 2009; White & White, 1998). “The zoot suit was characterized by a jacket, which extended to the knee or mid thigh, with broad square shoulders, wide lapels, and a nipped waist…. [paired with] exceedingly baggy pants [that] were tapered and cuffed at the hem” (White, 1998, p. 23). Zoot suits were often accessorized with a flat brimmed hat, a “V-knot” tie, a pocket watch chain, and Dutch-type shoes (White & White, 1998).

Conching, straightening the hair through the use of harsh chemicals became the hairstyle of choice among Black male zoot suiters (Tulloch, 2004). *Pachucos* (Mexican American male zoot suiters) distinguished themselves with the long and slicked back "duck bill" haircut, chin hairs and tattoos (Alvarez, 2008). Mexican American female zoot suiters, called *pachucas*, paired their "long fingertip coats or letterman's sweater[s]…[with knee-length skirts], high bobby socks and *huarache*…[sandals]" (Ramirez, 2009. p. 54). They also "made-up heavily with mascara and lipstick, and the favorite hairstyle was a high pompadour with flowers and earrings" (Ramirez, 2009, p. 54). The way the body was comported was an important element in the overall look; a distinctive swagger, referred to as "cooling it" was associated with zoot suiters (White & White, 1998).

The cloth conservation order put in place during World War II, made wearing a zoot suit illegal and decidedly unpatriotic (Tulloch, 2004). Nevertheless, many young African American and Mexican Americans continued to buy and wear zoot suits to not only show their indifference to the war, but to negotiate a sense of identity in the highly segregated and discriminatory society in which they lived (White & White, 1998; Alvarez, 2008). The interracial and gendered struggles for dignity by zoot suiters set the stage for the evolution of youth culture in the years that followed including the youth led Civil Rights Movement (Alvarez, 2008).

The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement was a mass resistance of Blacks and Whites to racial segregation and discrimination experienced by African Americans in the United States. Civil Rights activists employed mass action strategies such as civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance, marches, protests, boycotts, "freedom rides," and rallies (Klarman, 2006). This resistance also took place through smart dressing and grooming seen via extensive media coverage (Craig, 2002). As a rejection of the negative stereotypes and images of Black women often purveyed by the mass media (e.g. the Mammy, the Sapphire and the Jezebel), those involved in the Civil Rights movement employed the "politics of respectability" to counter these images with more positive representations (Jewell, 1993; Craig 2002). To construct a more professional and decidedly middle-class image many Black women, inspired by the movement, straightened their hair and wore conservative tweed suits that featured knee-length skirts and jackets with three-quarter-length sleeves (Thomas, 2000).

Music played an important part in the Civil Rights movement. Freedom songs, sung by activists on the frontlines of the movement, "conveyed the moral urgency of the freedom struggle, while expressing and helping to sustain the courage of the extraordinary ordinary people who were at the heart of it" (Ward, 2006, para. 1). Perhaps the most celebrated freedom song, *We Shall Overcome*, characterized by call-and-response vocal patterns, an element commonly used in today's hip hop music, was derived from black gospel music tradition (Ward, 2006). Other forms of popular music (e.g. blues, folk, jazz, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and soul), especially songs produced by the Motown Record Company, provided a soundtrack for the movement as well.

Motown Style

The styles worn by artists on the Motown label also influenced what young Black women wore in the 1960's. Wardrobe was of the utmost importance for Motown's girl groups, even more so than their sound, as the clothes they wore often defined them. For example, the stiletto heels and satin sheath dresses worn by the Ronettes marked the trio as sexy, the boots and tight pants of the Shangri-Las presented a tough, dangerous image, while the stiff elegance of the Supremes' matching gowns identified the group as refined and mature (Warwick, 2007).

Diana Ross and the Supremes were revered for their great fashion sense. "Form-fitting custom-made gowns in every color…[imaginable], the basis of their signature look, were] splashed with sequins or rhinestones, jazzed-up with swingy fringe, trimmed at the hem in fur" or accessorized with floor-sweeping feather boas (Thomas, 2000, p. 157). "False eyelashes, blacked with mascara, …[heavy kohl eyeliner], …frosty lipstick," and wigs in various styles further enhanced the group's overall image (Thomas, 2000, p. 157).

In contrast to the polished elegance of the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas always projected a grittier, less refined, more defiant image, preferring shorter dresses and pants suits (Smith, 1999). They were also known for a harder R&B sound, typified by their hit songs *Heat Wave*, *Nowhere to Run* and their signature song *Dancing in the Street*. Their music, though ostensibly focused on adolescent romance or the joys of youth culture, communicated the political urgency of the times (Smith, 1999). For example, *Dancing in the Street*, initially produced as an innocent dance single, took on a different meaning when riots in inner city America led many young Black demonstrators to cite the song as a civil rights anthem of social change in the increasingly violent struggle for racial equality (Smith, 1999).

The Black Power Movement

By the latter half the 1960's, the political climate in America was becoming more turbulent marking the end of the Civil Rights Movement. Nonviolent demands for equal opportunities for Blacks seemed to fall on deaf ears. The Black Power Movement adopted the "by any means necessary" ideology of the Nation of Islam (Ogbar, 2005). The movement advocated Black Nationalism, self-defense tactics, self-determination, condoned violence if necessary, promoted racial pride and demanded political and economic power (Ogbar, 2005).

Black Power was defined as much by the fashion of the times as the politics (Thomas, 2000). The Black Panther Party, established in 1966 to promote the ideals of the Black Power Movement, influenced new styles of dress among African Americans. Both Black militants and those that just admired the style wore typical Black Panther garb, including black leather jackets, black berets, dashikis, African beaded necklaces and platform shoes (White, 1998; Thomas, 2000). Dominant colors found in apparel and accessories during the 1960's, red, black, and green, were inspired by the Pan-African movement led by Marcus Garvey in the 1920's and are representative of the Pan-African flag (Starke, Holloman, & Nordquist, 1990). The flag consists of three equal bands of each color; red represents the blood that unites all people of African ancestry and the blood that was shed for liberation. Black represents Black people whose existence as a nation, though not a nation-state, is affirmed by the existence of the flag. Green represents hope and the motherland – Africa (Starke, Holloman & Nordquist, 1990).

Black women began to wear garments constructed from African printed fabrics such as batik, mud, or kente cloth that symbolized their connection to Africa and displayed their political awareness (Thomas, 2000). Colorful caftans and dashikis enhanced by intricate embroidery at the collars and hems were paired with bell-bottom jeans, pants, or long loose skirts (White, 1998; Thomas, 2000). This casual Afrocentric look was often worn with sandals and accessorized with African-inspired jewelry, including earrings, chokers, bracelets, rings, amulets and beads made of ivory, ebony or bone (Thomas, 2000).

African Americans began to express pride in their physical characteristics by flaunting rather than altering or concealing their features. The “Black is Beautiful” slogan of the Black Power Movement promoted acceptance of black features and grooming and rejected white beauty standards. The Afro, also referred to as the “natural,” became the most powerful symbol of the Black Power movement among both Black men and Black women (Starke, Holloman, & Nordquist, 1990), placing the issue of hair squarely on the political agenda (Tulloch, 2004). For Black men the Afro symbolized “black manhood, the death of the ‘Negro’ and the birth of the militant, virulent Black man” (Kelly, 1997, p. 31). For Black women the Afro was more than simply a hairstyle; it was a symbol of empowerment and a way of discarding Eurocentric beauty standards i.e. long straight hair, delicate physical features and lighter complexions.

Black Fashion on Television and Film

The increasing frequency of onscreen images featuring fearless African American women, especially that of political activist, Angela Davis, inspired the “super-vixen” characters of the blaxploitation film genre, popular throughout the 1970’s (Sims, 2006). Despite the criticism received for their distasteful portrayal of African Americans, blaxploitation movies provided alternative images of black femininity that signified strength and liberation (Sims, 2006). These images were a significant departure from the negative representations of Black women such as the Mammy and the Jezebel that were pervasive in American cinema (Collins, 2000).

To reflect the changing definitions of beauty associated with African American women, Pam Grier, known as the "Queen of Blaxploitation," changed hairstyles frequently in her popular films including *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974). It was not unusual for her characters to go from wearing a short bob, or long, flowing, straight hair to an Afro, all in one scene (Sims, 2006). Conversely, fashion model turned blaxploitation actress, Tamara Dobson, covered her head with wide brimmed feathered hats and colorful elaborate scarves and turbans for her role in the film, *Cleopatra Jones* (1973). "Rather than her hair functioning as the quintessential signifier of feminine beauty, it is most obscured which can be read as a resistance to the white patriarchal positioning of flowing hair as a sign of feminine sexual beauty" (Dunn, 2008, p. 94).

As the women's liberation movement took hold in the 1970's, women's fashion broke free from convention (Stone, 2008). Bras were denounced as symbols of oppression and conformity, and were discarded by many women (Stone, 2008). Consequently, blaxploitation heroines wore wardrobes influenced by the social context of the times. As an intentional statement of female empowerment, Grier was often shown braless in her sexy halter jumpsuits, slinky dresses and fitted pants suits (Thomas, 2000). At the same time, in *Cleopatra Jones and The Casino of Gold* (1975), Tamara Dobson flaunted her unconventional femininity (and set trends) by appearing in rich reds and yellows to accentuate her dark skin. Her tailored pants suits, worn with long voluptuous fur jackets, served to emphasize her powerful, towering 6'2" frame (Dunn, 2008; Sims, 2006).

Another vehicle for setting trends among African Americans in the early to mid 1970's, in addition to the influx of black sitcoms (e.g. *Good Times*; *What's Happening*) staring fashionable characters, was the music/dance television show, *Soul Train*. *Soul Train* featured performances by artists of contemporary styles of black music including blues, jazz, gospel and emerging 1970's soul music styles such as funk. The show became the first media outlet to showcase an emerging street dance movement, known as *popping*. "The wild, gaudy clothing (polyester printed bell-bottoms, micro/mini skirts, hot pants, and halter tops) worn by the show's dancers influenced the fashions worn by Black urban youth" (Reeves, 2008, p. 6). Beginning in the early 1980's, *Soul Train* also became one of the first media outlets to highlight emerging hip hop artists. However, hip hop-focused music video television programs including: the New York City Public access show *Video Music Box*, MTV's *Yo! MTV Raps* and BET's *Rap City* have had the greatest impact on the reception of hip hop style (White, 1998; Tyrangiel, 1999).

Hip Hop Culture and Fashion

Hip hop's origins can be traced to the passing of oral history by West African *griots*, a group of traveling poets and singers, whose customs were introduced to the "New World" by way of the Atlantic slave trade (Sarig, 2007). Hip hop can also be attributed to the Jamaican sound systems developed in the 1940's and the street parties that evolved around them (Chang, 2005). However, hip hop in a modern sense, began in New York's South Bronx borough during the mid 1970's, as a cultural outlet for the African American, Afro Caribbean and Latin youth who populated the area (Rahn, 2002). Hip hop culture grew out of the critical social conditions (poverty, drugs and violence), resulting from the deindustrialization of the South Bronx at that time (Rose, 1994). Federal funding for social services were cut, industrial factories were closed down, and "corporate developers were buying up real estate to be converted into luxury housing, leaving the borough’s working-class residents with limited affordable housing” (Rose, 1994, p. 27). In addition, the decline in available jobs contributed to high unemployment rates (Rose, 1994). South Bronx teens used hip hop’s four elements: graffiti, deejaying, break dancing and emceeing as a source of entertainment as well as a medium to vent about their social conditions and marginalized position within the American society (Kitwana, 2002; McLeod, 1999).

Fashion has also become an important form of self-expression for the hip hop generation to present their unique identity to the world. Hip hop fashion is a distinctive style of dress that embodies the attitudes and customs of the culture. It has become a group identifier, because the “gear,” which is generally comprised of baggy jeans, oversized tops and sneakers, is often the initial defining factor used to classify members of the hip hop community (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). While hip hop style is not contingent upon any particular trend, certain rules of dress have remained a constant throughout the lifespan of the culture. Anything goes in relation to attire and adornment, with two exceptions; it must be fresh and clean.

The term “fresh” (also referred to as “fly”) in a hip hopper’s lexicon refers to something or someone being cool and hip. Cool and hip are terms that go hand in hand with black culture, thus hip hop practitioners are naturally predisposed to determine what is and what is not “fresh” (Rahn, 2002; Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). In addition, the importance of looking clean whereby clothing is matching, free of stains, holes and any sign of wear is a principle omnipresent throughout African American culture (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). “To some degree the cleanliness ethic may derive from the precariousness of life in urban communities of color in which severe dislocations of structural inequality persist" (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 236).

Hip-hoppers are also compelled to pay homage to the past through their clothing choices. Fashion has long been considered an important element of hip hop and is often evoked in nostalgic hip hop songs and videos. In her 2003 single, *Back in the Day,* rapper Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliot raps:

Go back in the day
British Knights and gold chains
Do the prep and cabbage patch
And wear your laces all fat

A true connoisseur of hip hop fashion understands the value of "throwbacks" (Hip Hop's equivalent to vintage fashion) and rather than rejecting "old school" trends, they are treasured (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005).

Old School Hip Hop Fashion

Before hip hop truly developed its own style of dress, some hip hop artists emulated the elaborate attire worn by rock, soul, funk and disco musicians of the 1970's (White, 1998). Pioneering rap group Funky 4 + 1 More featured one of hip hop's first female emcees, Sha Rock, as the "plus one." In reference to their on-stage style, Sha Rock recalls, "We presented a Gladys Knight and the Four Tops image. The guys wore suits, matching what I had on. If I wore a pink fur, they would match it with, say, a burgundy and white outfit" (Verán, 2001, p. 8). The Soulsonic Force, led by Afrika Bambaataa, was clearly influenced by the outrageous get-ups worn by George Clinton and his groups Parliament and Funkadelic. Famed photographer, George Dubose, recalls the ornate costumes worn by each member of Soulsonic Force at a historic photo shoot that took place in 1982. "Bambaataa [was dressed] as a Viking, Mr. Big as a Roman soldier, Pow Wow as an Indian chief, and [MC] GLOBE's costume looked like, well, a globe" (Emery, 2004, p.12). Sequence, the first female rap group to release a record, performed in outfits inspired by the all female glam rock group LaBelle, who "were notorious for wearing outlandish metallic costumes…embellished with feathers… exaggerated padded shoulders, and flashy helmets [along with fantasy makeup, accessories, and high heeled boots], which gave them an almost intergalactic look" (Thomas, 2000, p. 171).

DJ Grandmaster Flash and his crew, the Furious Five, channeled Michael Jackson by mixing contemporary street wear and flamboyant garb (Emery, 2004). Their Lee jeans, button-down and mock turtleneck shirts were accessorized with punk-rock inspired zippers, leather and studs (Emery, 2004; Oh, 2005). Female emcees Roxanne Shanté and the Real Roxanne, both of whom found celebrity as a result of the infamous "Roxanne Wars" (a series of hip hop answer records), dressed up their casual attire as well. In the video for her debut single *Roxanne's Revenge* (1984), a 14-year-old ponytail-clad Roxanne Shanté wears a luxurious white fur coat over her Faire Isle knitted sweater and corduroy slacks. The Real Roxanne's Cleopatra style swoops of black eyeliner and signature hairstyle inspired by Barbara Eden's character on the sitcom *I Dream of Jeannie* added an exotic flare to her everyday clothes (Verán, 2001).

While the deejays and emcees were getting glammed up in the early days of hip hop, graffiti writers and breakdancers wore clothing that served a functional purpose. Graffiti artists came to be known as "backpackers" because they were never without a backpack or a currier bag containing an assortment of spray cans, markers and spray tips (Rahn, 2002). *Wild Style* (1983), hip hop's first movie, and the critically acclaimed documentary *Style Wars* (1984) both trace the development of graffiti as a cultural art form. "Zoro," the protagonist in *Wild Style* is played by legendary graffiti writer, Lee Quinones, who first appears in the film's opening sequence sneaking into a train yard dressed inconspicuously in black from head to toe, a tactic often used by graffiti writers to detract attention from authorities. In addition to wearing dark colors, Dez, a graffiti writer interviewed in *Style Wars,* states "you can tell a [graffiti] writer you know…he'll have ink stains on his clothes."

Although *Wild Style* and *Style Wars* focused on graffiti, deejaying, emceeing and breakdancing are also covered to a lesser extent. *Wild Style* features several prominent deejays and emcees, including hip hop impresario Fab 5 Freddy, who is known as much for his eclectic collection of hats and sunglasses as for introducing hip hop to the mainstream. The legendary breakdancing group, Rock Steady Crew, appears in both films and subsequently made an impact on the worlds of dance and fashion. They wore comfortable dance-ready outfits that combined athletic functionality with artistic creativity. The brightly colored running suits and flat-bottomed, "fat" (wide) laced sneakers that Rock Steady Crew members wore became the quintessential hip hop uniform and spawned a sneaker craze that still resonates within the culture today (*Just For Kicks*, 2005).

B-Boy/B-Girl Style

For b-boys and b-girls, finding and/or altering clothing so that it was practical for breakdancing and also looked flashy and unique was a subtle practice (Schloss, 2009). A breaker may put considerable time and effort into planning an outfit, even if their demeanor might suggest otherwise. "Part of the performance of fashion lies in manifesting the effort that went into one's appearance while simultaneously appearing not to care whether anyone notices" (Schloss, 2009, p. 79). This attitude of being consciously aware of your image, while at the same time acting unconcerned, is a variation of the "cool pose" – a tactic used by African Americans, primarily males, to project social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect (Majors & Billson, 1992).

In addition to the attitude, a key aspect of the b-boy/b-girl style is color coordination. It was imperative that the colors in a breakdancer's outfit coordinate and match the sneakers and other accessories worn with it (Schloss, 2009). Furthermore, a b-boy's sneakers had to remain spotless. For this reason, a dancer had to acquire an extensive collection of shoes to choose from and put substantial effort into maintaining it (Schloss, 2009). Some even went to the extent of laundering their sneakers and carrying a toothbrush for quick touch ups in order to keep them unsoiled. As internationally acclaimed graffiti artist, Futura 2000 remembers:

> The breakdancers, their shit always looked really correct and clean and it was all about keeping your sneakers pristine and constantly looking fresh in terms of how that complemented your entire kit [outfit] whether that was the Kangol hat, the nylon T-Shirt, jeans, whatever. I would say it was really that Ken Swift (an original member of the Rock Steady Crew)/ Rock Steady Crew/ b-Boy look that took over in terms of making sneakers almost the main attraction to what you had on (*Just For Kicks*, 2005).

Since the early days of the hip hop culture, there has been an interrelated sneaker subculture of "creative young people who cared…[so much about what went on their feet] that they customized the available models" (Gonzales, 2008, p. 138). Some members of this subculture customized their old shoes because they lacked the funds to buy new ones (Gonzales, 2008). Others created original designs by airbrushing, painting and/or adding embellishments including shoelaces in various colors and sizes to set themselves apart from others (Gonzales, 2008).

"The personalization of attire among hip-hoppers was, and remains, a way of 'making it your own': You had to take something and make it hip-hop" (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 235). Hip hoppers are inclined to personalize everything from jewelry to accessories such as the ever-popular name belt (a belt with a buckle featuring the wearer's name or nick name), as well as clothing. The personalization of one's attire was a significant element of a breakdancer's look. A b-boy or b-girl's name and the name of his or her crew was often displayed somewhere on their clothing (Schloss, 2009). While the importance placed on featuring one's name could be subliminally linked to the anonymity of slaves as they were stripped of their given names and made to carry their owners' names, this public declaration of individual identity coupled with the name of their crew – a proclamation of group membership – is directly derived from the "colors," or gang vests, worn by street gangs of the 1970's, a culture that was deeply influential on hip hop (Chang; 2005; Schloss, 2009). In essence, the look of a b-boy is paying homage to guys in the neighborhood that were considered heroes, e.g., pimps, drug dealers, outlaws and gang members (Schloss, 2009). Due to their influence on hip hop fashion, the designation b-boy/b-girl, once solely used to denote a breakdancer, now also refers to those devoted to hip hop culture and the b-boy style of dress.

Hip Hop's First Trendsetters

As the biggest hip hop act of the 1980's Run D.M.C. not only pushed hip hop into a new direction musically, but they changed the entire aesthetics of the culture by creating a personal style that remains the visual definition of hip hop today. Instead of taking cues from their predecessors, dressed like "cowboys, spacemen and other fantasy figures left over from the disco and funk eras," Run DMC decided to dress on stage the way they dressed on the streets (Cepeda, 2008, p. 160). The group's manager and then fledgling hip hop mogul, Russell Simmons, prompted the group to dress like their deejay, Jam Master Jay, who had been wearing a b-boy/street hustler look since junior-high school (Cepeda, 2008).

Run D.M.C assembled their street look with Adidas tracksuits or matching leather outfits, big Cazal eyeglasses, Stetson fedoras and "dookie" (oversized) gold rope chains (Frere-Jones, 1999). Fab 5 Freddy referred to the group's distinctive style as "the stick up kid look." "You know, the leather blazer, the Godfather hat, the black Lee jeans or the leather jeans and the Adidas, cats that wore that look had to be really official to pull that off" (*Just For Kicks*, 2005). Despite their hardcore image, the members of Run D.M.C were raised in the middle-class suburbs of Hollis, Queens.

Run D.M.C. contributed to an already growing sneaker culture with their 1986 hit single *My Adidas* in which they professed their love for the shoe and explained how one should wear them, with no laces:

Standing on 2 Fifth Street

Funky fresh and yes cold on my feet
With no shoestring in em, I did not win em
I bought em off the Ave with the tags still in em

"There were guys that wore…sneakers with no shoestrings. It was a very street thing to wear, extremely rough. They couldn't wear shoelaces in jail…[for fear that they might be used recklessly] but we took it as a fashion statement" (Ro, 2005, p. 164). The Adidas shell-toed Superstars they wore became such a trademark that when they achieved mainstream fame they scored a million dollar sponsorship deal with the company which lead to the release of the Run DMC sneaker and apparel line in 1986 (Gonzales, 2008). That same year the trio appeared on the December cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine wearing custom made gold Adidas shoe medallions (a gift from the manufacturer) attached to their "dookie" (oversized) gold rope chains (Oh, 2005).

The best selling female rap group of all time, Salt-N-Pepa named Run DMC as one of their biggest inspirations in terms of music and fashion (Oh, 2005). They often wore the same thing as their male counterparts, albeit with a feminine twist. Large, gold "bamboo" or "door knocker" earrings, spandex apparel, riding boots, prominent make-up and their signature asymmetrical hair cuts added a feminine sex appeal to their masculine garments. Salt-N-Pepa typified the look praised in LL Cool J's hit single, *Around the Way Girl* (1990), where he raps:

I want a girl with extensions in her hair
Bamboo earrings
At least two pair
A Fendi bag and a bad attitude

That's all I need to get me in a good mood

The women alternated between outfits featuring girly Madonna-esque party dresses and high heels to baggy shorts, oversized t-shirts with baseball caps and high top sneakers to tight, ripped jeans with midriff bearing tops and leather, sheepskin or shearing bomber jackets, all accessorized with an ample amount of gold jewelry.

The Golden Age

The label "Golden Age" (1985 - 1988) not only refers to what many hip hop connoisseurs consider the most innovative and influential era in hip hop, but it also accurately describes an era when gauche displays of wealth became standard practice among hip hop artists (Emery, 2004). By the late 1980's hip hoppers were making gold jewelry and prestige logos such as: Gucci, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Fendi and MCM, an integral part of their look (White, 1998). One of the most recognizable examples of such ostentation is the cover for Eric B and Rakim's critically acclaimed debut album, *Paid in Full* (1987). The legendary duo appeared on the album cover posing with cash in their hands in front of a backdrop of dollar bills, draped in gold chains, bracelets and rings, wearing leather Gucci suits, custom made by hip hop couturier, Dapper Dan. The image illustrates hip hop's obsession with material objects: money, gold jewelry and designer clothing (Emery, 2004).

British born emcee Slick Rick personified hip hop's materialism. In his debut single *La Di Da Di* (1985), Slick Rick describes his self-indulgent grooming rituals and penchant for designer goods:

I'm true to the style on my behalf.
I put the bubbles in the tub so I can take a bubble bath.

Clean, dry was my body and hair.
I threw on my brand new Gucci underwear.
For all the girls that I might take home,
I got the Johnson's baby powder and Polo Cologne
Fresh dressed, like a million bucks,
Put on the Bally shoes with the fly green socks.
Stepped out the house, stopped short, oh no!
Went back in, I forgot my Kangol.

Slick Rick the Ruler, as he called himself, adopted a lavish style of dress reminiscent of the flamboyant attire worn by blaxploitation film heroes and the lavishness of English royals (Oh, 2005). Along with his sophisticated wardrobe of tweed blazers, cardigan sweaters, slacks, Clarks Wallabees and furry Kangol hats, he was notorious for wearing a crown onstage, along with half a dozen thick gold ropes around his neck, a ring on every finger, gold teeth and even an eye patch encrusted with diamonds (Oh, 2005).

He attributed his fashion sense to his Jamaican background:

> A lot of Jamaicans were into Kangols and all that type of stuff. Gold teeth, that was a Jamaican cult heritage thing. It transferred over to Brooklyn, and then it became a real Brooklyn thing, and kids started to dress like real gentlemen (Oh, 2005, p.19).

He also credits his British upbringing for his unique style: "I came from a different country that had a different climate, so they were pretty much winter specialists. They had the tweed and all that" (Oh, 2005, p. 20). "They were into the Catholic uniform sort of thing. So there was a lot of gray, dark greens and burgundy [in what they wore]. It had an effect [on my style]" (Oh, 2005, pp. 19-20).

Afrocentric Era

Throughout the late 1980's and early 1990's many of hip hop's followers abandoned the trappings of conspicuous consumption in favor of jewelry and clothing reminiscent of the Black Power and Black is Beautiful movements of the 1960's (Emery, 2004). The desperate conditions of black communities – teenage pregnancy, imprisonment, poverty, drug abuse, disease, criminality, and decreasing life expectancy – due in large part to President Ronald Reagan's "trickle down" economic policies, also known as Reaganomics, precipitated a shift toward Black Nationalism among many African Americans at that time (Ogbar, 2005). Using their beats and rhymes to inspire positivity and encourage social justice, "conscious" emcees of the Afrocentric era, "galvanized a whole new righteous and intelligent movement in hip hop" (Emory, 2004, p. 72).

Public Enemy, one of the first hip hop groups to take a political stance, was undoubtedly the most outspoken and visible groups of the Afrocentric era. Its members were instantly recognizable. The front man, Chuck D, evoked the look of a Black Panther in his black leather bomber, black Wranglers, and black cap (Emory, 2004). Flavor Flav, the group's hype man, was garish with Italian sunglasses, day-glo clothing, a black silk top hat, much like those worn during the Harlem Renaissance, and his trademark, an outsized clock around his neck (signifying a time for change in hip hop) (Emory, 2004; Cepeda, 2005). Public Enemy's producer Terminator X, along with

Professor Griff marshalling the S1W (Security of the First Word), formerly a hip hop security organization, appeared to be militant in their berets and camouflage uniforms.

The Native Tongues, a collective of three groups - the Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, and A Tribe Called Quest – introduced a laid-back bohemian vibe (reminiscent of the jazz age) to the Afrocentric movement. They were branded “hip hop hippies,” due to their promotion of a concept they coined the D.A.I.S.Y. Age (Da Inner Sound, Ya’ll), which was used as a call for peace and harmony, that drew comparison with the days of Flower Power (Wood, 1999). Although the hippie label was unintended, the Native Tongues fashioned an eclectic style of dress reminiscent of the 1960’s hippie movement and the emerging grunge subculture.

Members of the Native Tongues trilogy mixed several patterns, textures and colors in one outfit and cut their hair into abstract shapes. They accessorized with peace sign pendants and custom made African medallions that incorporated crystals, cowrie shells, semiprecious stones, wood, leather, bones, Ankhs and even action figures. The following explanation was given when the artists were asked about their fondness for African inspired accoutrements:

> By wearing medallions with Africa on them, we were recognizing our origin and paying homage to that. We also wanted to make it known that the majority of gold and diamonds comes from Africa. So many people die just to acquire these things. We thought of it as a tribute, and as a way for us to show we were not in support of living for just material things (Oh, 2005, p. 70).

With the addition of rugby shirts, button downs and college paraphernalia the Native Tongues appeared to be at once urban, wearing layers of baggy clothing, but also decidedly preppy - a testament to their middle class suburban upbringing (Wood, 1999). Coincidently, traditional American sportswear brands like Polo, Nautica, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger became highly desirable among the aspirational hip hop set (Wood, 1999; White, 1998).

Hip Hop Designers

Designer Ralph Lauren responded favorably to hip hop's patronage signing Jamaican American model, Tyson Beckford, to an exclusive contract for his Polo Sport line in 1993 to appeal to urban consumers (Centric TV.com, n.d.). Tommy Hilfiger especially embraced hip hop culture featuring well known hip hop artists such as Method Man and Treach of Naughty by Nature in his runway shows and commercials (Spiegler, 1996). Hilfiger remained popular throughout the 90's thanks to rappers who wore his designs in music videos and to special appearances. For example, after Snoop Dogg famously wore an oversized red, white and blue Tommy Hilfiger rugby shirt on *Saturday Night Live* in 1994, it sold out of New York area stores the next day and soon afterwards the label became a hip hop staple (Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.)

The popularity of American sportswear among hip hoppers, inspired many African American designers to launch their own clothing lines in the early 1990's. The prototype urban fashion line, Cross Colours, founded in 1990 by designer duo Carl Jones and Thomas Walker, reached its peak in 1992 with sales reaching $89 million in revenue (Glickman, n.d.). Cross Colours was definitely distinguishable from other clothing brands on the market at that time. It featured caps, oversized jeans, jackets and T-shirts in a bright, almost blinding color palette. Initially targeted to young black men and women of the hip hop generation, the line quickly caught on with white suburban teenagers as it could be found in any major shopping mall throughout the country (Branch, 1993). The success of Cross Colours paved the way for subsequent hip hop fashion lines, including a denim line created by designer Maurice Malone in 1990, FUBU (For Us, By Us), established in 1992, Phat Farm founded by hip hop mogul Russell Simmons in 1992 and Karl Kani, a former Cross Colours designer launched his own line in 1994.

Just as hip hop designers are influenced by high fashion, high fashion designers are influenced by hip hop. In the late 1980's, Isaac Mizrahi, inspired by his elevator operator who wore a heavy gold chain, showed a collection featuring catsuits, gold chains, big nameplate belts, and black bomber jackets with fur trimmed hoods, a look *Women's Wear Daily* called "homeboy chic" (Wilbekin, 1999). Hip hop's influence was also apparent at the House of Chanel's 1991 fashion show where models sashayed down the runway in black leather jackets, baseball caps worn backwards and piles of gold chains (Wilbekin, 1999).

Various styles of hip hop dress were popular throughout the late 1990's and early 2000's. The gangsta style of hip hop dress, a look that included black ink tattoos, bandanas, plaid shirts, black or blue Chuck Taylor sneakers and jeans or Dickies work pants, worn baggy and "sagging" or low, was popularized by West coast rappers including Ice-T and Snoop Dogg. On the East coast, record executive Andre Harrell and hip hop mogul Sean "Puffy" Combs popularized the "ghetto fabulous" aesthetic, an ostentatious style of dress consisting of luxury brand clothing and over the top jewelry. During this time period, *bling* or *bling-bling*, a term coined by Southern rappers, the Cash

Money Millionaires, also became an expression frequently used in popular culture to describe any ornamented accessory from flashy jewelry to accessories such as cell phones and handbags adorned with rhinestones.

In recent years hip hop has become a more common element in the world of high fashion. Hip Hop artists are now regularly featured in high fashion magazines and are also becoming more involved in the business of high fashion. In 2005 rapper Andre 3000, one-half of the Atlanta based hip hop duo Outkast made *Vanity Fair's* International Best Dressed List. In April 2009 hip hop-influenced artist Beyonce appeared on the cover of *Vogue*. The House of Louis Vuitton collaborated with rapper/producers Pharrell Williams in 2008 and Kanye West in 2009 to create a jewelry line and footwear collection, respectfully. In 2008 singer Rhianna appeared in Gucci's fourth annual campaign to benefit UNICEF and hip hop entertainer Ciara signed with Wilhelmina Models adding fashion spreads in *Elle* and *Vogue Italia* to her resume. In addition, hip hop's elite have become permanent front row fixtures at fashion weeks both domestically and internationally.

Media Images of Black Women in Hip Hop

Currently, a myriad of styles exist for the female hip hopper, which may be influenced by her area of residence and/or sub-genre preference. Based on their performance styles, styles of dress and images portrayed through the media, Keyes (2000) finds that Black female hip hop artist can be placed into four distinct categories. These categories include the Queen Mother, the Fly Girl, the Sista with Attitude, and the

Lesbian. These categories, however, are not static as Black female hip hop artists are able to “shift between these categories or belong to more than one simultaneously” (Keyes, 2000, p. 266).

The Queen Mother category includes female hip hop artists who view themselves as true African queens - an image often suggested by their dress. Women in this category may adorn themselves with “royal or Kente cloth strips, African headdresses, goddess braid styles, ankh-stylized jewelry” (Keyes, 2000, p. 266). Queen Mothers often demand respect through their use of feminist lyrics. Hip Hop/Neo Soul artist Eryka Badu is an example of a Queen Mother.

The Fly Girl is thought to be an erotic figure rather than an objectified one; she is independent, sexy and stylish. She chooses to wear chic clothing and fashionable hairstyles, jewelry, and cosmetics. Hip hop’s fly girl image highlights aspects of Black women’s bodies considered undesirable by mainstream American beauty standards. Short skirts, tight jeans, and high heels accentuate the round buttocks and thighs, seen as attractive features within the Black community. Hip hop influenced R&B artist Beyonce represents the Fly Girl image.

Hip hop’s “bad girls,” Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown can be classified as Sistas with Attitude. These women are known for their aggressive, arrogant and defiant manner as well as their hyper-sexualized images. Kim and Foxxy introduced sex and glamour to hip hop, “delivering rhymes perched on three-inch Manolo Blahnik stilettos” and decked out in revealing designer clothing (Thomas, 2000, p. 121). Their look, which came to be known as “ghetto fabulous” spoke to the consumerism and materialism that marked the hip hop generation (Thomas, 2000). Hip hop newcomer Nicki Manaj, often compared to Lil' Kim in terms of style of dress, also represents the Sista with Attitude persona.

Lesbian hip hop figures may appropriate male clothing and/or male gestures. Female rapper Queen Pen is perhaps the first to perform under an openly gay status though other female artists are also rumored to live a lesbian lifestyle. MC Lyte sported an androgynous style in order to fit into the male-dominated hip hop industry. Rapper/actress Queen Latifa traded in her African-inspired attire worn early in her career for baggy jeans, Timberland boots and oversized T-shirts in the early 1990's as she felt her previous look made her less accessible to fans (Thomas, 2000). Da Brat, the first female MC to sell more than a million records, mixed her tomboy style with glamour and materialism; a look afforded through the sale of her platinum selling album (Thomas, 2000). Hip hop artist Missy Elliot continues to wear styles, appropriated from male hip hop culture, perhaps in an effort to be seen as an equal in the male dominated hip hop industry.

Historical Media Images of Black Women

In addition to the images of Black women found in hip hop, many controlling and oppressive images of Black women that originated during the slave era are likely to have an impact on the way Black women dress. Three of the most common media images of Black women include the Matriarch, the Sapphire and the Jezebel. The Matriarch image portrays Black women as mothers, who are either heads of the household with equal or more authority than the fathers, or are single mothers" (Baker, 2005, p. 15). Both the Sapphire and the Jezebel images are extrapolated from that of the Matriarch.

The Sapphire is seen as an “independent and headstrong Black woman…often portrayed as overpowering her male counterpart and threatening his sense of manhood” (Baker, 2005, p. 15). The Sapphire image, while viewed as a dominant figure is also seen as a comedic figure because of her exaggerated sassiness. Therefore she is often not taken seriously.

The Jezebel is defined as the seductive, sexually charged Black woman. Constructed during slavery by white male slave owners, the Jezebel image was first used to rationalize the sexual exploitation of female slaves (Collins, 2000). Although these images were formed some time ago, they have become a part of American culture and act as the foundation for the creation of new images.

The Matriarch, the Sapphire, and the Jezebel as well as the Mammy (the asexual female slave or domestic servant) and the Welfare Mother (the lazy, uncontrollably breeding burden on society) images of the past have influenced the development of eight more current stereotypes: the Diva, the Gold Digger, the Freak, the Dyke, the Gangsta Bitch, the Sister Savior, the Earth Mother, and the Baby Mama. Stephens and Phillips (2003) suggests that the aforementioned representations are not simply two-dimensional “images,” but rather they are three-dimensional “sexual scripts” which young Black women use to understand how they think about themselves, how they relate to others, and how others relate to them. Several factors have led to the emergence of these new sexual scripts, most notably the advent of the hip hop culture in which these sexual scripts are embedded.

“To witness these scripts in action, one only needs to turn on their television, particularly music video programming…. where females in Hip Hop videos are depicted as having both great sexual power and sexual desires"(Stephens & Phillips, 2003, pp. 13 - 14). Elements of *neocolonialism* (the economic, cultural, or political influence of a corporation or dominate group over a subordinate group) can be blamed for this extreme sexualization of young Black women in the hip hop industry. Stephens and Phillips (2003) also state:

> What cannot be overlooked [however,]…is how African American women as a group retained a dialogical relationship with the music industry and the larger culture and thus vitally shaped the discourse about themselves and their sexuality. Thus, to characterize African American women as mere victims of the neocolonizing process would be to overstate their lack of agency….[Although] African American women, now dominate the construction of their own cultural [identities]…the self-definitions produced by [this] group are, sadly, far from devoid of the remnants of racism and sexism [and the objectification of Black women] (p. 13).

This is evident in the development of the current sexual scripts as they are obviously based on the negative stereotypes of the past.

The Diva script is unique as it exemplifies middle class status. The Diva lives up to European standards of beauty as she often embodies or strives to maintain the ideal look, which most often includes long, straightened hair, a fair complexion, and a slender build. She is seen as sexy, but not overtly so, which is a testament to her middle class upbringing. While the Diva projects an air of independence, she selects sexual partners based on their ability to support and bolster her high-maintenance image and social status.

The Gold Digger is also concerned with economic advancement. However, she is willing to use sex as a means to get what she wants. The Freak, on the other hand, seeks to have sex solely to fulfill her own sexual desires. Because Freaks exhibit true sexual empowerment, they are often the envy of their sexually-inhibited peers.

In contrast to the aforementioned scripts, the Dyke chooses not to engage in sexual acts with men. As a result of this choice, Dykes are seen as acting out against men after being badly hurt either emotionally or physically in a previous heterosexual relationship. The Gangsta Bitch takes on aspects of the Dyke's persona but remains sexually available to the opposite sex. "The term 'gangsta' reflects the culture in which they operate, while 'bitch' is used to label their aggressive and self-sufficient attitude (Mitchelle, 1999 as cited in Stephens & Phillips, 2003, p. 25). Due to the rigors of urban life, a Gangsta Bitch does not expect a love relationship from men; she has become emotionally detached. Therefore, she views sex as a means to release stress rather than as a vehicle to express affection.

The Sister Savior and Earth Mother scripts are unique. They do not provide a space for male-defined behavior because "the sources of their decision-making processes are external to the hip hop culture" (Stephens & Phillips, 2003, p. 28). Sister Savior's abstinence from sex is a reflection of her affiliation with the black Church or mosque and its traditions, bound by patriarchy. Because of her religious dedication, the Sister Savior is sheltered emotionally, and thus not exposed to the skills needed to develop a sexual identity in her own right. On the other hand, the Earth Mother portrays a well-developed sense of self and sexual identity that she unabashedly expresses in varied ways, such as her choice of hairstyle (usually an alternative to the traditional standard of beauty) or her political stance. The Earth Mother script is the least sexualized script because men tend to be intimidated by her self-confidence, which in turn, significantly decreases her prospects in the dating pool.

The Baby Mama script is established once an illegitimate child is born. The title, Baby Mama, is also an apt description of a woman who desires nothing more than to bear a man's child, whom she will intentionally use as leverage to maintain a continuous relationship. The identity of the Baby Mama remains in the hands of the male, who is allowed to stray, yet is always granted sexual access to his Baby's Mama. The Baby Mama script is not at all new; it is found at the core of the foundational images of the past: the Matriarch, the Jezebel, the Sapphire, the Mammy and, of course, the Welfare Mother as they are most often single mothers as well.

These image categories of women in hip hop are likely to influence the dress of Black women from the hip hop generation. What must be understood about each image category is that young women are able to pick, choose or combine these images based on their surroundings or the situation at hand. In other words, "how a young woman projects herself at a nightclub may be different when compared to her behavior at a basketball game, church social, or on a first date" (Stephens & Phillips, 2003, p. 35). It is also important to note that a young woman may also choose not to conform to any of the images discussed, depending on how comfortable she is with herself and around others.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

My research utilized two main theoretical positions: feminist theory and cultural theory. Feminism is a social and political movement concerned with women's oppression and the ways and means to empower women. The movement gained prominence at the turn of the 20th century as feminists campaigned for women's right to vote and access to education and professions (Scott & Marshall, 2005). Second wave feminism came about in the late 1960's with the onset of the Civil Rights Movement along with other cultural theories (i.e., queer theory, black studies), which sought to decentralize white, straight, male, cultural authority. Black feminists found white feminism to be simplistic and Eurocentric, if not racist, for ignoring the stark differences between women that arose from imperialism, racism, and the historical legacy of slavery (Scott & Marshall, 2005). Their critique of white feminism showed its limitations and pinpointed its narrow focus, i.e. that concerned itself only with the needs of White women.

Black feminist thought, a critical social theory that has developed through the contributions of first wave and contemporary Black feminists included the work of Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins, among others. Because clarifying Black women's experiences and ideas is central to black feminist thought, interpreting them requires a diverse set of knowledge. While this study looks at the experiences of educated Black women, Black feminist

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) underlined that women previously not considered intellectuals in black communities such as mothers and "other mothers" (women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities), members of black churches, musicians and poets, also offer intellectual thought worthy of serious consideration.

> For example, Imani Perry (1995) suggests that the music of Black women hip hop artists serves as a new site of Black women's intellectual production. Despite the fact that hip hop contains diverse and contradictory components (Rose 1994) and that popularity alone is insufficient to confer the title 'intellectual,' many more Black women listen to Queen Latifa and Salt 'N' Peppa than read literature by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison (as cited in Collins, 2000, p. 16).

Although black feminist thought places Black women at the center of analysis, it does not seek to dismiss the contributions of others. As Collins (2000) asserts, "Black women must be in charge of black feminist thought, but being in charge does not mean that others are excluded" (p. 18).

Collins (2000) also contends that Black women especially in academia, have an "outsider-within" status. This concept explains many Black women's reality of being within, yet simultaneously being excluded from dominant culture. Occupying this social location allows Black female academics to identify injustices that Black women experience within the larger society, which often goes unrecognized.

Intersectionality, a Black feminist perspective introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) and widely used by authors bell hooks (1994) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), is a major analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities, including race, class, age, and geographic location.

This concept is also helpful for interpreting how these intersections contribute to the differences that exist between and within groups. Therefore, the concept of interesectionality guided my analysis of the lived experiences of the African American women involved in this study.

I also used the concept of reflexive modernity from cultural theory because the concept of reflexive modernity has significant implications in the understanding of everyday life (Bennett, 2005). A major contribution of theorists' Michel de Certeau (1984) and John Fiske (1989), was that they viewed the consumer as an "active audience" member. Because my goal is to empower my research participants and other female members of the hip hop generation, their insight constitutes the basis of this study.

The theory defining everyday life as a cultural space can be attributed to Michel de Certeau (1984). de Certeau diverged from previous mass culture theorists in that he considered the production of mass culture and the process of developing media products and cultural industries to be a two-way process, rather than a one-way flow. For de Certeau, both producers and consumers play a part in determining the aesthetic meanings of images, text and objects provided by the media and cultural industries.

Fiske (1989) further developed the ideas of de Certeau by taking a second look at the relationship between the individual and late modern consumer culture.

> Fiske argues that the act of cultural production is largely due to the creative potential of the individuals whose consumption of cultural products and images results in the creation of new meanings. According to Fiske, at the level of their industrial mass production, objects and images are simply 'products' created for economic gain. It's only when such products enter the public sphere and are

> appropriated by individuals for use in everyday life that they become culturally meaningful (Saukko, 2003, pp. 47-50).

Relying on the above theoretical frameworks and insights, this research analyzed the role of African American women as both active consumers and producers of hip hop dress.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Focus Groups

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective with the use of focus group interviews as the informed method of inquiry. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) define focus groups as:

> a non-directive style of interviewing… where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic of focus for the group…The aim of the focus group is not to reach consensus about, or solutions to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different view points on an issue. Focus group interviews are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain, since lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive, interviews (p. 150).

Focus group interviews became increasingly popular after the 1950's when market researchers began to use them to investigate consumer motives and product preferences; today focus groups dominate consumer research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). There is now an increasing use of focus group interviews in academic research as well (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Morgan, 1997).

As a research method, focus groups not only occupy an intermediate position between interviews and participant observation but also provide access to forms of data that are not easily obtained with the above two methods (Morgan, 1997). As opposed to individual interviews and participant observation, focus groups allow a researcher to observe interaction on a topic in a short amount of time and immediately gather data about the similarities and differences of opinion among participants (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups also allow researchers to obtain quality data with more subjects than other qualitative methods.

Although focus groups offer some advantages to the other qualitative research methods, disadvantages exist which may not make this method suitable for certain studies. Focus groups are considered less naturalistic than participant observation because the moderator creates and directs the group and therefore has influence over the group's interactions (Morgan, 1997). Because of the moderator's influence there is always some uncertainty about the accuracy of the participants' responses. In addition, the group itself may influence the nature of the data it produces. As opposed to individual interviews, it remains an issue, in the case of focus groups, that interaction between group members can potentially influence what each individual will contribute to the group. In other words, when some participants discuss certain topics in the presence of others it may affect their responses. This is an inevitable aspect of focus groups that should be considered as a potential disadvantage for any given research project (Morgan, 1997).

Morgan (1997) described the three basic uses for focus groups in current social science research as (a) supplementary, (b) multimethod and (c) self-contained. Focus groups can be used as a supplementary source of data in studies that rely on another method as its primary source of data (Morgan, 1997). In studies that utilize focus groups as a supplementary source, the group discussions either serve as a preliminary means to obtain data in a primarily quantitative study or as a follow-up method to gather data needed to supplement the primary method (Morgan, 1997). For example, as a preliminary technique they can be used to generate survey questionnaires. Or as a follow-up technique, they can be used to clarify poorly understood survey results. Focus groups used as a supplemental source of data allow researchers to maximize the results of their primary method.

Focus groups can be used in multimethod studies that combined two or more means of gathering data in which no one primary method outweighed the other (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups used in multimethod studies add to the overall data collected from other qualitative methods, such as participant observation and individual interviews. An ethnography or field study is a common multimethod study, which traditionally utilizes multiple research methods such as observation, questionnaires and interviewing (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups are a likely addition for ethnographic studies whereby group as well as individual interviews can be used to gather data. “The goal in combining various qualitative methods is to use each method so that it contributes something unique to the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Morgan, 1997, p. 3).

Focus groups used as a self-contained method serve as the primary means of collecting qualitative data, just as participant observation or individual interviewing can serve as primary means of gathering data (Morgan, 1997).

> Using focus groups in this manner requires a careful matching of the goals of the research with the data that the focus groups can produce to meet these goals. Accordingly, the uses of focus groups as a self-contained method often leads to an emphasis on research design (Morgan, 1997, p. 3).

For this study, focus groups are used in a self-contained fashion and are therefore the principle source of data.

The focus groups took place at Forshe boutique, a women's clothing store located in the Sweet Auburn Historic Disrict of Atlanta, GA. This venue was chosen not only because of its relevance to fashion, but also because of its inner-city location and historic signifigance. The Sweet Auburn Historic Disrict in downtown Atlanta stretches along Auburn Avenue. It used to be referred to as "the richest Negro street in the world," due to the many African American businesses, congregations, and social organizations established there during the early 20th century (National Park, n.d.). "The Sweet Auburn Historic Distric reflects the history, heritage and achievements of Atlanta's African Americans" (National Park, n.d., para. 1).

Participants

Focus groups can include 4-12 people "…who are unfamiliar with one another and have been selected because they share certain characteristics relevant to the study's questions" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 114). For this study, four focus group sessions were conducted with each group having 6-8 participants. Twenty-seven women participated in this study. The first focus group session had eight participants; the second had six participants; the third also had six participants, while the fourth and final group had seven participants. Each session lasted between 2-3 hours.

All focus group participants were African American women residing in the Atlanta, Georgia area. Their ages varied between 26-46. They were chosen as members of the hip hop generation (born between 1965-1984) because they were expected to share a similar worldview. The original selection process included questions about the class position of the participants. Participants self-identified as middle-class, ranging from lower middle-class to upper middle-class and varied in terms of marital status. Some of the participants were single or single with children, while others were married or married with children. Most participants hold at least one college degree and all have professional occupations. Participants were recruited through a snowballing approach involving friends, colleauges, co-workers, and acquaintances. Messages posted via the internet on websites such as www.craigslist.org, www.facebook.com, and www.myspace.com were also used in order to reach a larger audience. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the participants. Consent forms were distributed to all participants at the start of the focus group sessions (see Appendix A). A focus group protocol was developed consisting of primary questions and secondary questions or probes designed to encourage discussion among the participants (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, audio-recorded tapes of the focus group sessions were transcribed. To interpret the data, a thematic content analysis of the transcripts was carried out. No a priori coding themes are used with a thematic analysis. Instead, coding categories are developed using consistent themes that are prevalent within the data. Thematic coding categories emerge after the researcher has spent a prolonged amount of time immersed within the texts. Marshall and Rossman (2011) state that:

> The process of category generation involves noting patterns evident in the setting and expressed by participants…the researcher does not search for the exhasustive

> and mutually exclusive categories of the statiscian but, instead, identifies the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting (p. 159).

Since the goal of this study was to seek understanding, a thematic content analysis was critical because it allows for accurate understanding of the data, which is particulary important since coding themes are consistent categories found within the transcripts rather than pre-established measures.

To begin the thematic contect analysis, the recorded focus group sessions were transcribed. Next, a chart was formed to organize the focus group questions and the participants responses from each session. The actual coding procedure took place following this, whereby highlighter markers were used to color code related segments of text. From the highlighted text, one or more keywords were attached to each color-coded segment of text to permit later identification of the statement. Following the coding procedure, a second chart was created to organize the keywords with the corresponding color-coded text. After a re-examination of the chart, involving the regrouping of related and unrelated text, reoccuring themes were identified. The following chapter will involve a presentation of the themes garnered from this data set.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Two theoretical frameworks, intersectionality and reflexive modernity, are used to guide the thematic content analysis of the data collected for this study as it relates to the research objectives discussed below. Intersectionality, a Black feminist perspective introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) theorizes how various socially and culturally constructed categories such as gender, race, class, age, and other axes of identity including geographic location and generational category, interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels. This concept is also helpful for interpreting how these intersections contribute to the differences that exist between and within groups. Here intersectionality theory is used to examine the lived experiences of middle class African American women of the hip hop generation residing in the Atlanta metropolitan area and how these variables shape their lived experiences.

The concept of reflexive modernity is used as it also has significant implications in the understanding of everyday life (Bennett, 2005).

> Rather than existing as a site of exploitation and oppression, [the concept of reflexive modernity views] everyday life…[as] a site of contestation and struggles; a site on which a plurality of cultural values give rise to competing sensibilities through which individuals reflexively define themselves, their relationship to others and their place in the physical and symbolic order of things.

Michel de Certeau (1984), a major contributor of the reflexive modernity theory, contended that producers and consumers both engage in determining the aesthetic meanings of images, text and objects provided by the media and cultural industries. Theorist John Fiske (1989) added that “the act of cultural production is largely due to the creative potential of the individuals whose consumption of cultural products and images results in the creation of new meanings” (Saukko, pp. 47-50). Therefore, this study acknowledges the role of the participants as agents in the construction of cultural meaning in their everyday lives.

Research Objective 1

To achieve the first objective of this study, to describe the consumption habits of dress influenced by the hip hop culture among middle-class Black women in the Atlanta metropolitan area, various questions were asked of participants during each focus group session in order to obtain a detailed description. The questions that were posed to address the first objective asked that participants discuss and/or describe their favorite places to shop, how often they shop, their shopping budget, brand preferences and the factors they consider most important when buying a garment. To analyze the data in regards to this particular objective, a thematic analysis was completed, which yielded three distinct themes that illustrate the consumption habits of Black women in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The three themes most often revealed in the data include: (1) unique styles of dress, (2) aesthetic appeal and high quality, and (3) alternative shopping methods.

Unique Styles of Dress

The desire to wear unique styles of dress has always been a major factor in African and African American culture. The earliest depictions of West Africans show that they were unconventional in terms of what they wore. “They freely borrowed items of apparel from new peoples with whom they came in contact….[and] they wore clothing made from a variety of materials woven into a rich assortment of patterns” (Foster, 1997, p. 71). This trend can also be linked back to slavery when slaves altered European clothing to their liking using spinning, weaving, dyeing and sewing techniques (White & White, 1998) and has been seen throughout various stages of hip hop’s development. Early practitioners of hip hop culture, many former gang members, took their knack for fabricating gang attire to represent a certain “set” (a specific area or neighborhood) and applied it to modifying their hip hop gear. Hip hoppers continue to customize their t-shirts, jeans, shoes and accessories to make them one-of-a-kind and to set themselves apart from others.

The focus group data gathered for this study revealed that acquiring unique styles of dress is a significant factor in the consumption habits of the participants. It proved to be one of the prominent themes discussed in all of the focus group sessions; and was often one of the first factors mentioned. Two participants in this study expressed their liking for unique styles of dress through their preference for boutiques over mall-based retailers. One participant a flight attendant by the pseudonym Christa, from the second focus group (FG2) asserted, “I don’t want to look like the Old Navy commercial; I don’t want to look like the Gap; I don’t want to look like any of that stuff. You know the cookie cutter, the khaki, that’s just not [me], like there’s no individuality in it.” Another participant a singer/songwriter by the pseudonym Kimberly, from the third focus group (FG3) commented by saying:

> I like to have something that I know not a billion people in Atlanta are going to be wearing. You know what I mean? Like when H&M opened up [in Atlantic Station] it was so funny because everybody had the same clothes on. I just had to laugh like this is crazy the world that we live in when we're all just dressed alike. So it's kind of cool when you can go to boutiques and find something different.

A real estate agent by the pseudonym of Leslie, a participant from the first focus group (FG1), utilizes the mall for basics but seeks out boutiques for unique items. She commented by saying:

> I'm more boutique-y. If I'm looking for just a sundress or something like that, I'll hit the mall. But, if I want something special, I'm going to do a boutique or a small shop because I don't want mass market. [I] don't want to walk [into a room] and be like she got my dress on! So, I try to stay away from the mall pretty much.

The same participant recalled an episode from a popular African American 90's sitcom, starring rapper/actress Queen Latifa, which depicted this very occurrence:

> It's like that episode of Living Single where [Régine] went to that party and she had on [the same dress as two other women]! She chased those girls around, poured wine on them and all that stuff. [That's] how [I] feel…I want to be an individual.

Another participant from FG1, a graduate student by the pseudonym Brittany concurred with Leslie stating, "I like boutiques too. I rarely go to the mall, unless I'm looking for something specific like [a t-shirt] but, it's usually boutiques."

Several participants also enjoy scouring vintage and thrift stores to find one-of-a-kind or rare pieces. One participant from FG1, an occupational therapist by the pseudonym Donna finds that shopping at vintage stores reduces “the likelihood of seeing somebody else in something that you have on. It’s like you can’t get this, this is 30 years old.” A graphic artist by the pseudonym Terri from FG3, commented “I like to go to the cheapest store ever, the Goodwill, because you can find so much stuff in there and you would never think that you would find the stuff that you do at the Goodwill and Plato’s Closet (a gently used consignment store for teens and young adults).” She added, “When I went [on a trip] to New York I was in this really rich area so their Goodwill was crazy, they had all kinds of stuff, so I kind of came up on that.”

An alternative to vintage and thrift stores that participants also embrace is off-price department stores, such as TJ Maxx, Marshall’s and Ross. The hip hop community has always had fondness for exclusive name brand and luxury goods and so they like off-price retailers because they allow shoppers to purchase designer merchandise at discounted prices. Christa, from FG2 contended, “It depends on the area. I would [shop there] but it depends on what location it’s in because some places you have to dig and I don’t like digging.” Another participant also from FG2, a minister by the pseudonym Saundra, noted that although “you still have to dig…going to Marshall’s is like going to the thrift store, but sometimes the digging pays off.”

Two participants however preferred a more edited selection of one-of-a-kind clothing, eliminating the “rummage” process that often occurs when one opts to shop at vintage and thrift stores or off-price retailers. An event planner by the pseudonym Yvonne from FG2 stated, “I prefer consignment shops versus thrift stores because it’s a lot easier to find things." Saundra also from FG2 frequents estate sales for one item in particular. She declared:

> I'm a coat collector and [they] have to be vintage; so I don't go to the thrift store. When I'm home up North I go to the estate sales. When you go to the estate sales you find these amazing coats that have been around for a long time but are barely worn. Most of them are wool, they're very vintage and they all have mink collars. They have the tie [sash], you know they're all just very unique like that."

Some participants stated that shopping in a variety of areas and locations was the best way to find unique fashions. A participant from FG3, a teacher by the pseudonym Ann admitted, "I kind of shop all over. I will go to the mall; I love Forever 21. If I see something cute I'm going to buy it. Target, Marshall's, TJ Maxx, I just shop in all the stores." A paralegal from FG2, by the pseudonym Monica, stated: "I think it depends on what you're looking for cause I think as black women we always know what store or what type of store to go to, to get what we need." A comment made by a health insurance specialist by the pseudonym Mary from FG1 puts this idea into perspective:

> Every store is based off demographics. If you shop around different areas, you'll find something at South Dekalb or at Greenbrier (urban malls located on the specializing in sneakers and hip hop inspired clothing), go to Lenox (upscale mall featuring several high-fashion designer boutiques) or go to North Point in Alpharetta (a super regional suburban mall featuring a variety of specialty stores) and you'll see the same [clothing] line with different stuff. If I want something urban I can go to Stone Mountain, if I want something classy I can go to

> Dunwoody, you know the same stores and I know it's based off demographics. Even Wal-Mart does that. It's just based off where you are.

Another participant, a nurse by the pseudonym Tiffany from FG1 gave an example of this:

> I live in Sandy Springs but I know I'm not going to find a pink, green and brown sneaker, in Sandy Springs, you're just not going to find it. So like if I want a certain color…I know that I can go to Greenbrier Mall (laughs). You know what I'm saying? Or if I go to South Dekalb Mall, I know I'm going to find it. If I go to Little Five [Points], I know I'm going to find it.

Aesthetic Appeal and High Quality

In addition to the uniqueness of a fashion item the aesthetic appeal of the garment is also an important consideration among the participants. While aesthetic value can be a matter of individual taste, it is often thought to be the sum of a particular group's desires or values (Kaiser, 1990). Based on this observation, hip hoppers are said to be generationally, demographically and spiritually predisposed to the African American aesthetic (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). Aesthetic values in relation to dress include: color, style, fabric/trim, quality and fit (MacDonald, Lazorchak, and Currie, 2009). "Key facets of [the African American] aesthetic include an affinity for loud colors, the desire to create one's individual expression and the use of exotic features (unusual patterns and combinations)" (O'Neal, 1998, as cited in MacDonald, et. al, 2009, p. 256).

Despite the prominence of the African American aesthetic in many of the urban apparel lines on the market today, when asked if they purchase urban brands most participants said that they do not because they find them to be unappealing. Many participants remarked on their distaste for urban brands. A store manager, referred to as Jennifer from FG1 commented: “I think a lot of it is gaudy, like the House of Dereon with all that gold lame and spray paint. It’s a bit much.” Another participant from FG2, a business consultant referred to as Josie, added the following: “It’s just poorly done with all these little appliqués pressed on. I’m just not feeling it.” A dental hygienist referred to as Candace from FG3 remarked: “Sometimes it just looks cheap. Lastly, a singer from FG1, referred to as Gloria, concluded: “I just always feel a little bit disgusted at them for continuing to only make items for us that look like that when you don’t see [the designers] wearing things like that.”

From these statements, it is apparent that not all of the participants have an affinity for the traditional African American aesthetic, such as loud colors, unusual patterns and rich embellishments (O’Neal, 1994). The middle-class and professional status of the participants may explain these findings; it has been argued that loud flamboyant hues generally imply lower social and economic classes (O’Neal, 1994; White & White, 1998). Conversely, one participant from FG1 an administrative assistant by the pseudonym Janice revels that she supports urban brands. She said the following:

> I’m going to support the black man, that’s where my influence comes from. I’m going to give the man a chance, I’m going to try his jeans on and see if they fit because I want to support him in his fashion efforts. After the [Tommy] Hilfiger statement was made (referring to the rumor that designer Tommy Hilfiger does

> not want Black people to wear his clothing) [I feel] like why am I giving this man money when these guys have labels out there that are just as good, made just as well.

In an effort to substantiate her statement the same participant continued by adding: "It has to be quality though. It's not just because ok, well this is Sean John, I'm going to get it. It has to be fashionable and just as good of quality because you don't want to support something that's half made."

Other participants had strong sentiments about the importance of purchasing quality clothing, shoes and accessories as well. Some general comments made about quality include: "To me bad quality is a deal breaker. I mean if the stitching is hanging all off…it just looks cheesy" (Mary, FG1) or "If you purchase something that's going to give you longevity…you don't have to go [shopping] as often" (Candace, FG3). Jennifer from FG1 said that her appreciation for quality stems from her upbringing:

> My mom raised me to look for quality. That's just the way she is; you buy quality shoes, you buy quality purses. I mean she'll look at [a pair of] shoes and she'll be like [Jennifer] those are a hundred dollars but they're not real leather, don't buy those. So, I will happily go and spend a few hundred dollars on a quality pair of shoes or boots. Not necessarily sandals because [they're] so transient and from summer to summer I may want something else but in the winter quality shoes are what I'm looking for. I'm looking at the stitching; I'm looking at how it's going to hold up and how versatile it is.

This emphasis on quality has long been a characteristic of the African American aesthetic. During the 1900's "high quality and fashionable attire became an important aspect of asserting status among [affluent Blacks]" (Gatewood, 2000 as cited in Branchik & Davis, 2009, p. 44).

> Despite their economic prosperity, elite Blacks were subject to a number of inequalities. They were excluded from buying homes in some neighborhoods, and some upscale restaurants and shops refused their patronage. Thus, elite African Americans engaged in marketplace activism for important reasons. For example, to avoid receiving inferior products from racist store clerks, they demanded brand names as an indicator of quality (Hale, 1998 as cited in Branchik & Davis, 2009, p. 48).

A participant from FG2, an environmental scientist by the pseudonym Casey exemplifies this belief opting to purchase brand name items because of their perceived quality.

> I buy stuff for it to last, so I'm not buying cheap stuff. Brand is important to me because I want to wear this next year. [It's] like when I went to college and I bought a cheap iron, like oh an iron is an iron, I'll buy a cheap one. Well I was buying another one six months later. If you buy quality from the start you get your money's worth in the long run.

Josie from FG2 had a difference of opinion, she said that quality is not solely based on brand name alone: "I've bought stuff from Macy's that…[is] supposed to be quality…and I've had to take it back. So, I think you just have to kind of get to know what to buy in any [store you go into]."

Two participants found that versatility was at least as important as quality. Tiffany from FG1 simply stated, "Yes, that's my thing, it has to be versatile…quality and versatility. Can I wear it to work, can I wear it out? I like to step out after work and still look fly." One participant from FG3, a business owner, by the pseudonym Nancy, commented by saying:

> I think for me…I try to see if…it's a transitional piece, if I can work it with something else. Will I be able to [wear] it next year? You know stuff is coming in and out so…I want to make sure I can have it a couple of years down the line and it still looks pretty good.

The middle class status of the participants may be an indication of the importance placed on purchasing quality merchandise. Many participants seem to want the best products that their money can buy with emphasis placed on the versatility of the item, a factor used to justify expensive purchases. Some might even make purchases priced out of their budget to give the illusion that they are of a higher class. In addition, because some of the participants may possibly be first generation members of the middle class raised in working class families, wearing high quality merchandise could hold even more significance to them if they were not afforded such items during their childhood.

The fit of a garment, which is generally a challenge for Black women due to their often curvier body type, is another aesthetic concern that was frequently discussed among focus group participants. Tiffany from FG1 asserted, "Jeans are always an issue with black women, period. I think so many of us have big hips and small waists." Donna, another participant from FG1 jokingly responded, "It's not an issue, it's a wonderful thing"! Gloria also from FG1 concurred stating, "It's a good thing, I've always wanted to be thicker"! Despite the shopping challenges associated with having a voluptuous figure, most participants considered this an asset and have sought out brands that compliment their physique. Janice from FG1 explained:

> I don’t usually go urban. But what I will go urban for is jeans…[because] I want a decent pair of jeans for my shape. My girls who’ve known me since college [will tell you that] I’ve always had a small waist to hip proportion. You can’t go to any store and find jeans like that. Even though I hate the cat (referring to the logo used on urban clothing label, Baby Phat), I’ll put that cat on…because that cat fits my butt better than any jeans. That’s the way [Kimora Lee] has her jeans shaped. I don’t like Apple Bottoms (women’s clothing line created by rapper Nelly); [they] don’t work as well.

A journalist by the pseudonym Kelly from FG3 explained,

> You have to know your body type and you have to know your shape and know that you can’t wear certain things. I like Baby Phat jeans…[because] they’re the only jeans that fit my waist and hips in the right proportion. In any other jeans I’m gaping [in the back] and I’ve got to take them up and wear a belt. But those are the jeans that I can wear and be comfortable in.

Alternative Shopping Methods

In addition to the previously mentioned themes, the use of “alternative” shopping methods was also common among participants in this study. Online shopping is one alternative to in-store shopping preferred by many participants. While research indicates that Blacks and Hispanics are less likely to own a computer than Whites there is no significant difference in internet usage between Whites, Blacks and Hispanics (Ono & Zavody, 2002). In addition, Blacks appear to shop online more frequently and spend more than non-Hispanic Whites do (Ono & Zavodny, 2002).

When asked if they shopped online, most participants said that they do because it is convenient and cost effective. Factors that may contribute to the participants' tendency to shop online are their middle class, social status, which means that they are mostly college educated and thus highly computer literate or have access to computers. In addition, they are likely occupied in positions where they have immediate computer access, allowing them the convenience of shopping at work.

Yvonne from FG2 explained why she preferred to shop on-line by saying, " I like ordering stuff online because I'm about convenience, and time is money." Kimberly from FG3 cited savings that attracts her to shopping online: "I'm definitely into eBay because it's cheap." The question also prompted the participants to discuss their favorite online shopping sites. The following dialogue developed among participants in FG1:

> I saw a website called GoJane, it has these shoes on it (Gloria).
>
> I bought a dress from there for a wedding; it is gorgeous (Donna).
>
> But I'm stuck on the shoes like, oh my god (Gloria).
>
> Yeah, everything is oh my god (Donna).
>
> My sister ordered some and I was like, these are quality (simulating tapping the bottom of a shoe), you know (Gloria).
>
> GoJane (Janice)?
>
> Yeah, GoJane.com (Gloria).
>
> I like 15dollarstore.com. Everything is 15 dollars…shirts, tops, pants. I got the cutest little halter top dress I wore for my birthday last year (Mary).
>
> Is it free shipping (Leslie)?
>
> No, it's free shipping if you go over a hundred dollars (Mary).

> That's a lot of items at 15 dollars a piece (Brittany).
>
> Yeah, so it's worth it (Mary).

Still, when it came to online shopping two participants had opposing views. Ann from FG3 commented by saying, "I don't shop online because I don't trust it. I'm scared someone might get my credit card information." Janice from FG1 simply stated, "I personally don't shop online because I like to try on my clothes before I leave the store." Tiffany from FG1 has a strategy to avoid the sizing issues often associated with online purchases. She explained: "I don't online shop unless it's like Nine West. I stick with a brand, you know whatever the designer is, that way I know what the [fit is like] in the store; so when I'm online shopping, I can stick with that same designer." Leslie from FG1 agreed: "I shop at Metrostyle.com for work clothes and their clothes are very reasonable. So, I'm like if it doesn't fit, I've only lost like five dollars for shipping. So, for the most part since I order from them so much, I know what fits."

Some participants also utilize non-conventional shopping methods such as shopping parties. Monica from FG2 likes the convenience and networking opportunities that these offer. She said:

> That's why I started doing the little fashion parties or the shoe parties where you're in an intimate setting, you're having fun, it's you and your girls and you're meeting new people, you know. I can take my time and there's no [sales associate] standing over me closing a sale. Then you've got opinions, you have people to help you just to say this is cool. I know that the focal point of the day is going to be shopping.

Saundra from FG2 also uses her social network to obtain clothing. She admitted, "I utilize my friends who are fashion stylists when I'm going someplace special and that's a nice connection." Yvonne from FG2 uses her business acumen to get the best deals. She explained:

> I'm a wholesale type person. I don't pay retail for anything. Typically, I'll set up a business. I love shoes, so I literally set up a shoe company so I can get that wholesale discount, so that I can get into the Apparel Mart. I go to the Apparel Mart for jewelry, shoes, clothing, handbags.

To justify her approach the participant continued by saying: "I mean it's like if you want to live [a certain lifestyle], you kind of have to play the game, I think, in the whole fashion thing because it's just like the mark up on retail, it's so over exuberant." By using various alternative shopping methods participants demonstrate that they are savvy shoppers, from saving time and money by shopping on-line to combining business and pleasure by participating in shopping parties or taking advantage of wholesale opportunities.

Research Objective 2

The second objective of this study, was to determine what social, cultural, political, and economic factors influence the sartorial choices of hip hop-inspired dress among middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area. To elicit discussion to reach the second objective, several questions were asked, including: "Who are some celebrities or figures in entertainment whose style you admire?"; "Do you watch African American and/or fashion or hip hop culture related television programs?" and "Do you consult friends and/or family members for style advice?" The findings that emerged through a thematic analysis of the data for this research objective revealed two themes that exemplify the factors that influence Black women's sartorial choices. These two themes are: (1) stepping out of the box, (2) considerable family influence and (3) regional influence.

Stepping Out of the Box

In American society it is expected that we can dress in the fashions that we choose, however, there are social norms that govern the established and approved ways of doing things in regards to dress, speech, and appearance. Throughout history African Americans often had to conform to Eurocentric standards. The ability for African Americans to express themselves through dress was severely restricted during slavery. Consequently, African Americans have pushed boundaries throughout history to embrace aspects of their culture that have been suppressed or devalued. Post slavery, newly liberated Blacks often deliberately, consciously, and publicly tested the boundaries of freedom by dressing in colorful and, what often seemed to whites, bizarre combinations of clothes (White & White, 1998). Hip hop, is a culture notorious for testing the norms, especially in the areas of language and appearance.

From the collected focus group data it became clear that stepping out of the box in terms of dress is a social and also somewhat conscious political decision made by the participants. When participants were asked to name a person whose style they admired, First Lady Michelle Obama was always among the first figures mentioned in each focus group session. For many African American women, First Lady Michelle Obama, represents their ideal. "Obama is an affirmation that black women can have a successful marriage, a family and a career, despite a bombardment of messages over the last two decades that it is not possible" (Glanton, 2008). By challenging the stereotypical and often hypersexualized media images of Black women such as the Mammy and the Jezebel, Mrs. Obama is changing the way they are viewed, especially through her fashion choices that are widely publicized (Collins, 2000).

One participant, a personal trainer by the pseudonym Stacy, from FG4 remarked on Michelle Obama's style by saying:

> She's taking us to a whole new level of having your arms out. I don't know if your parents are like mine, but my mom thought it was the worst to go sleeveless. She thought that was too exposed. I personally like sleeveless and halters. But you know you go to church and you ask the question, is this appropriate? Can I wear this?

Another participant from FG4, a social worker by the pseudonym Patrice, concurred and added the following, "She's also creative. I like how she puts stuff together." Yvonne from FG2 declared, "She's the new Jackie Kennedy. Everything she wears we're going to wear." Not all participants were fans of Michelle Obama's style, however. In opposition to the other participants in her focus group, Leslie from FG1expressed her distaste for the First Lady as a style icon by stating:

> I'm going to be a devil's advocate and I know I'm going to get a lot of hate here, but I have not really caught on to the whole Michelle Obama thing yet. She has not impressed me with her dress. I don't like anything that she wears.

Whether they loathed or loved the First Lady's style many participants agreed that, it's the fact that "she steps outside the box" as Nancy from FG3 put it, that keeps people interested and talking.

When asked if there were any hip hop or hip hop-influenced artists whose style they admired, the participants seemed to prefer hip hop or hip hop-influenced artists who dressed in a more refined manner as opposed to those who “stepped out of the box.” Christa from FG2 remarked, “I don’t particularly care for J. Lo (Jennifer Lopez), but every time I see her she looks classy and elegant.” Monica also from FG2 added, “I think Alicia Keys is can be very elegant at times.” Tiffany from FG1 commented by saying, “I like Amarie. I like the way she dresses. It’s not super revealing it’s just stylish, very stylish.” Gloria also from FG1 stated, “when Keyshia Cole wore that navy dress on the Oscar red carpet, it was absolutely beautiful. Her hair, everything was just stunning.” Whitney from FG4 declared, “I like Rihanna’s laid back look. Not when she’s wearing a corset or something to perform in, but just her everyday look.” Patrice from FG4 also admired Rihanna’s style. She commented by saying, “Rihanna is very classy and edgy at the same time. She was in Vogue or In Style [Magazine] and she had on this light chiffon dress, but she had on this heavy, quirky jewelry. She just rocked it and I was like that girl is bad!” Other participants admired the style of hip hop or hip hop-influenced artists whose body type mirrored their own. Mary from FG1 stated, “I think Beyonce always looks pretty. I can see some things on Beyonce and go, you know what, that’s attractive on you and I could probably rock too that depending on what it is.” Nancy from FG3 commented by explained:

> I like Queen Latifa; I think for a big girl she knows how to carry herself real well. I really like Queen Latifah because I’m top heavy. I look at her and I see her pull off certain things. That’s how I base my [admiration], I look to see if [that person] has a shape like mine.

Because hip hop has become a hybrid cultural phenomenon, which borrows from and shares cultural aspects with other cultures, it is not surprising that the participants shared a liking for other media figures with a fashion sense including popular White entertainers, known for their eccentric style. A graduate student by the pseudonym Brittany, from FG1 asserted, "the Olsen twins (Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen) are killing it!" "I definitely dig Gwen Stefani," declared Kimberly from FG3. Christa from FG2 commented, "I like Pink, she doesn't try to fit a mold." Casey also from FG2, added "Amy Winehouse has a cool style, she's kind of vintage, too." A number of the participants also admired the style of eccentric Sex and the City character Carrie Bradshaw, played by Sara Jessica Parker. Gloria from DG1 asserted, "Sarah be rocking some shoes." Brittany from FG1 agreed, "She does. Her shoes are off the chain." Leslie from FG1 added, "I like Carrie. Carrie wears beautiful messy clothes. I like how she throws it together, it's so nonchalant."

Participants not only admire figures in entertainment who create a unique sartorial identity, but do so themselves as they contend that they simply do not follow trends. As Leslie from FG1explained:

> People know me cause I wear long flowing dresses and I have been wearing them before they became popular. Like that was just my style. Recently, I went to the club and every woman in there had on a long sun dress, a maxi dress, cause maxi dresses are in right now. So, now, I'm going to wear the shortest dresses I can find! I just hate going along with the status quo.

Other participants may take a current trend and wear it in an unconventional manner. For example Josie from FG2 described how she would wear the recurring boy shorts trend:

> I like the boy shorts. But if I was going to do boy shorts, cause I think I can pull them off, I've got to have the tailored long coat and then you need a thigh high boot. That's my version, that's a more mature, sophisticated version.

Donna from FG1remarked that maturity may be the reasoning behind members of her focus group's aversion to following trends. She declared, "the older you get the more you buy things for how they look on you, not because they're trendy."

Another participant, Terry from FG3 gave her take on trends: "As far as trends and stuff, I might go back to like the 20's or 30's, to the flapper days, or something like that. Just switch it all up, mix it all up and make it, you know, look good."

Participants were also prompted to discuss their individual preferences regarding mixing and matching prints. The following dialogue developed among participants in FG3:

> Stripes and polka dots still don't match (Candace).
>
> But I rocked that the other day and people were loving it (Terry).
>
> It's how you do it (Nancy).
>
> Right (Kimberly).
>
> I wore a pin striped suit with a dotted shirt (Terry).
>
> Oh yeah, you can do that (Kimberly).
>
> See, I've done that (Nancy).
>
> Were they small dots (Candace)?
>
> The dots were big but the stripes were small (Terry).
>
> Oh, ok, I've done that (Ann).

> But you can’t do large both (Candace)?
>
> No (laughter) (All)!

Several participants discussed how they “stepped out of the box” at work in terms of their professional business attire. Christa from FG2 admitted to deliberately challenging corporate dress codes:

> When I worked for the federal government, before I became a flight attendant, I was so defiant. I wore my suits but I would do like a strappy sandal no hose because I don’t wear pantyhose for anybody but the airline. I’m serious! And my suits were fitted, they weren’t loose; even my flight attendant uniforms were really tailored and fitted.

Jennifer from FG1also recalled her experience of not complying with her company’s dress code:

> I probably was the only person in the firm that pushed the envelope cause I would wear short set suits, you know, and they had never seen that before. I got sent home for my short set suit. To me it’s no different, I mean you wear a skirt or shorts, it’s still a suit.

When asked why they would deliberately challenge their company’s dress codes some participants felt that their professionalism should not be based on what they wear. As Christa from FG2 asserted, “I don’t think you should be judging me by my clothes.” Whitney, a mortgage broker from FG4 stated, “A lot of it has to do with how you carry yourself. If you’re professional in your demeanor, you can get away with the open toe shoes.” However, other participants disagreed with this notion and found that it was important to present a professional image at work. A social worker referred to as Patrice from FG4 contended, “I think you always need to have certain level of professionalism.” Josie from FG2 went even further. She stated:

> I’ve consulted a lot of places and because I’m a consultant I do just that. I go from one place to another but also because I’m a consultant I have to abide by their dress codes but as a consultant I usually tend to step it one notch up so that there’s no issues.

Family Influence

Along with the desire to “step out of the box,” the influence of family as an important social and cultural factor that had a profound effect on the participants of this study also emerged from the data. The connection between family and fashion among African American women can be linked to their deep connection with the Black Church. It is expected in most African American churches that individuals present their best appearance for worship. Slaves even saved their best clothing for Sunday church services. African American women are known for wearing fine dresses and suits and elaborate hats to church. African American girls are taught from an early age by the female members of their family what is and what is not appropriate for Sunday church service and otherwise. Thus, for African American women a strong family influence on sartorial choices becomes ingrained from their earliest memories.

When asked if they consult friends and/or family members for style advice most participants agreed that they tend to seek out their family members’ opinion during the shopping process. Patrice from FG4 explained why she prefers to go shopping with her sister:

> I usually bring my sister because I know that she's going to tell me ok, that looks good, now let's go. …If the two of us are in one store we can get twice as much damage done. So I'm just like ok I can't fit this and she will go find something else that's better for me. I hate shopping and trying stuff on, it's just such a job for me. She makes it easier.

A high school teacher by the pseudonym Tia, from FG4 added:

> I like that stamp of approval from my family. So every once in a while I like to have somebody say oh yeah that looks good or no come on now, you know that's not working. You kinda need that in your ear sometimes.

Ann from FG3 shared sentimental reasons for why she chooses to shop with family members:

> I grew up with sisters and my mom. My mom was very fashionable. She styled me very well. Mom was into that whole Pam Grier and Christie Love look. I was wearing tams with the balls on top, in high school I wore riding boots with suede and cowhide. My mom and my sisters were very influential in terms of my style. So for me, shopping has always been a family affair.

Some participants found that aspects of their African American heritage passed on from previous generations have an influence on their fashion choices. An internet technician by the pseudonym Char, from FG4 stated:

> I think we were raised aware. Because, you know, my grandmother used to say, dress like you're going somewhere, even if it's Saturday morning and you're getting ready to just run some errands, the day can switch at the drop of a dime, so you have to be ready for something.

Tiffany from FG1 recalled, “When I listened to my grandmother and great-grandmother talk back in the day, it was also the undertone of like and you’re representing the family so you don’t want to be looking a mess.” Sandra from FG2 contended:

> We’re always looked at, you know, we as black people, we always have to prove ourselves, so to speak, so those generation of women and men, like my parents will never get on a plane dressed down. But that was just the era in which they were raised, like you dressed to go places like, and they instilled that in us, too.

Kimberly from FG3 proclaimed, “In the South we’re raised to be ten steps ahead of Caucasians or whoever else. Ann, also from FG3, added:

> I think it’s more or less based on an image. You dress like you’re somebody you know; you dress like you’re worth something so they can never look at you negatively. This is why they have such an issue with the culture of [young men] sagging their pants, because you look like a bum or you look like a thug. It’s always about dressing the part. If you go to an interview, dress the part if you want to be successful. I think that’s basically what they were trying to say. Like she said, in the South you had so much racism and oppression there like, they’ll respect you more, if you look a certain way. If you look professional, you’ll act professional you know you’ll act the way you dress.

When asked if she thought this idea was specifically related to the South, she responded by saying she believed it was a cultural thing.

Regional Influence

Regional influence also proved to be an important social and cultural factor in the sartorial choices of the participants. Focus group members that relocated to Atlanta from smaller towns found that city living changed their perspective on fashion. Char from FG4 commented on this by saying:

> Coming from a small town it is important to me to be stylish I guess because Atlanta is a big city and also most people are fashionable here so you know, you put more importance on it since most people dress nice you want to dress nice, too.

Participants from the North had a different perspective on fashion in Atlanta. Kelly from FG3 remarked:

> Back home, in places like Chicago and Milwaukee, you have to wear a suit. You better be suited and booted, you know what I'm saying, and have the right color leg hose and everything. Whereas here I'm always like should I do the suit or should I just throw on something because it's more casual here.

Nancy also from FG3 concurred, and added:

> Where I come from up North we never did sandals with suits and bare legs. That just was not standard. So it's hard for me to let that part of me go. But I swear to you I'm always like what should I do here in Atlanta? There is no code, if you will, in terms of attire. I mean I've gone to black tie events and it's not even black tie.

According to the focus group participants who relocated to the South, the differences between going out dress in the North and going out dress in the South are stark. Stacy from FG4 explained:

> When you go out up North men wear suits. Women wear a dress to look nice; know what I'm saying. Here they are comfortable going out in jeans, jeans and

> tennis shoes. I'm just like oh help me…

Whitney, from FG4, added the following:

> Atlanta does not require the type of sexiness that goes on in the Midwest and the North. In the Midwest and in the North, they get sexy. No, it doesn't even require it and I say require it because when you go out, you're overly dressed and you feel like the odd one out, so sometimes we conform to this Southern type of fashion which is jeans, all types of jeans, cute pumps or stiletto with any type of cute tops.

Although the research findings yielded several social and cultural factors that influence the participants' sartorial choices, the data did not reveal any significant political and economic factors impacting the participants' appearance. This finding could be attributed to the participant's middle class status. The black middle class in Atlanta is perhaps becoming more politically and economically complacent in recent years, due to the opportunities and privileges afforded to them as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and because of the changing political landscape of the New South.

Research Objective 3

The third and final research objective sought to describe the various methods of producing a distinctive sartorial style, influenced by the hip hop culture among African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Some of the questions included: "How important is your hair style, makeup and nails to your overall appearance"; "What clothing, shoes, accessories or cosmetics do you consider to be wardrobe must haves?"; "Do you have a signature item that expresses your personal style or that is indicative of the hip hop culture?" The findings that emerged through a thematic analysis of the data for this research objective revealed two themes that exemplify the factors that illustrate the various methods used by African American women to produce a distinctive style of dress influenced by the hip hop culture. The two themes that emerged from the data are: (1) pronounced emphasis on personal adornment, and (2) focus on color coordination and immaculate dress at all cost.

Pronounced Emphasis on Personal Adornment

"Adornment can take many forms: permanent body modifications such as scarification, tooth filing, body piercing, tattooing, and cranial deformation; or temporary transformations achieved through dress, the manipulation of hair, the application of cosmetics and the wearing of jewelry" (Heath, 1999, p. 50). Although the practice of adornment is universal, the use and meaning of personal adornment objects within African American culture are often dynamic and multifaceted (Heath, 1999). "Before Europeans invaded Africa, people of the fourteenth and fifteenth century empires of Ghana, Mali, Egypt, Kush and Songhai adorned themselves in gold "collars, rings, necklaces, earrings, crowns and even gold-dipped fabrics" (White, 1998, p. 15). Within these societies adornment practices were used to confirm membership in specific lineages or cult groups, indicate political power or subordination, express personal wealth, ensure health or success in one's occupation and mark rites of passage (Heath, 1999). While few specific historic adornment practices appear to have survived among Africans transplanted to the New World, new practices emerged within slave communities as succeeding generations of African Americans forged social identities in their new surroundings (Heath, 1999). Objects of personal adornment had varied uses during slavery.

> Men and women used them to define themselves within the confines of the quarter, exhibiting individual preferences by the combinations of buttons that fastened their coats or the arrangements of beads strung around their necks, wrists or waists. Beyond reflecting personal taste, adornment practices functioned as meaningful social markers within the larger enslaved community beyond plantation boundaries, perhaps identifying those seeking a spouse, those with specialized occupations, or those with memories of Africa (Heath, 1999, p. 50).

The use of objects of adornment continued throughout African American history most notably among practitioners of the hip hop culture. The fat gold “dookie” chains, like those worn by rap group Run DMC and the large gold “door knocker” earrings worn by female hip hoppers throughout the 1980’s were regarded as symbols of economic power.

This study revealed that personal adornment was the primary method used by the participants to produce a distinctive style of dress. Jewelry proved to be the most common object of adornment used among several participants. Sandra from FG2 talked about her large collection of distinctive jewelry with a sense of pride:

> My jewelry is ridiculous. I have an armoire. My mother literally was like this has gotten out of control so she actually bought me the huge dresser for jewelry. It has everything. I need to have the bracelets, the rings, and the necklace. If it has a matching piece I might not wear it all together, but I’m buying it.

Other participants, while not as extravagant as Sandra still expressed an affinity for idiosyncratic jewelry and stated that they have to have jewelry at all times. Char from FG4 stated, “I have to have earrings and I prefer to have a necklace but I’ve got to have earrings.” Tia, also from FG4 added, “I like earrings too, either hoops or tear drops and I have to have a necklace." Donna from FG1 commented by saying, "I typically wear two rings, but I have at least one."

In addition to jewelry, some participants use other accessory items to adorn themselves. Jennifer from FG1 likes "a big variety of different color shoes, purses and scarves." Terry from FG3 bases her wardrobe around shoes stating, "Shoes are like a key piece in an outfit, you know what I mean? You can make a whole outfit just based on your shoes alone." Patrice from FG4 prefers to use a statement piece to define her style, she explained, "I have this lemon yellow rain coat; it's like one big punch of color. When I wear it I just tone everything else down because it acts as an accessory."

Lauren, a salon owner from FG2, emphasized her hairstyle as her main tool of accessorizing her outfits, "I have to have hair. I have to put my 'hat' (referring to a wig or a weave) on with my outfit." Interestingly, besides her, nobody else mentioned hair. This is all the more surprising because hair grooming and ornamentation is a highly developed art form, which has a long and important history and cultural significance among the African Diaspora (Foster, 1997). This can be attributed to the fact that many African American women do not feel comfortable discussing their grooming rituals in public. The episode of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in which comedian Chris Rock promoted his documentary, *Good Hair* (2009), which focuses on African American women's hair, is a perfect example of such behavior. Several audience members criticized the film for exposing African American women's beauty secrets. One viewer responded to the clips from the film by saying, "it's not necessary to let every white woman know all that we do to compete and be accepted today…Chris, our hair is not a joke. There are some things we need to keep to ourselves to maintain our dignity"

(Oprah.com, 2009). On the show Chris Rock drew the conclusion that young women seem to be more open about their hair, whereas their mothers and grandmothers are more guarded (Oprah.com, 2009).

Focus on Color Coordination and Immaculate Dress

Some aspects of African American dress may have been derived from African customs, whereas others may have developed in response to slavery. Slaves tended to wear a combination of not only different pieces of material in one garment – sometimes they had no other choice - but also various items of clothing within one assemble; they also had an affinity for bright and vivid colors that "clashed violently" (White & White, 1998). By the nineteenth century, this practice of contrasting colors, materials and patterns in clothing came to be associated with the African American aesthetic. Nevertheless, combining what European Americans perceived as unlikely elements of dress may have been simply a matter of making do with materials at hand.

The importance of looking clean which meant wearing matching clothing that is free of stains and devoid of holes and any sign of wear is an important principle to the practitioners of the hip hop culture and has been omnipresent throughout African American culture (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). A key aspect of the b-boy/b-girl style is color coordination. It was imperative that the colors in a breackdancers outfit coordinate and match the sneakers (which should remain spotless) and other accessories worn with it (Schloss, 2009). "To some degree the cleanliness ethic may derive from the precariousness of life in urban communities of color in which severe dislocations of structural inequality persist and ensemble dressing provides a public platform for defying social and economic deprivation" (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 236).

Despite the fashion world's distaste for overly coordinated outfits, when asked if it was important to wear color coordinated outfits, most participants agreed that this was an important aspect of dress for them. Monica from FG2 commented on this by stating:

> I know the stylist say matchy, matchy is not in, I mean you're not supposed to do that but I like to have my shoes match my outfit, you know. I'm not going to have red shoes with this (brown patterned) top.

Josie also from FG2 agreed and added, "I know matching is out now, but it has to coordinate. Not necessarily color coordinate though. Just coordinate with each other, you know." In addition, Stacy from FG4 remarked, "I like to match. I like to have my shoes matching either the skirt or the top. I like to have something matching somewhere in the outfit." And Janice from FG1 affirmed, "I like my shoes to match my top or something. I need my make up to match something that I have on. Yeah I like to be color coordinated." One wonders if this is not a subconscious reaction to the fact that their ancestors had to make do with mismatched clothing and, therefore, contemporary African American women want to always demonstrate that they are in full control of their appearance.

However, not all participants shared the same sentiments in regards to color coordination. Brittany from FG1 commented by saying:

> I don't match very often. I think its just my style but, I just won't be like not matching wearing crazy colors but it'll be colors that go together but aren't necessarily the same color. I probably won't wear a purple shirt, purple shoes, purple earrings, you know, but it'll be a color that looks good with purple, you know.

Gloria also from FG1 agreed stating, “the yellow shirt and the yellow shoes, yeah, I’m not with that.” While Ann from FG3 declared “I do a little of both, I like to match, but then every now and then I have a pop color just out of the blue.” For these participants their lack of desire to match their clothing may be due to their middle-class status. They may not feel the need to express control in their appearance or it could be linked to a desire to blend into the mainstream.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study was set up to explore the influence of the hip hop culture on the fashion choices of middle class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The premise guiding the design of this study was that hip hop has a distinct influence on the sartorial choices of middle class, African American women in this geographic location. However, surprisingly, the data gathered for this study in four focus groups with 27 participants did not support this argument. In fact, the study found few indications that the sartorial choices of the members of the hip hop generation were directly influenced by aspects of the hip hop culture. Three factors may account for this result, (1) the age, the middle class status and lifestyle, and the professional identity of the participants, (2) the participants' area of residence and (3) the wide scale commodification of hip hop as a cultural, social, economic, and political movement.

Hip hop culture was originally created by poor, working class youth as a source of entertainment and as a medium to vent about their social conditions and marginalized position within the American society (Kitwana, 2005; McLeod, 1999). The qualitative data gathered in four focus groups with 27 participants revealed that middle class African American women of the hip hop generation in the Atlanta metropolitan area seem to show no significant difference in terms of fashion choices from other women of the same age group and class status. The researcher's experience working in a women's boutique in the Atlanta metropolitan area also support this finding. This finding is likely due to the participants’ primary identification with their middle class and professional status over their membership status in the hip hop generation.

The results of this examination also suggest that the participants of this particular study no longer relate closely to the original socioeconomic, cultural and political underpinnings of the hip hop culture. For example, the use of statement-making “righteous” regalia, common among “conscious” rappers of the Afrocentric era, such as beaded jewelry and clothing styles reminiscent of the Black Power and Black is Beautiful movements of the 1960’s, were not found. Also, no examples of alternative dressing influenced by media image categories of black women, discussed in the literature review, were found. Although many of the participants expressed a liking for wearing large amounts of jewelry, which may be influenced by the hip hop culture, this pronounced emphasis on personal adornment could also be true for White women of the same age group. The participants’ penchant to shop at off-price department stores is comparable to their White counterparts as these retailers have continued to do well even through the recession because mainstream consumers also enjoy shopping for brand names at discounted prices.

It was found, however, that a very small percentage of the participants showed a fondness for hip hop brands in an effort to support the culture or because these particular brands flatter their body shape, but only when the quality of the item was not sacrificed. Some participants also mentioned that they were more fond of brand names when they were younger, especially brands that were promoted by their favorite rappers. Lauren from FG2 recalled:

> When I was younger it was a status symbol in a sense to dress like Run DMC, wear Kangol hats or dress like the girl that LL Cool J wanted. Those were all fashions that were designed by a White man who owned Kangol or Adidas or Levi's, but we wore them because those rap stars or those hip hop stars wore them.

However, she quickly emphasized that she had since matured past that stage and stated:

> But I've grown out of that. That was twenty years ago. I have no idea, lets say, what kind of girl LL Cool J might want today and I certainly don't want to be the type of girl that Soldier Boy wants, I don't want to dress like her. But, I think if we had to envision what does a girl dress like who wants to be what one of these hip hop stars want, the only image we have is what's in the video and I can say no, I don't want to dress like that.

These statements suggest that some participants view hip hop as a period in their lives rather than a culture that they still consider themselves to be members of. Because of their middle class status, the participants' professional and personal identities were very similar, while this likely would not be the case with working class women. The participants' professional and middle class status and lifestyle appears to have a more important bearing on their sartorial choices than their cultural identification with hip hop.

Several participants also commented on how they no longer identify with hip hop due to the increasing misogyny and violence in hip hop lyrics. Donna from FG1 stated:

> Hip hop has changed. I'm not with today's hip hop. I'm more into [conscious rappers like] Common and Mos Def. I like the rappers that talk about something

> and the rappers that don't disrespect me or call me a bitch. I ain't no ho, I ain't no bitch, I'm the person you take home to mama.

Mary, also from FG1, added:

> To me the more hip hop evolves the less interested I become because their lyrics have no meaning. Basically some of it is degrading and when they're quote/unquote "telling it like it is" from where they're from, they're really promoting violence.

Some female hip hop artists have challenged hip hop's misogyny and violence against women in their own lyrics. For example, Queen Latifa boldly proclaims, "you gotta let him know, you ain't a bitch or a ho," on her Grammy award winning single U.N.I.T.Y. (1993). Nevertheless, many of the participants have chosen not to support hip hop culture entirely due to its degradation of black women.

The participants' area of residence may also contribute to their lack of a stronger identification with the hip hop culture. Many of the participants live in the Atlanta metropolitan area, which not only includes the city of Atlanta but several bordering counties as well. In fact, fewer than one in ten residents of the metropolitan area live inside Atlanta city limits (The Bookings Institute, 2003). Therefore, although the participants may work and entertain themselves in the city, they actually live in suburban areas, which appear to influence their style of dress as well as their dress practices. Atlanta's predominantly black population, currently at 52.61%, may also account for the fact that the participants do not focus their appearance on the distinct features of hip hop fashion ("Atlanta," 2008). Because the participants constitute the majority of the population in Atlanta, they simply may not feel compelled to distinguish themselves sartorially as much as they would in other places where the black population is more disenfranchised.

This study would have likely yielded different results, had it been conducted with participants living in the intercity neighborhoods of Atlanta, where by virtue of their socio-economic status, residents are reminded of hip hop's original social goals and political purposes on a daily basis. Although hip hop has now spread all over the world, it originated in New York City's South Bronx borough, and it is still a decidedly urban culture. The dynamics of the urban environment create a milieu in which more emphasis is placed on projecting one's public identity and social and cultural affiliations with sartorial means than elsewhere. For example, one participant, Whitney from FG4 related her inner city upbringing to her affinity for a hip hop style of dress as a teenager:

> Growing up in the late eighties in high school, our thing, at least for me, as an inner city kid, I wanted to dress like the "around the way girl," you know, that LL cool J wanted. I wanted the big earrings, I wanted to be kind of the female version of Run DMC. I had my Stan Smiths [Adidas sneakers], I had my Levi's, I had my Starter Jacket. But, I'm growing up in inner city Detroit where that was cool.

She went on to mention that there was a ritual among her peers known as "checking in" where someone would walk up behind you and say "checking in." "That meant you needed to handle your clothes (by making sure your attire was up to par) or risk being beat up or shot." This statement suggest that dressing in a hip hop style of dress was not only a means to express ones cultural identity but a way of life among teenagers in the inner city.

The participants of this study may also be somewhat removed from the hip hop culture because it has been commodified. Hip hop has been transformed from a culture with a distinct political and cultural message into a capitalist cultural commodity. Because hip hop has been taken over by the American consumer culture, the participants may no longer view hip hop as a decisive tool of self-expression or as a means of constructing a unique African American cultural identity as they likely did in their youth growing up in working class families. This is evidenced when the participants were asked to define hip hop and what it means to them. Terri from FG3 responded to this question by saying:

> I think from a musical standpoint, music has evolved from just quality to what sells anyway. So it's not really about the content it's about entertainment, the same as any industry, it's about the bottom line. What's the bottom line? Money. What sells? Right now conscious rappers or conscious song writers and singers, they're not in style because that's not what sells anymore.

Another participant, Monica from FG2 stated:

> The music I listen too now is not hip hop. When I think about hip hop, I think about Common, I think about Mos Def, I think about De La Soul and I think about all those other great hip hop [artists]. It's almost like it's in the past, like it's not now. I still have those old albums because it's what I like. I like real music. It's just not as conscious as it used to be. So, I don't consider what anything is right now hip hop. I can't base what I am off of today's hip hop.

Yvonne, also from FG2 added, “[hip hop] started off as a feel good, party type thing and then it turned into this gangster type thing. Now it’s just all over the place. It falls into different genres and it’s infused into different genres.”

Other participants expressed that while they still view hip hop as a culture, it is a one that is in danger of fading away. As Leslie from FG1 explained:

> Hip hop has gone from just being music to being a culture. Now hip hop is the way you talk, the way you dress. When you have Apple Bottoms on Oprah and it’s on her favorite things list, it’s bigger than just music. The music is the big part that’s kind of fading, everything else is growing.

Stacy, a participant from FG4 aptly describes the current state of hip hop. She stated, “it’s definitely a culture that is slowly fading, but there are some remnants left. There are some [hip hop artists] that are still doing real music outside of pop culture and the gimmicks.”

Despite what was expected, the results of this study suggest that the sartorial choices of the participants, although members of the hip hop generation, are less influenced by hip hop’s cultural, social and political underpinnings than their African American cultural identity. Therefore, this study not only illustrates the steadfastness of African American culture, but also the decreasing importance of hip hop which has become so commercialized that it has lost its edge and is becoming reduced to just another fashion trend, although it is a global success. This study revealed that among middle class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area, identification with African American culture is considerably stronger than identification with hip hop culture.

Limitations

There are three major limitations to this study. The first is that this study was only able to capture the experiences of middle class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Therefore, the findings presented in this thesis are limited to those relative to this particular population. The second limitation of this study is that it uses focus group interviews as its primary data collection method. While there are several advantages to using focus groups, "they are largely limited to verbal behavior and self-reported data, consist of only interaction in discussion groups, and are created and managed by the researcher" (Morgan, 1997, p. 8). In other words, one-on-one, in depth interviews, even with the same participants, may have yielded different results and more nuanced insights into the cultural choices of the hip hop generation. The third limitation of this study is that it did not provide any new data to help retailers better market merchandise to middle-class African American females of the hip hop generation. This is because no significant difference was found among the participants of this study in terms of their fashion choices, from other women of the same age group and class status.

Directions for Future Research

One direction for future research could be to replicate this study using participants with different demographics. Because hip hop is a youth-based urban culture, the researcher may garner entirely different results among younger, working class African American women from inner-city areas. A second direction for future research would be to include participant observation as research method. Because I did not witness the participants in various settings, a night club for example, I was unable to determine if the clothing they wore in this environment was hip hop influenced or not. Participant observation would have given me the opportunity to observe participants in a naturalistic setting. “Three major advantages of naturalistic observation are (a) an ability to collect data on a larger range of behaviors, (b) a greater variety of interactions with the study participants, and (c) a more open discussion of the research topic” (Morgan, 1997, p. 8). Third, as suggested above, in-depth interviews with participants would perhaps yield richer data and allow to find out more about the interviewees’ own reasoning regarding their preferences of African American cultural influence over hip hop influence in their sartorial presentation.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

The University of Georgia
Research Participant Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study titled "Hip Hop's Influence on the Fashion Choices of Black Female Consumers in Atlanta, Georgia," which is being conducted by Samii Benson, The Department of Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors, 404-313-3352 under the direction of Dr. Katalin Medvedev, The Department of Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors, 706-542-4307. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have information related to me returned, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore consumerism as it applies to African American females of the hip hop generation. This study aims to answer the following question: How does the hip hop culture influence the fashion choices of African American women?

Benefits: The benefits that I may expect from this research are that participants will gain insight into the reasonings behind their clothing choices and personal behaviors. The participants will have access to the study and thus will be provided with the opportunity to learn how their behaviors and choices are important and that they have meaning. In addition, participants will have the chance to share their feelings about fashion and the hip hop culture.

The procedures are as follows:

Duration: The researcher will schedule a date, time, and location to meet and conduct the focus group interview that is suitable for each participant. The focus group session will last a couple of hours.

Particulars: The purpose of the study will be explained clearly to the participants and any questions the participants have will be answerered at the time the question is posed. Participants will be offered a small token of appreciation for their participation.

Audio Recording/ Stimuli: The researcher will inform the participants when the audio recording will start. The participants will then answer questions asked by the researcher. During the interview, the researcher will provide the participants with photographs and advertisements featuring women wearing hip hop-inspired dress to stimulate the participant's reponses.

Follow up: After the interview, the researcher will remind the participants of their rights as research participants. They also will be given time to ask any additional questions. The participants may be contacted again after the first focus group interview occurs if the researcher is unclear or unsure of any of the recorded interview data, or also if the researcher sees the need in scheduling a follow-up interview

Discomforts, Stresses and Risks:
No discomforts of stresses are expected. No risk are expected.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
THE RESULTS OF PARTICIPATION WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL. NO INDIVIDUALLY-IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION ABOUT ME, OR PROVIDED BY ME DURING THE RESEARCH, WILL BE SHARED WITH OTHERS WITHOUT MY WRITTEN PERMISSION. ALL RECORDED DATA OBTAINED FROM FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WILL BE SECURED IN A LOCKED DRAWER IN THE RESEARCHER'S HOME THAT ONLY THE RESEARCHER HAS ACCESS TO. TAPES WILL BE ERASED IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TRANSCRIPTION. BOTH THE INTERVIEW TAPES AND THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS WILL NOT BE PUBLICLY DISSEMINATED. TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS WILL BE KEPT ON A FLASH DRIVE AND SECURED WITHIN THE LOCKED DRAWER IN THE RESEARCHER'S HOME. TRANSCRIPTIONS WILL BE KEPT FOR A PERIOD OF OF THREE (3) YEARS AFTER THE RESEARCHER'S THESIS HAS BEEN SUBMITTED; AFTER THREE YEARS THE TRANSCRIPTIONS WILL BE ERASED FROM THE FLASHDRIVE.

Further Questions:
The Researcher will answer any futher questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 678-788-0611

Final Agreement:
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Telephone	Email	
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612

Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199: E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Interview

(1) Greeting and Ice breaking

a. Introduce myself

b. Have each participant introduce themselves

(2) Opening Questions

a. How important is fashion to you?

b. Can you all define hip hop and what it means to you?

c. Has the hip hop culture influenced your life?

  i. If so, how?

d. Do you think you have a unique style?

  i. If so, describe it.

(3) Questions related to Objective 1:

To describe the consumption habits of dress influenced by the hip hop culture among middle class African American women in Atlanta metropolitan area.

a. Where do you prefer to shop for clothing, shoes, accessories and cosmetics?

  i. Do you shop at stores or in areas that cater mostly to hip hop/urban apparel consumers?

    - Why or Why not?

        ii. Do you have a preference for malls or boutiques?
            - Why?
            - What is your favorite place to shop? Why?
        iii. Do you shop online?
            - Where? Why?

b. How often do you shop? (weekly, monthly on special occasions?)

c. On average how much do you spend on clothing, shoes, accessories, cosmetics and grooming (i.e., hair and nails) monthly?

d. What is the most you ever spent on shoes, accessories or a clothing item?

e. What 3 brands are you attracted to?
    i. What 3 hip hop/urban brands do you like?
    ii. If you buy hip hop/urban brands do you do so to support the culture or because you simply like the garment?
    iii. In your mind are urban brands different from other brands?
        -Why or Why not?

f. When buying a garment what factors do you consider most? (e.g., price, fit, color, quality, style, brand, celebrity influence, etc.)

(4) Questions related to Objective 2:

To determine what social, cultural, political and economic factors influence the sartorial choices of hip hop inspired dress among middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

a. Which celebrities' or figures' style in entertainment do you admire?
    i. Are there any particular hip hop artists whose style you admire?

- What do you admire about them?

b. Do you consult friends and/or family members for style advice?

c. How important is it for you to "fit in" style wise with others?

    i. How important is it for you to "fit in" style wise with members of the hip hop culture?

d. Can you name some current trends that are hip hop inspired?

    i. Do you like to wear these trends?

e. Is it important to you to keep up with the latest trends?

f. Do you read African American and/or hip hop fashion and culture related magazines?

    i. Which magazines do you read?
    ii. Do you get style ideas from these magazines?

g. Do you watch African American and/or fashion or hip hop culture related television programs?

    i. Which programs do you watch?
    ii. Do you get style ideas from these programs?

h. What unrelated (to African American and hip hop culture) fashion magazines or televisions programs do read or watch?

    i. Do you get style ideas from these magazines and programs?

(5) Questions related to Objective 3.

To describe the various methods of producing a distinctive style of hip hop dress among middle-class African American women in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

- a. How are your dress choices influenced by your identification with the hip hop culture?
- b. What clothing, shoes, accessories or cosmetics do you consider to be wardrobe must-haves?
    - i. Why do you consider these items to be wardrobe staples?
- c. Do you have a signature item that you wear that expresses your personal style or that is indicative of the hip hop culture?
- d. Do you prefer to wear an outfit that has been coordinated for you (i.e., visual merchandising) or do you mix and match garments to suit your taste?
- e. How important is it for your outfit to be color coordinated?
    - i. Which colors do you prefer?
- f. What kind of fabrics do you prefer (e.g., shiny, cotton, etc.)?
- g. How important is your hair style, makeup and nails to your overall look?
- h. Does your African American heritage play a part in your daily fashion choices?
    - i. How so?
- i. Do you incorporate styles or trends from other subcultures or racial groups into your own look?
    - i. Which styles of trends have you borrowed?

(6) Closing