WHERE DO RAPPERS COME FROM?: HIP-HOP AS A REMIXING OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL TRADITION AND HOW IT ENGAGED THREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

DARREN RHYM

(Under the Direction of Peter H. Smagorinsky)

ABSTRACT

In this study I examine the question, where do rappers come from? It is an investigation of three professional rappers' reflections of how they came to be rappers and what role their high school English Language Arts (ELA) classes played in that journey. The express purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of these rappers and to determine the roles these experiences played in developing the skillsets that permitted these artists to become professional rappers. The analysis of these students’ experiences can help teachers better understand, engage and connect with their students.

INDEX WORDS: hip-hop, hip-hop and education, student engagement, critical race theory, signifying
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2018
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May, 2018
DEDICATION

To Mivida: without you, this is impossible. Your limitless love, patience, compassion, and loyalty helped me unfurl my wings and be(come). Te amo; SIEMPRE.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sometimes, too frequent to assess, I thought I would never get here. Now that I am, I want to thank some the people who made it possible.

First and forever, my wife Melissa, thank you for always being there and for always believing in me and my abilities.

To my kids—my awesome kids. Chad and Jordan, you two sacrificed so much for me. I wasn't there for absolutely everything the way that I wanted to be and I'm sorry for that, but thank you so much for your love and support and your own hard work in your studies, often times your habits became my habits and I hope some of your habits were learned from me.

To my new children, thanks for your love and support and trust. Pete, Sophia, and Bruce you are such beautiful and amazing people.

Mom! Thank you for your love and understanding when I couldn't come to visit.

To Peter Smagorinky! Your patience sir! You are a great scholar, a trusting and giving mentor, and a friend. You have inspired me and uplifted me in ways intellectual that I never knew could be. Thank you so much for everything. It's been a long journey and you were always there.

To Donna Alvermann: from the first day of your class I have been impressed and inspired by your wisdom and your incredible perspectives. You've always given sage advice and been very supportive. Thank you.
To Ruth Harman: Dear, dear Ruth. You are the best. You are such a wise and nurturing soul. There have been many times when I've seen you and had no idea if I had what it took to see this through and after seeing you and talking to you I've always felt more confident and willing to fight on. You have such a wonderful presence and method of inspiring your students. Thank you so much for sharing that gift and its magic with me.

To George "Gig" Long, whose been calling me doctor since I taught my first class at UGA back in ’93.

To Carl Spangler who always believed. Thanks for toughening me up.

To Rich Stewart who said you got this and don't quit—don't ever quit!

To Stuart Tryon who said fight on and was always kind and supportive, even when I felt I had failed.

Lastly, to my teachers. To Mr. Brown who told me I had to "burn the midnight oil."

To Mrs. Ceria who always supported and believed in me, even when I was "cuttin' the fool" in Spanish class.

To Mrs. Huslin who taught me to love English.

To Coach Chappy Moore who gave me the world: the most caring, and unconditionally loving individual I have ever met. Thank you Coach.

To Coach Joe Susan, who took a chance on a kid from Trenton and took what Coach Moore started and finished the job. Thank you Coach.

To Dr. Bruce Weigl, a great poet and teacher of life skills. Thank you sir.

And finally, to Dr. Bernard W. Bell, the reason why this took so long. A great scholar who set the bar so high and rightfully so. You have been my idol and my inspiration and I hope one day I can make you proud.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

A goal of my study is to identify and contribute to the legacy of African-American resilience in the United States. This resiliency is evident in many facets of African-American life, including education. I am interested in research that can help black students discover their “authentic” selves (Freire, 2011). Were it not for teachers, particularly those who looked like me, I believe it would have been difficult to achieve the academic success that I have experienced. While it is not necessary for a teacher to share a student’s race, ethnicity, or culture to make a significant impact on that student’s life, it is very important that the teacher respect the student’s experiences. Black students benefit from having black teachers they can relate to (Grissom & Redding, 2016), but the numbers of black teachers are diminishing in the United States, particularly in urban schools in large metropolitan areas (Rizga, 2016). This is not to say that only African-American teachers should teach African-American students. My point is, that teachers who teach African-American students should study their student’s culture in order to find methods to keep their students engaged. Paolo Freire calls upon teachers to liberate and empower students (2011) and help them see themselves as authentic thinkers, the way rappers in this study did.

Finding out where rappers come from is an essential question for educators in the Southern United States, where I did my study. Tapping into Hip-Hop culture’s ability to engage, empower, and inform young people, particularly African-American students in the Southeastern
United States, could prove to be a powerful classroom tool for teachers in the region trying to engage students of color. This study exemplified how intelligent and creative these young artists were; it also confirmed their literacies, writing skills, communication skills, and business acumen. These community-based learners were able to mediate street-knowledge and school-knowledge and transform themselves into new age griots, secure in their identities, their intelligences, and their professional lives. In this study, I wanted to accomplish two goals: find out how my participants became rappers and ascertain what role they remembered school playing in the process. I wanted to know how rap informed who they were, how their worlds worked, and how they learned to navigate their worlds and become successful. Each of the rappers possessed keen awareness and abilities concerning how to move in and out of spaces and how to find and take advantage of good opportunities. I know from their interviews that Hip-Hop played a critical role in their lives and in their ways of being (Yancy, 2013).

**Statement of the Problem**

There are several disturbing facts about racial bias in the educational and prison systems in the United States that I use to preface this study. I think that there are correlations between a lack of student engagement in schools, the disproportionate disciplining of African-American students in schools (Strauss, 2017), and the disproportionate dropout rates of African Americans in schools. In 2014, when I started my research on Hip-Hop, I was motivated by statistics that I read in a Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) report, “The State of America’s Children: 2014.” The report stated that every day in the United States 2,857 students dropped out of high school, 27% of those students (763) were African-Americans. Of the 49.8 million students in public schools that year, 15% of them identified as African-American, yet this 15% made up 25% of the

---

1 Griots are members of a class of traveling poets, musicians, and storytellers who maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa.
students who dropped out (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014). The IES report (2014) stated that 4,408 children were arrested every day in 2014 and 1,274 (nearly 30%) were African-American. This study does not focus on incarceration rates, but when African-American students drop out of school and don’t graduate, they are very susceptible to the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Heitzeg, 2009; McCarter, 2016; Scully, 2016; Smiley, 2015).

The Problem of Race in Education in the United States

Antonio Gramsci considers educational institutions a part of a system of ideological hegemony in which individuals are socialized into maintaining the status quo (1971; Entwistle, 1979). In the United States, the status quo of which Gramsci spoke is made up primarily of wealthy and middle class white males. The works of social critics and critical theorists W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and Carter G. Woodson (1933) demonstrate the cyclical nature of racism in the United States that existed before their early 20th century works. Both men examined the vital role that race played since Emancipation when looking at the history of hegemony in the United States. Du Bois said that, the “problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line”:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, --a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903)
In the *Mis-education of the Negro* (1933), Woodson writes that “The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies” (p. 2). In the 21st century these attitudes of inferiority have persisted (Strauss, 2017). I have experience with the legacy of African-American student disengagement. I have taught African-American students; I have been an African-American student, and I have parented African-American students. A personal experience with my son, gave me a new perspective on student engagement. During his freshman year of high school, my son Miles, who loves Hip-Hop, felt uncomfortable incorporating Hip-Hop into an ELA project because he didn’t think his teacher would consider Hip-Hop a valid academic discipline to compare to classic literature. As a teacher myself, I disagreed. Miles was one of a few African-American students at a predominantly-white, Rap City Catholic High School, in Rap City, a semi-urban, city in the Deep South, and he was stressing over what to do with a topic on the project. I suggested he consider incorporating Hip-Hop into his project. We frequently discussed texts he was reading in ELA class. We regularly discussed Hip-Hop artists, lyrics, and texts, new and old; we analyzed lyrics and discussed the sociocultural and economic ramifications of rap music. As a teacher, I used Hip-Hop and rap music as tool to engage students and to talk about literature. So, it seemed appropriate to me for a student to incorporate Hip-Hop into a literary assignment. When I suggested this to Miles, he looked at me with surprise and confusion, deciding whether or not to take me seriously. Finally, he decided that I was wasting his time with my ridiculous suggestion and politely changed the topic of our conversation. During my research for this study, I remembered this scenario with Miles; I asked him to reflect upon it.

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2 Pseudonym
3 Pseudonym
For one, I was personally going through a "black pre-teen" identity crisis, especially transitioning from a very black middle school, where I was often tormented, never celebrated, but then moving to a completely white high school where I was lauded for all of the wrong reasons. So, in that English class, there was a sense of me not taking Hip-Hop lyrics seriously as "classic literature" because my understanding of books and academics was that it was all prestigious and godly, whereas Hip-Hop was just a way for black men to have fun and get out of the hood, as simple as that. I didn't take rap seriously; I liked it but didn't think too much of it in terms of its intellectual presence. Rap was never taught in schools; why would I associate it with what was taught? At 14, to pursue that concept was irrational. (Personal interview, 2017)

Miles's reflection opened my eyes to the conflicts African-American students who participated in Hip-Hop culture faced and how frustratingly similar they were to the conflicts that I faced as a high school student, two generations ago.

Both of our struggles are attributed to what W. E. B. Du Bois called double consciousness, a social theory that is a part of the theoretical framework of my study. Miles's recollection gave me insight into the frustration that he felt when he believed he could not incorporate his culture into his ELA project. From sources, outside of his home, he had been given the message that Hip-Hop culture was illegitimate and not to be taken seriously, that it should not be compared to or studied with classic literature. Despite what I taught him at home, he was re-taught that a comparison between Hip-Hop and "classic literature" in his assignment was “irrational.” This incident contributed to my son not having his academic and social needs met at his school (Karenga, 2010). If students do not have their social and academic needs met in school, engagement is difficult.
Miles’s situation, in many ways, reflected the dilemmas that African-American students who loved Hip-Hop culture faced in ELA classes in the United States. Miles had two parents, both bi-cultural, both bilingual (Bell, 1987; Gates, 1988; Smitherman, 1977), both educators, both aware of the dangers that exist for African-American students, particularly African-American male students, in regards to the school-to-prison pipeline. As parents, we worked hard, researched, and tried to prepare him for the challenges we knew he would face in the U.S. educational system. Attending a predominantly-white Catholic school, being taught by an all-white faculty, and developing friendships and spending a lot of time with white peers, introduced Miles to social and cultural conflicts that he was not prepared for.

I taught at both of Miles's high schools (before he attended); I also taught at a middle school in the Rap City School District, like the one he attended. I taught in the high school and middle school that two of my three participants attended. Each of the schools was predominantly African-American. White culture and the white vernacular were privileged at each of the schools. African-American students were rewarded for mimicking the language and adopting the culture of the schools. Miles was given preferential treatment in middle school because he was deemed “articulate,” well dressed, and well-mannered. My son is not the focus of this study but I use his experience to explain how even an African-American student who liked school and who was not at risk of dropping out of school could become frustrated and disillusioned with the educational system. The fact that my son had two parents with advanced degrees, multicultural experiences, and experience in secondary and post-secondary education, gave Miles some unique advantages in school. Not many of the high school kids that I have taught have the level of familial support that Miles had. He was taught to play the game (of school); many of my at-risk students do not want to play the game or have not been taught how to play the game. These are
critical components of student success. But my study uncovers other components of success. A remarkable fact that too often goes unnoticed is that many at-risk students navigate school without support from parents or mentors.

**Student Engagement**

Traditionally, students who have done well in U.S. schools and graduated have been white, middle and upper-class students. Clemson University’s National Dropout Prevention Center / Network examined data on why students drop out of school, dating back to 1927 (NDPC/N). The culmination of all this data explains that “push, pull, and failing out factors provide a framework for understanding dropouts” (Doll, Eslami & Walters, 2013). The reason students dropped out of school revolved around disciplinary measures for non-attendance, and the reason that students gave for not attending school was because they did not like it (school) (2013). It’s not uncommon for kids to hate school—white or black—the difference, too often, is children of color have no faith in educational institutions in the United States. African-American and Latinx students don’t trust teachers or administrators. They lack the belief that if they buy into school that they can obtain the American Dream. The realities that my participants wrote about in their songs were of surviving poverty, oppression, and gender discrimination.

Hip-Hop is a way to engage students. It engaged my participants, even though it was not a part of their ELA curriculums. Hip-Hop has been around for more than 40 years (Bradley & DuBois, 2010; Hill, 2009; Light, 1999; Perkins, 1996) and has been a part of mainstream music in the U.S. since the 1980s (Diehl, 1999; Perkins, 1996; Toop, 2000). It has value, complexity, and cultural significance. In the 2000s, teachers and scholars began introducing Hip-Hop into the classroom (Akom, 2009; Alim, 2007; Dimitriadis, 2001, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Hill, 2008, Morrell, 2004, 2006, 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Stovall, 2006).
Hip-Hop culture has demonstrated an unexpected longevity. It has become an integral part of American society and demonstrated popularity around the world.

Bettina Love makes a very insightful point concerning the role of teachers, student engagement, and Hip-Hop. In her 2014 Ted Talk she explains:

> When we deny students the opportunity to express their culture in classrooms we are spirit murdering them. When I am asking you every day to walk through that door and be something that you are not, I am murdering your spirit. When I am asking YOU to stop being who you are so that I can do MY job, I am taking away something from you; and I am murdering your spirit, piece by piece. (Ted Talk, University of Georgia, 2014)

Love’s premise of how teachers—and institutions—can “spirit murder” students reminded me of how crucial a teacher’s role is in student success.

**Research Question & Design**

This qualitative study was designed to answer the question, “Where do rappers come from?” I’ve always been fascinated by Hip-Hop music; I grew up with it. As a scholar and a teacher, I often wondered where rappers came from, how they learned to rap, and whether school—ELA classes in particular—played a significant role in their careers as rappers, since rap lyrics are lyrical poetry. I assumed my participants, like poets, studied poetry and were really engaged in their ELA classes and loved writing. Thus, I created this study to see if this was true.

The purpose of this project was to have my participants reflect on their experiences and attempt to recollect how they became rappers. I primarily sought to have them reflect on three developmental aspects: (1) how they learned to write lyrics, (2) the processes involved in becoming performers, and (3) the role their high school ELA classes played in items 1 and 2.
A few overarching goals drove this project. First, I sought to establish the connection between rap and the African-American oral tradition. Second, I sought to identify the contribution that rap makes to the legacy of African-American resilience in the United States. This resilience is evident in many facets of American life, including education. This research examines people's discovery of their “authentic” selves (Freire, 2011). In finding out how my participants became rappers, I also discovered what survival skills that each developed as African-Americans to navigate racism and other obstacles they encountered on their way to becoming rappers. Third, I wanted to explore not only what role Hip-Hop played in their lives but also how it informed who they were and how they viewed the world. How did Hip-Hop permit them to navigate the space in their communities and the spaces beyond their communities? Finally, my last goal was to analyze what teachers can learn from a deeper understanding of their students' experiences, both in their communities and in their ELA classes.

Theoretical Framework

To understand where my rappers came from and how and why they became rappers, I used two theoretical perspectives. First, Critical Race Theory (CRT) allowed me to put race at the center of my study and exam how it affected my participants’ quests to become professional rappers. CRT recognizes racism as a very real obstacle for African-Americans that is pervasive and entrenched in American society. Another important component of CRT is its reliance on stories and storytelling to empower marginalized folk to tell their own stories in their own words. Second, I incorporate Henry Louis Gates's theory of Signifyin(g) and the African-American oral tradition because it is the foundation of my participant's literacies and the primary source of their musical content.
Critical Race Theory

CRT is an academic discipline influenced by qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and derived from critical theory (Delgado, 1995, 2013; Gordon, 1999; Yosso, 2005). It began in the field of law and was developed as a means to critically examine society and culture by exploring the relationships and interconnections of race, law, and power. Beginning with the early critical works by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, CRT developed as an academic field in the middle and late 1970s. Bell, Freeman and many other lawyers and legal scholars across the country began to realize that the gains of the 1960s civil rights era were, in many cases, being repealed (Delgado, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Critical Race Theory addresses sociohistorical issues such as the normalization of racism in American society, discontent with liberalism, white supremacy, and white male privilege. The most attractive element of CRT as it pertained to this study was its views of racism as a normal part of American life, not as an aberration (Ladson-Billings, 2003), the view of racism as part of the context of a specific educational problem such as literacy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), its qualitative approach, and perhaps most importantly, its emphasis on storytelling (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

CRT permits my participants to tell their own stories, both in the narratives they crafted in our interviews and in the narratives that they created in their songs. Bettina Love (2016) states that although CRT is “concerned about social constructions of race and racism, its major principles aligned with the culture and music of hip hop” (p. 418). Hip-Hop and CRT view storytelling as a way for people of color to see themselves in the world and define their place and space (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Duncan (2002), for CRT,
Storytelling is important, from this theoretical perspective, because it assumes that (1) previously marginalized peoples can narrate their stories and (2) these new stories expand the concept of the ‘normal’ narrator and contest the traditional stories continually told about the experiences of Americans. Critical Race Theory has contributed to framing research on urban schools and the experience of African American students.

CRT and Hip-Hop argue that storytelling allows one to name, own, and tell his or her reality.

**The Influence of African-American Oral Tradition**

African-American culture and its traditions are evident throughout my participants' music. Their music illuminates their experiences as African-Americans in an “imaginatively distinctive manner” (Bell, 1987, p. xiii). According to Bell these attributes present themselves thematically and stylistically in African-American texts. Borrowing from Bell’s interpretive strategy, I examined my participants' lyrics, treating them as socially symbolic acts used to tell their stories. Sometimes when they retell their stories, they do so by remixing and re-remembering their African-American pasts. The African-American oral tradition served as a tool for the rappers to tell their stories which connects them to slave tradition and their narratives.

Andrews (1988). Bell (1987, 2004) and Gates (2014) each explain that African-Americans as an ethnic group become conscious of themselves and celebrate their quests for personal and social freedom, literacy, and wholeness and create art, such as rap music, as a means to express themselves and survive racism and social oppression through art. Thus, rap music became a conduit through which my participants gave voice to their identities, which were influenced by double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision (Bell, 1987).

**Double Consciousness.** The term double consciousness was coined by W. E. B. Du Bois as a metaphor for the sociopsychological process by which African-Americans responded to
racial and cultural domination. In 1937, double-consciousness was remixed by anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits as socialized ambivalence and used to explain the existence of conflicting African and European values and behavioral alternatives in postcolonial Haiti (Bell, 1987). The trope of double vision is the third remix of double consciousness:

This trope was further developed in 1963 by Ralph Ellison as double vision to describe the ambivalence of modern black Americans toward all people and events. These interrelated terms do not signify a basic personality type or disorder. On the contrary, they signify both the complex sociopsychological process of acculturation of black Americans—the will to realize their human and civil rights—and the sociocultural relationship of colonized people of African descent to colonizers of European descent. The shifts in allegiance of black Americans between the values of the white dominant culture and those of the black subculture are a normal survival strategy, a healthful self-protective, compensatory response to the oppression and repression fostered by institutionalized racism and economic exploitation. (p. 345)

These racist assumptions also led to whites in America Sambo-izing African-Americans. This term stereotypes African-Americans, particularly adult males, as child-like, shiftless, lazy, and not wanting to work. Double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision states Bell, are normal survival strategies.

**Signifying and the Black Vernacular.** Gates (2012) describes Signifyin(g) as the trope of tropes in the African-American vernacular, which is a language of African-American people that has been cultivated and used since they were brought here from various West African regions by the Spaniards in the early 1500s. Esu-Elegbara was the central figure of linguistic
interpretation in Yoruba culture in West Africa. The Signifying Monkey is his distant relative and what Gates calls "the rhetorical principle in Afro-American vernacular discourse" (p. 234). The Signifying Monkey is more than a character in a narrative; he, according to Gates, is the "vehicle for narration itself" (241). Signifyin(g) is a homonym of signifying. Here is how Gates explains the homonym:

"Signification," in standard English, denotes the meaning that a term conveys, or is intended to convey. It is a fundamental term in the standard English semantic order. Since Saussure, at least, the three terms signification, signifier, signified have been fundamental to our thinking about general linguistics and, of late, about criticism specifically. These neologisms in the academic-critical community are homonyms of terms in the black vernacular tradition perhaps two centuries old. By supplanting the received term's associated concept, the black vernacular tradition created a homonymic pun of the profoundest sort, thereby marking its sense of difference from the rest of the English community of speakers. Their complex act of language Signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions, conventions established, at least officially, by middle-class white people. (p. 237)

Mikhail Bakhtin calls Signification a double-voiced word or utterance decolonized by black people for their purposes "by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation" (qtd in Gates, 2012). Gates distinguishes between American English signifying from African-American English (which Gates calls the black vernacular or Afro-American English) by physically removing the g from the end of the word, so that it sounds more like the African-American pronunciation: Signifyin'. The capitalization denotes the terms status as the master trope in the black vernacular.
Signifyin(g) is black double-voicedness "because it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation" (p. 239). Signifyin(g) in its multifaceted role as trope acts as a complex rhetorical device that Gates calls a trope reversing trope. In American English these signifying tropes include metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, litotes, metalepsis, aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis. In African-American English these Signifyin(g) tropes are represent in loud-talking, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, and playing the dozens. In the latest reinterpretation of the African-American vernacular remixed by rap artists, they include dissing as a remix of calling out and playing the dozens. In this study, I call the loud-taking boasting and connect it to the back woods boaster of African-American folklore, who were known said to perform yard calls and communicate from one plantation to the next using that method.

Rap music continues the Signfyin(g) tradition in African-American music. Jazz signifies on versions of popular music. The blues signifies on itself; there are dozens of variations of The Signifying Monkey. Tropes such as these, empower African-Americans, freeing them from the white gaze and allowing them to communicate freely and undetected by audiences who cannot speak the black vernacular (Du Bois, 1903; Gates, 1988; Morrison, 2012). African-Americans have their own unique languages with linguistic structures that rely on repetition and revision that are fundamental to African-American artistic forms (Gates, 1988).

Signifyin(g) is a fairly complex concept to those unfamiliar with the language. Two helpful examples can be found in the writings of Langston Hughes and H. Rap Brown. First, in Hughes's poem “Cultural Exchange” he writes, "And they asked me right at Christmas / If my blackness, would it rub off? / I said, ask your Mama.” H. Rap Brown, in his definition of signifying says, “Some of the best dozens players were girls...before you can signify you got to
be able to rap...Signifyin(g) allowed you a choice--you could either make a cat feel good or bad” (Gates, 2012, p. 234). Signifyin(g) is linguistic, rhetorical, political, and humorous. It is the transformation of the trope also after it has been remixed by double consciousness. “In the extraordinarily complex relationship between the two homonyms,” says Gates, “we both enact and recapitulate the received, classic confrontation between Afro-American culture and American culture” (p. 235).

Signifyin(g) is expressed in various ways, one being coded language. In this study, rappers construct what Gates calls talking texts, where tropes are remixed, taking old beats, tracks, or lyrics and recreating them for a new audience. Coded language has always been a part of the African-American oral tradition and of African-American music in the United States. Complex, multilayered texts have appeared in music and songs; “Talking drums” were used to communicate long distances even between villages in Africa. Drums were also used for religious services and social gatherings (Finnegan, 2012, p. 470). Negro spirituals, in particular, were used to send messages and to coordinate meetings. In Negro spiritual such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” the double meanings included words like “traveling shoes,” “chariots,” or “wheels.” Any time these words were referenced, they were often codes that denoted that a slave was planning to run away. Places in songs were coded metaphors for destinations or meeting places, for example the Jordan River in “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” symbolized the Ohio River for slaves who used that song in Ohio.

**Funds of Knowledge**

Funds of knowledge are the collection of linguistic and oral skills that my participants brought to school with them and upon their journeys to become rappers. Funds of knowledge work from the theory that using communities and students’ household knowledge as resources.
Using the knowledge based generated by families where upon those who teach are often family members and have personal knowledge of the learners that is more in-depth and complex than the traditional student-teacher relationship (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). In the funds of knowledge approach, teachers go into the communities and become learners. They get to know the students in the students’ environments. Funds of knowledge includes one’s background schema, what one learns from family and community, language, vocabulary level, how one communicates with others, culture, the way one gets along with others, one’s way of resolving problems, values, individualism, competiveness, one’s spiritual beliefs, one’s style of learning, the stories one knows, the songs one sings, the games one plays, the food one likes, the traditions one celebrates, one’s self concept, one’s hopes, and one’s dreams all make up that individual’s funds of knowledge (Bender).

Intertextuality

The theory of intertextuality suggests that every text has its meaning but only in relation to other texts. According to the theories of intertextuality, all texts are built from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works (Kalogirou & Economopoulou, 2012). Reading from the intertextual perspective becomes a process of moving between texts and not necessarily one of creating texts independently. Gates (2012) refers to a similar tradition in African-American literature with his theory of Signifyin(g). He calls texts that move in and out of one another “speakerly texts” because they speak to each other across time. Roland Barthes (1977) says literary meanings cannot be stabilized by readers. Texts are “multidimensional space” in which a variety of writings blend and clash and none of these writings are “original” (p. 46). Julia Kristeva (1980) in her development of Bakhtin’s spatialization of literary language argues that “each word is an intersection of other words and texts where at least one other word or texts
can be read” (1980, p. 66). Through sampling and Signifyin(g) rappers are constantly dancing back and forth, remixing and recreating black texts, black talk, and black culture, making what was old, new again.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapters 2-4 are written as standalone articles that will be submitted to scholarly journals. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I have written three case studies about rappers whom I call Sebastian, Melody, and Clarke. For each case study, I used interviews that I co-constructed with each participant. These case studies examine how and why my participants became rappers and the role that their high school English Language Arts classes and mentors played in that process. Each of the case studies also examines conflicts that the rappers faced and how their teachers might have benefited from understanding the rappers' experiences and the kinds of things that engaged them. In Chapter 5, I reflect upon the case studies and identify recurring themes and discuss implications for African-American students and teachers. I conclude with a discussion of suggestions for future research and advocate for teachers to reach out to students and to become more knowledgeable about African-American culture and traditions in an attempt to better engage African-American students and prevent them from dropping out of high school.
CHAPTER 2

FROM THE SIGNIFYING MONKEY TO THE "STREET CAT":

A CASE STUDY OF WHERE RAPPERS COME FROM: SEBASTION'S NARRATIVE

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4 Rhym, D. To be submitted to Journal of Black Studies.
Abstract

In this qualitative study I examined the question, where do rappers come from? I sought to learn how a young person became a rapper. I conducted a personal interview with a professional rapper whom I call Sebastian and asked questions pertaining to his skills, abilities and what he remembered about developing them. In the study, I investigated Sebastian's recollections of his experiences growing up in his community and in his high school, that led to his development as an artist. The express purpose of this study was to examine how his experiences developed into skill sets that facilitated his becoming a professional rapper. I also wanted to know if there was a connection between the artist's English Language Arts experiences in high school and his success as a rapper. I wanted to know if school played a role in his success and if his story could be used to inspire and engage other potential rappers still in high school.

INDEX WORDS: hip-hop, critical race theory, signifying, literary signifying double consciousness

Introduction

An important observation that I made during this study was the identification of rap's contribution to the legacy of African-American resilience in the United States. This resiliency is evident in many facets of American life, including education. Rappers are products of their communities. Sebastian allowed me to explore and share his recollections of how he became a rapper. This case study investigates Sebastian's experiences and analyzes the processes he developed to begin his career. The skills that he honed during the early stage of his career greatly contributed to his development as a rap artist. I interviewed Sebastian and asked questions pertaining to how he became a professional Hip-Hop artist. This case focuses on four things: (1) the role Hip-Hop played in Sebastian's life, (2) how rap informed who he was and how his world
worked, (3) an explanation of how he navigated his world and became successful, and (5) gives teacher's insights into engaging young, black, urban students, interested in Hip-Hop culture.

**Framing the Study**

**Critical Race Theory**

This study is framed by tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an academic discipline influenced by qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and derived from critical theory (Delgado, 1995, 2013; Gordon, 1999; Yosso, 2005). It began in the field of law and was developed as a way to critically examine society and culture by exploring the relationships between race, law, and power (Gordon, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Beginning with the early critical works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, CRT developed as an academic field in the middle and late 1970s. Bell, Freeman and many other lawyers and legal scholars across the country began to realize that the gains of the 1960s civil rights era were, in many cases, being repealed (Delgado, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Critical Race Theory addresses sociohistorical issues such as racism in the United States, liberalism, white supremacy, and white male privilege. The most attractive elements of CRT, as it pertained to this study, was its views of racism as a normal part of American life, not as an aberration (Ladson-Billings, 2003), the view of racism as part of the context of a specific educational problem such as literacy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), its qualitative approach, and perhaps most importantly, and its emphasis on storytelling (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

CRT privileges Sebastian's narratives. He recalled narratives that we co-constructed during our interview and in the narratives that he created in his songs. Hip-Hop and CRT view storytelling as a way for people of color to see themselves in the world and define their place and space. According to Duncan (2002), for CRT:
Storytelling is important, from this theoretical perspective, because it assumes that (1) previously marginalized peoples can narrate their stories and (2) these new stories expand the concept of the "normal" narrator and contest the traditional stories continually told about the experiences of Americans. Critical race theory has contributed to framing research on urban schools and the experience of African American students. (p. 418) CRT and Hip-Hop argue that storytelling allows one to name, own, and tell his or her reality.

**CRT and Education.** Gloria Ladson-Billings applied the tenets of CRT and Critical Pedagogy (Lynn, 1999; Jennings, 2000) to the field of education. She recognized that after critical pedagogy was established, theories and epistemological works for gender and class quickly developed but no critical theory for race and education was developed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009; Jennings & Lynn, 2005). Class-based and gender-based explanations are not powerful enough to explain all of the differences or variances in school experiences and performances. For example, an examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, does not account for disparities in school discipline rates, dropout rates, pushout rates, or the disproportionate rates at which people of color who do not graduate are incarcerated.

In her social theory of race and education Ladson-Billings (2009) critiques liberalism, explains the ineffectiveness of civil rights laws, and analyzes social doctrines that she says perpetuate an American hegemony that continues to affect African-American learners during this period of post-integration. According to Ladson-Billings, post-civil rights era acts of educational segregation such as white flight, the dismantling of African-American schools, the displacement of African-American students via busing, and the unemployment of African-American teachers greatly disadvantaged African-American learners. The reward for surviving Black Codes and Jim Crow legislation is de facto segregation—particularly in many U.S. high schools—under the
guise of gifted programs, white flight, and a loss of African-American teaching and administrative positions (2009). Inequality is perhaps accepted and tolerated because desegregation programs that fail African-American and Latinx learners can oftentimes help white students academically, hence they may be allowed to flourish (2009). So, while white students flourished, African-American and Latinx suspensions, expulsions, and dropout and pushout rates continued to rise.

The Influence of African-American Culture

The African-American Oral Tradition. African-American culture and its traditions are evident throughout the music in Sebastian's catalog\(^3\). His music illuminates his experiences as an African-American in an “imaginatively distinctive manner” that Bernard Bell (1987, p. xiii) attributes to texts written in the African-American oral tradition. These imaginative qualities present themselves thematically and stylistically in African-American texts. Borrowing from Bell’s interpretive strategy, I examined Sebastian's lyrics, treating them as socially symbolic acts used to remix, rewrite, and remember his African-American past via his present experiences. The African-American oral tradition served as a tool for Sebastian to tell his story, akin to the way slaves did in their narratives (Andrews, 1988). Bell (1987, 2004) and Gates (2014) explain that African-Americans as an ethnic group become conscious of themselves and celebrate their quests for personal and social freedom, literacy, and wholeness and create art, such as rap music, as a means to express themselves and survive racism and social oppression through use of art. Thus, Sebastian's music became a conduit through which he gave voice to his identity and consciousness, which were shaped by double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision (Bell, 1987).
**Double Consciousness.** The term double consciousness was coined by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) as a metaphor for the sociopsychological process by which African-Americans responded to racial and cultural domination. In 1937, double-consciousness was remixed by anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits as socialized ambivalence and used to explain the existence of conflicting African and European values and behavioral alternatives in postcolonial Haiti (Bell, 1987). The trope of double vision is the third remix of double consciousness:

This trope was further developed in 1963 by Ralph Ellison as double vision to describe the ambivalence of modern black Americans toward all people and events. These interrelated terms do not signify a basic personality type or disorder. On the contrary, they signify both the complex sociopsychological process of acculturation of black Americans--the will to realize their human and civil rights--and the sociocultural relationship of colonized people of African descent to colonizers of European descent. The shifts in allegiance of black Americans between the values of the white dominant culture and those of the black subculture are a normal survival strategy, a healthful self-protective, compensatory response to the oppression and repression fostered by institutionalized racism and economic exploitation. (p. 345)

These racist assumptions also led to whites in America Sambo-izing African-Americans. This term stereotypes African-Americans, particularly adult males, as child-like, shiftless, lazy, and not wanting to work. African-Americans, also, are not schizophrenic or psychotic. Double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision states Bell, are normal survival strategies.
Signifying and the Black Vernacular. From an ELA and from a linguistic perspective, Geneva Smitherman defines the black vernacular as an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America. Black language is Euro-American speech with an Afro-American meaning, nuance, tone, and gesture. The Black Idiom is used by 80 to 90 percent of American blacks, at least some of the time. It has allowed blacks to create a culture of survival in an alien land, and as a by-product has served to enrich the language of all Americans. (1977)

From a pedagogical perspective, Carol Lee (1993; 2000), has studied Signifyin(g) as a scaffold for literary interpretation. She has studied the pedagogical implications of the black vernacular upon African-American students. Her work examines the link between the social practices of black people (i.e. Signifyin(g)) and the conflicts that may arise when people (e.g. teachers) who don’t understand the black vernacular try to get black students to complete school tasks (1993).

What is missing, however, in terms of enriching the links between every day practice and schooling, are specific descriptions of the knowledge structures taught in school as they relate to the knowledge structures constructed within non-school social settings. The interplay between structures of knowledge constructed through social activity outside classrooms and structures of knowledge embedded in the school learning is potentially powerful because the resulting network of associates is richer in both its specificity and its generalizability. This interaction can be viewed in Vygotskian terms as the cross-fertilization of scientific and spontaneous concepts (Vygotsky 1986). (1993)

It is difficult for teachers to teach students if they cannot (or will not) understand (or make an attempt to understand) and appreciate the students’ culture and that culture’s norms.
Gates (2012) describes Signifyin(g) as the trope of tropes in the African-American vernacular, which is a language African-Americans have been cultivating and using since they were brought here from various West African regions. At one time, Esu-Elegbara was the central figure of linguistic interpretation in Yoruba culture in West Africa. The Signifying Monkey is a distant relative and what Gates calls "the rhetorical principle in Afro-American vernacular discourse" (p. 234). The Signifying Monkey is more than a character in a narrative; he, according to Gates, is the "vehicle for narration itself" (241). Signifyin(g) is a homonym of signifying. Here is how Gates explains the homonym:

"Signification," in standard English, denotes the meaning that a term conveys, or is intended to convey. It is a fundamental term in the standard English semantic order. Since Saussure, at least, the three terms signification, signifier, signified have been fundamental to our thinking about general linguistics and, of late, about criticism specifically. These neologisms in the academic-critical community are homonyms of terms in the black vernacular tradition perhaps two centuries old. By supplanting the received term's associated concept, the black vernacular tradition created a homonymic pun of the profoundest sort, thereby marking its sense of difference from the rest of the English community of speakers. Their complex act of language signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions, conventions established, at least officially, by middle-class white people. (p. 237)

Mikhail Bakhtin calls Signification a double-voiced word or utterance decolonized by black people for their purposes "by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation" (Gates, 2012). Gates distinguishes between American English signifying from African-American English (which Gates calls the black vernacular or
Afro-American English) by physically removing the g from the end of the word, so that it sounds more like the African-American pronunciation: Signifyin'. The capitalization denotes the terms status as the master trope in the black vernacular. Geneva Smitherman

Signifyin(g) is black double-voicedness; "because it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation" (p. 239). Signifyin(g) in its multifaceted role as trope acts as a complex rhetorical device that Gates calls a trope reversing trope. In American English these signifyin(g) tropes are called includes metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, litotes, metalepsis, aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis. In African-American English these Signifyin(g) tropes are called marking, loud-talking, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens. In the latest reinterpretation of the African-American vernacular remixed by rap artists, they include disssing as a remix of calling out and playing the dozens. In this study, I refer to loud-taking as boasting and connect it to the back woods boaster of African-American folklore, who were known to do yard calls and communicate from one plantation to the next using that method.

Signifyin(g) is a fairly complex concept to those unfamiliar with the language. Two helpful examples can be found in the writings of Langston Hughes and H. Rap Brown. First, in Hughes's poem “Cultural Exchange” he writes, "And they asked me right at Christmas / If my blackness, would it rub off? I said, ask your Mama." H. Rap Brown, in his definition of signifyting says, “Some of the best dozens players were girls...before you can signify you got to be able to rap...Signifying allowed you a choice--you could either make a cat feel good or bad” (Gates, 2012, p. 234). Gates explains signifyin(g) as a homonym of the American English term signifyning. Signifyin(g) here we see is linguistic, rhetorical, political, and humorous. It is the transformation of the trope also after it has been remixed by double consciousness. “In the
extraordinarily complex relationship between the two homonyms,” says Gates, “we both enact and recapitulate the received, classic confrontation between Afro-American culture and American culture” (p. 235).

The coded language used by rappers in the trope of talking texts is a remixing of the coded language that has always been a part of the African-American tradition and of African-American music in the United States. During slavery, the coded messages of slaves had to multilayered and constructed for multiple audiences. People who profited from the enslavement of Africans, especially slave owners, worked very hard to suppress and information. Hence coded language was critical to slave survival. This coding by slaves was a deliberate strategy created to disguise their messages. Slaves took items they were permitted to have and literally wove them into their cultural heritage. Quilts for example became tools through which slaves deliberately embed messages and planned their escapes, stealing themselves from their masters. One quilt patter known as “trip around the world was used to indicate a path around a mountain instead of over it. If a non-slave overseer, master, or mistress overheard a slave talking about a trip around the world they would have dismissed it as nonsensical (Tobin & Dobard, 2000). The slaves were very good at reading their masters.

Slaves remixed common, everyday items into complex tools. Another cultural item which became a tool of signification was dance (Rice). Slaves created dances, like the limbo, which spoke directly to the limited space that slaves endured on slave ships when they were forced to dance as exercise on the decks. Another dance, the cakewalk, mocked southern plantation owners by making fun of them (Rice). In music (e.g. drumming) and songs “Talking drums” were used to communicate over long distances even between villages in Africa. They were also used for religious services and social gatherings (Finnegan, 2012). Negro spirituals, in
particular, were used by some slaves to send messages to coordinate meetings and as maps for running away from their masters. Slaves took existing songs, repurposed the meaning of certain sections of the songs, and added their own style, tone, and even developed idioms. These repurposed songs now housed multiple meanings that coexisted in the music. The new meanings lay dormant until audiences who could read and understand their meanings and contexts could use them. The songs’ original meanings continued to entertain and soothe the songs’ original audiences as well. In a Negro spiritual such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” double meanings were found in words like “traveling shoes,” “chariots,” or “wheels.” Any time these words were referenced, they could be used as codes that denoted that a slave was planning to run away. Places in songs were coded metaphors for destinations or meeting places, for example the Jordan River in “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” symbolized the Ohio River for slaves who used that song in Ohio.

Work songs were sung to coordinate labor and to boost work morale. Quilts also contained coded messages and family histories that were passed down from one generation to the next. Some of these messages included escape plans and maps to help slaves escape (“Underground Railroad”). Later, blues songs were coded with double meanings to get around censors and radio executives to portray African-American like and sexual innuendo expressing sentiments about “cake” and “jellyroll” as code words for sex.

Rappers perpetuate the African-American tradition of coded messages by signifying, boasting, dissing, and using other methods to hide messages in texts to audiences of various races, ethnicities, ages, classes, regions, and genders. Rappers, like bluesmen have always cleverly hidden message in lyrics for audiences so that they permit themselves a modicum of freedom to say what they want without censorship. The coding of language, language in this
way, thus enables Sebastian to create spaces in the music, with her lyrics, for her and various other members of her audience who can read the codes.

**Intertextuality**

The theory of intertextuality suggests that every text has its meaning but only in relation to other texts. According to the theories of intertextuality, all texts are built from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works (Kalogirou & Economopoulou, 2012). Reading from the intertextual perspective becomes a process of moving between texts and not necessarily one of creating texts independently. Gates (2012) refers to a similar tradition in African-American literature with his theory of Signifyin(g). He calls texts that move in and out of one another “speakerly texts,” because they speak to each other across time. Roland Barthes (1977) says literary meanings cannot be stabilized by readers. Texts are “multidimensional space” in which a variety of writings blend and clash and none of these writings are “original” (p. 46). Julia Kristeva (1980) in her development of Bakhtin’s spatialization of literary language argues that “each word is an intersection of other words and texts where at least one other word or texts can be read” (1980, p. 66). Through sampling and Signifyin(g) rappers are constantly dancing back and forth, remixing and recreating black texts, black talk, and black culture, making what was old, new again.

**Methods**

**Researcher Bias**

I grew up listening to Hip-Hop. My early connection to Hip-Hop is why I chose the research topic. Hip-Hop culture is transmitted through the African-American oral tradition and porch culture and family stories and family histories. Double consciousness has played a large role in my life and has played a role in shaping my perception of the world and how think about
Hip-Hop. It has generated bias in me and my participants as well, my analysis and findings will discuss these biases and what they mean. Every Hip-Hop head remembers when he or she fell in love with Hip-Hop. I remember Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh when they first sang “La Di Da Di” and “The Show.” I remember “Rapper’s Delight,” by the Sugar Hill Gang. I remember the powerful effects of this music on me and my identity. I also remember the importance of porch culture when families came together for holiday parties, birthdays, and other social gatherings to fellowship, celebrate, and bond during cultural rituals (Moyer, 1998). As was our tradition, we ate great food, listened to classic black music from the sixties and seventies, many of the songs that have been remixed and sampled by Hip-Hop artists over the years. From these customs, traditions were transmitted.

Interview

For this study I used a qualitative approach. Within this approach I co-constructed an interview with Sebastian. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) explain that respondents have funds of knowledge from which they can formulate their narratives. Interviewees are like “vessels” of answers that are accessible by researchers. These types of responses could be concise and accurate and contain the respondents “sentiments, feelings, and behaviors” (p. 30). Narrative inquiry justifies using interviews, which Holstein and Gubrium (2003) label “special conversations” instead of empirical data in which people talk about their lives (p. 30).

According to deMarrais (2004), “different purposes and theoretical perspectives shape qualitative interview approaches” (p. 55). Thus, by focusing on the narratives that Sebastian constructed during our interview and created for his songs, I was able to identify his voice and understand his process of becoming a rapper (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). The
establishment of this voice permitted me to learn and understand how African-American culture contributed to Sebastian's transformation into a professional rapper.

**Participant Selection**

Before my study, I performed informal interviews with rappers, DJs, and promoters in Rap City. In the informal interviews, I asked rappers, DJs, and Hip-Hop promoters what makes a good rapper. I wanted to know what, in their opinions, distinguished a good rapper from a bad rapper. From my informal interviews, three criteria emerged: the ability to create lyrics, access to beats, and the ability to move the crowd; the artist must have stage presence. I was unable to develop a consensus for the order of these items because they are intrinsically interwoven. These criteria, according to my research, are what connect rappers to their audiences and what makes a rapper, a rapper, according to the Rap City Hip-Hop community.

After I knew what I was looking for in a participant, I applied aspects of criterion based sampling, purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling to select my participants (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). I used one-on-one interviews, in which my participants talked about their lives and their ELA experiences. These conversations varied from semi-formal guided conversations to free-flowing informal exchanges (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

Sebastian and I met through a student I taught in a First-Year Composition class, at a university in the Southeast. I was reading the student’s paper; the paper discussed connections the writer had in the Rap City Hip-Hop community. When I returned his paper, I mentioned my dissertation topic about rappers. I asked him if he felt comfortable mentioning my dissertation topic to some of the rappers he knew, to see if they might be willing to participate in my study. He found the idea interesting. He shared the topic with Sebastian and Sebastian agreed to meet me for an interview. A few days later Sebastian called. We set up a time for the interview and
met the next week. Sebastian came to my office and we conducted the interview. During our interview, he shared his narrative that we co-constructed. See Figure 2.1 for interview questions.

Figure 2.1: Interview Questions

1. What is Hip-Hop?
2. What is authentic Hip-Hop?
3. How did you learn to write lyrics?
4. What was your writing process?
5. Who were your mentors or role models (who did you emulate)?
6. What do you remember from your ELA experiences, in high school?
7. What roles did teachers play in your development as a rapper?
8. What role did your community play in the development of your Hip-Hop skills?

Data Collection

In my study, I used various data sources including interviews, song lyrics from mixtapes, and videos. Other documents include on-line news articles and video blogs. See Figure 2 for a list and description of data sources analyzed.

Document Analysis

In my study, I also used various data sources including song lyrics from digital EPs, compact disks, and videos on YouTube. Other documents included interviews and news articles conducted about Sebastian. See Figure 2 for a list and description of data sources analyzed.

Figure 2.2: Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview transcripts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two semi-formal interviews were conducted. The first was in my office; the second was at a Rap City coffee shop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Facebook / Messenger 13 Follow ups to the interviews were conducted via Facebook Messenger interaction on-line.

YouTubes 42 Videos of Sebastian's songs, release party videos, promos, and tour vlog.

Mixtapes 2 All songs are currently on mixtapes except for one.

Songs / tracks 32 Sebastian has published 33 tracks, on 2 mix tapes. Another track is available on the Soundcloud an internet site where artists can share their music and more than 110 minutes of content. I was not able to access one of her extended play (EP) CDs.

Data Analysis

In my data analysis, I set out to explain how Sebastian became a rapper. I focused on his origins and the processes he developed and used to write lyrics and create a stage persona. I researched and analyzed what roles his upbringing in his community played in his artistic development. I also focused on what role his high school experiences played in his development as a rapper, including his levels of engagement while in school, his relationships with his teachers or mentors, and whether or not he perceived his work as authentic and what that meant to him as an artist.

From my analysis of my interviews, I discovered he acquired the context, content and rhetorical skills he used as a rapper from his experiences growing up and by listening to and participating in family and community rituals, like signifying and boasting.

After the interview, I transcribed it and eliminated pauses and buzz words. Then, I read and reread the interview and took notes on words, phrases, and experiences that were repeated or that I identified as elements or components of the African-American oral tradition. During this stage, I read the interview on my laptop, writing comments digitally, in the margins, and highlighting the points salient to the African-American vernacular; I identified these points as
themes: origins, the role of school, disengagement, the African-American oral tradition. After I did this for the entire document, I printed out the document, reread my comments again, making newer notes on those comments, writing on the text. I added the newest written notes as digital comments and recreated another draft of the text. I repeated this process four times.

To reinforce what I learned from the text of the interview, I went back to the audio recording of the interview. Reading Sebastian’s words sometimes caused a dissonance from the content of the interview. Going back to the audio helped me re-center. When dealing with oral traditions, sounds and tones are important in conveying meaning, especially with signifying.

Rap and its lyrical content are part of the African-American oral tradition. I found evidence of Sebastian’s competence in African-American literary tropes in his published lyrics. The tropes of signifying and boasting occur frequently in his music. He also raps about voice and identity in his songs. In analyzing Sebastian’s lyrics, I use an interpretive strategy I adopted from Bernard Bell’s (1987) work on the African-American novel and view the rapper’s work holistically as a socially symbolic act. In this symbolic act, texts are examined as a rewriting of the survival strategies: boasting, dising (which is Hip-Hop’s remixing of the African-American linguistic, social word game, the dozens\(^2\)), and signifying. Thus, Sebastian's music becomes a conduit through which he gives voice to his identity and consciousness, which are shaped by his experience with double consciousness.

**Findings**

Hip-Hop is life for Sebastian. It is his lens for viewing the world. The rapper got involved with Hip-Hop, he said, because he believed he had a story to tell. Through Hip-Hop he uses his experiences to reintroduce old artists, while doing this he also perpetuates the African-American oral tradition. Hip-Hop has remixed the dozens, boasting, toasts, Signifyin(g), and continues to
make blackness not only relevant but cool and topical; this is why Hip-Hop has been around and growing in popularity for more than 40 years.

Hip-Hop provided Sebastian intellectual and economic sustenance; not only did it free his mind, it also provided a source of income. The majority of that income was generated from his performances at night clubs. He provided his music and videos for free on internet websites like You Tube, Soundcloud, and Spinrilla. The idea was to give the music away for free, build a following, then people would come to see him perform. When fans came to see him perform, he sold merchandise: mixtapes, t-shirts, stickers, and buttons. With so many artists saturating the market, creativity was vital to his survival as an independent artist in the industry. What made Sebastian unique in Rap City and the region was his popularity on the gentlemen's club circuit.

At the beginning of his career, Sebastian developed a method in which he frequented gentlemen's clubs in Metropolis\(^5\) during the daytime when business was slow. He talked with the dancers, built a rapport with them, and gave them copies of his songs. He even created songs to target that market, in hopes the dancers would like the songs and choose some of his songs to perform their routines to. If they liked his music, his songs would get in the DJ's rotation. Getting a song in a major strip club's rotation strongly improved an artist's chance of getting heard later at night when important people from the music industry might be in the club. It also could lead to airplay on one of Metropolis's urban radio stations, which happened for Sebastian on more than one occasion. This creative strategy helped to make Sebastian very popular, not only in Metropolis but throughout the Southeast. He toured regularly and had been trying to take the next step into getting more radio play and ultimately, getting signed by a major record label.

\(^5\) Pseudonym
Sebastian learned to write lyrics by studying rappers like Jay Z and T.I., using their lyrics as templates and their styles as scaffolds. I was surprised when Sebastian said mentors did not play a substantive role in his becoming a rapper. There were a few supportive teachers, but Sebastian did not call them mentors. Sebastian did not have a positive experience in his high school ELA classes or in high school in general. The role of his community was more significant in his upbringing, even though he did not have a very good home life. He was raised by an aunt, who was there for him when his parents were not. Sebastian's aunt was the main inspiration for Sebastian to stay in high school, graduate, and to go to college.

Sebastian's Origins

Sebastian is an African-American male, born and raised in Rap City, a semi-urban city in the Southeast. Rap City has two public high schools. Sebastian attended both, Rap City East and Rap City West, graduating from Rap City West in the 2001. Growing up in the streets of Rap City, Sebastian was a drug dealer. These experiences, as well as the skills he needed to survive in this dangerous environment, increased his cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) define cultural capital as a collection of norms, values, and customs that help govern/orient a group’s ways of talking, acting, dressing, and even raising their families. He believed these experiences gave him license to rap about them in his songs, in what he considered an authentic and real way. He implied that this sense of realness allowed him to connect with his audiences.

Sebastian's Rapper Origins. Sebastian became a successful rapper through his ability to creatively recreate his cultural experiences and his mastery of narrative invention. Good rappers devise unique and innovative methodologies that they are able to apply to their experiences and construct thoughtful, unique, and insightful lyrics. They use these lyrics to entertain their
audiences. Sebastian’s transformation into a rapper changed his life, gave him a sense of purpose, and realigned the way in which he saw himself in the world.

**Sebastian’s Rapping Process**

**Grit.** As part of the process of learning to rap, Sebastian embodied grit and other Hip-Hop sensibilities. This grit, which rappers often refer to as their grind or hustle, enabled the rapper to persevere despite racist obstacles and other conflicts. As I alluded earlier, hustling and grinding are culturally transmitted survival techniques from the legacy of Esu Elegbara, a Yoruban mythological trickster character. The Signifying Monkey, is Esu's double-voiced American embodiment. From the black double-voiced tradition, grit can convey multiple meanings to various audiences and symbolize ingenuity, bravado, trickery, and be masculine of feminine while maintaining the stylistic lyrical speech that seeks to promote African-American survival through a coded language. This braggadocious grit developed from the idiom, “making a way out of no way.” African-American people established this idiom from the Bible verse, Isaiah 43:16, which explains how God makes a way and provides for his people. Grit and determination, coupled with Sebastian's linguistic prowess empowered him to push boundaries of racism and classism that he faced growing up. With the roadblocks of racism and classism, Signifyin(g) and hustling became a means for Sebastian to survive.

**Sebastian's Process of Learning to Be a Rapper.** Sebastian was not interested in rapping in high school. He didn't start rapping until he went to college. He did not mention rapping at all during his tenure at Rap City schools. In college, he was a promoter (organizing social events and parties) and happy in that role. “I never in my life thought about rappin’,” the rapper said; “I’m an R & B fan. I’d go pay a hundred dollars to see Jaheim before I pay fifty dollars to see Jay Z, and I'm a biz Jay Z fan."
The Circuitous Route to Becoming a Rapper. Sebastian's rap origins began with a diss song. After an adversary—who also promoted parties—disrespected him by calling the fire marshal and getting one of Sebastian's parties shut down for a fire code violation, the rapper took action. He wrote a diss song signifying on his adversary, humiliating and embarrassing him in retaliation for getting his party shut down. In the song, Sebastian said he sampled⁶ a beat from a popular song and looped⁷ it, so that it played again and again. He did all this in preparation for his next party, anticipating his adversary would be at the event. He was. At the party, Sebastian called the promoter out:

[He was] doing all kinds of internet stuff. And he wasn’t a street cat...me I’m a street cat. His family was wealthy, but he wanna play street. But you don’t do that with no street cat...So, I put the song together (I sample something from Shawty Lo⁸ like, “Goddamn, must be two-sides”). I stopped the music; I called that particular person out [makes record playing backwards sound of DJ rewinding the record]. “DJ bring it back,” I say. And, I guarantee you that song broke in three weeks. It was bananas...And you know, we just looped the hook⁹. We just looped it, looped it, looped it, looped it, looped it. I was like, okay. I got me somethin’.

This scenario identified Sebastian’s transition from promoter to artist. It also depicted his adeptness at technology. In addition, the event delineated the complexity of coded language in the black vernacular. The song he created contained a coded message inferring with its content the story of how the promoter was duplicitous and could not be trusted in the community. This

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⁶ Sampling in music is a technique of digitally encoding music or sound and reusing it as part of a composition or recording.
⁷ To loop in music means to repeat a section of sound material.
⁸ Atlanta based rapper (1976-2016).
⁹ A hook is a musical idea, often a short riff, passage, or phrase, that is used in popular music to make a song appealing and to "catch the ear of the listener". The term generally applies to popular music, especially rock, R&B, hip hop, dance, and pop. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hook_(music).
message was for the community, and would not be understood by outsiders who may also have been at the event. After this event, which took on some folkloric overtones (Gallant, 2012), Sebastian became known as a rapper in the community.

**Role of High School During the Rap Learning Process.** Sebastian did not have a positive high school experience. When I asked how his ELA classes helped to develop his skill sets for being a rapper, he recollected that he developed his skills as a rapper "outside" of his ELA classes. Even though he identified English as his favorite subject, the only book he remembered with any fondness was *Beowulf*. The only teacher he recalled with fondness was a teacher that lived in a neighboring county, who he said was from Ghana. Sebastian was unable or unwilling to draw a correlation between his growth and development as a rapper and what he was learning in his ELA classes.

**Academics Not Engaging.** The only things Sebastian said he enjoyed in high school were sports: “Basketball, that’s all I enjoyed, ‘cause I was skippin’ school,” he said. He claimed he missed 80 or 90 days of school. He didn’t care, he explained; all that mattered was that he was good at football and basketball: “I wasn’t doing nothing positive, except basketball,” he acknowledged. When I asked, what motivated him to stop skipping school, he admitted, “The biggest thing was graduation.” “I can’t be embarrassed,” he laughed, “man, my people think I’ve been going to school; all this time, I been skipping. So, it [graduation] was more to please the people that also was there for me.” A second incentive that kept Sebastian in school and on time to graduate, was girls. “Girls weren’t into dummies,” he explained, “they like cool dudes and skipping school wasn’t cool. Those guys were viewed as dummies.” Whether to demonstrate that he was no “dummy” or to meet the expectations of his family members, Sebastian attended school, passed his classes, and graduated.
Until Sebastian realized he was in danger of not graduating, he was unmotivated and didn’t try at school. “I didn’t apply myself,” he told me. Even though teachers informed him of his potential as a student, their acknowledgements did not motivate him. They were unsuccessful in engaging him. Only his perceived threat of the “embarrassment” of not graduating motivated Sebastian. He remembered, when “I knew I was against all odds…I buckled down and got myself together…” There were two points during the interview when he discussed teachers as allies. The teacher from Ghana at Rap City West and the teacher of his acting class in college, but he didn’t consider either teacher a mentor. He recalled his success as something he achieved on his own. A consistent motif in Sebastian’s recollection was that he considered his graduation and his rap career as ways to “take care” of his people: his aunt and some nieces and nephews.

**The Connection of Hip-Hop to the Community.** An engaging element that Hip-Hop provided for Sebastian that school was unable to was music's ability to solidify his connection with his family and friends. Sebastian included nieces, nephews, and his crew in some of his rap videos. He said he wanted to give something back to his family. Especially his aunt, the person who supported him the most, when he needed help. She was the most influential person in his life; she died in 2001. His aunt took him in and removed him from an unstable home environment. She provided for him and gave him a sense of emotional and financial security, perhaps for the first time in his life. In his song, S16PTM, he rapped that his “Auntie” left him a “couple stacks.” His mother and father were in and out of jail when he was growing up. Sebastian said most of his friends grew up like him, with parents in and out of jail. These experiences were important themes in Sebastian’s two mix-tapes (2014, 2017).

**College.** During high school, Sebastian said he was afraid to talk about his life:

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10 A stack is $1000.
I really wasn’t in a shell…but if you knew me from high school, you wouldn’t have knew what I been through…you would think, oh, he played basketball, he was playing football; he’s good. It was pure hell. I never wanted to talk about it.

After high school, Sebastian took a year off, this gap year coincided with the death of his aunt. He acknowledged it was after this hiatus that he began to find his voice and himself. During his college career, Sebastian attended two colleges in the Southeast but did not graduate. During this time away from Rap City, he started his career. In our interview, he recalled that, ”Only when I started doing parties and college, that’s when my [rap] skills got better” His engagement shifted from a focus on sports to an emphasis on rapping and writing. He no longer identified school as a place to play sports. Sports were a focus early in his high school career but not later in high school.

   Similar to his rap career, he had no previous desire to promote events either. He began promoting events because the parties at the small college he was attending were not very good:

   I didn't want to do it (promote parties), but only did it because it was very little parties at the college I attended. Once I started doing it I realized the money was good and I didn't have to work for anyone. I was good.

Sebastian’s interest in promoting stemmed from taking advantage of an opportunity to make money. He was hustling, taking advantage of an unfulfilled niche. In our interview, Sebastian explained how he reluctantly gave in to Hip-Hop. It was difficult to resist the art form because it gave the rapper the confidence he needed to speak and the vehicle he needed to express himself in a real and genuine way. He took charge and created parties because he saw a way to fulfill a need within his new community. The people in his community responded. He got positive
feedback from fans and critics. Articles were written about him in the *Rap City Herald* and his vlogs and YouTube videos were viewed more than 20,000 times.

While transitioning from promoter to rapper, he continued promoting. The culmination of his transformation occurred during one of his acting classes. An assignment called for him to read a text and “come back with a thirty second monologue,” he recalled:

…and whatever, man, I’m just wil’in’ out. So, the professor was like, Sebastian, you’re up. But keep in mind, like, I already know what I’m gonna do, I’m just gon’ do a scene from my life. And the scene was me and my mom; it’s like, we had an argument cause, you know, she would come to parent-teacher conferences.

Sebastian didn’t recreate the whole scenario, and I’m not sure how much he remembered, but the scene was from a high school parent-teacher conference. His most important recollection, however, was, after he finished the scene. He had an epiphany: “It hit me,” he said; “I can act.” The response from his professor was, “what in the hell book did you read that from?” “I said, actually it’s something that happened in my life, in that same exact way,” replied Sebastian. The teacher responded, “well you know I can’t give you an A for that.” “So, I got a B out of the class,” he remembered.

When Sebastian reflected on his memory, he recalled that his professor said, “that story was great.” “But it wasn’t a story,” Sebastian retorted, “It was real; it was reality.” The scene exemplified Sebastian developing his voice and realizing that his story mattered, in an academic setting. He no longer felt silenced:

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11 Acting wild and crazy.
By the time I finished high school I felt more comfortable talking about it (his life). And once I started doing music I wanted to tell my story because I saw it was people going through the same things.

Rap gave Sebastian a platform to tell his story but the vehicle that drove him there was the opportunity to perform, and that happened in school. After the epiphany resulting from the acting class, Sebastian wanted to speak and be heard. He didn’t mention having any opportunities to do this in high school. His college acting class was the only academic exercise that he recalled that gave him the freedom to express himself in a way in which he felt comfortable. The only other places that he seemed to express comfort was on the athletic field and the court. In college, without a field or court to perform on, he took that opportunity to tell his parent-teacher conference story in this acting class. His tale about his mother was the only academic assignment during his recollection of school that he could remember engaged him.

**The Process of Lyric Writing.** The first question I asked Sebastian during our interview was, “What is Hip-Hop?” I wanted to know how important Hip-Hop was to him. I assumed it was something that he had always wanted to do. I also assumed that all rappers were life-long writers. I thought being a rapper was fulfilling a childhood dream. Rapping wasn’t Sebastian's dream, however. He still responded, quickly and matter-of-factly, saying, Hip-Hop was, “an expression of life.” Hip-Hop was a vehicle for him: “I felt I have a story to tell,” he said. Once Sebastian discovered what inspired him, he was able to find his voice; then he began to establish his persona. Next, he applied his drive and dedication to his new craft and became a student of the industry and began to develop a business model that he used to launch his career. He learned
everything he could about the Southern, urban, club scene. “When I’m in there [Metropolis\textsuperscript{12}] researchin’,” he recalled, he would think:

> Oh, this DJ played this song. Let me text this to myself so when I get back here and host my party or open up my show, depending on who I perform in front of, I’ma come out on this old song to show people Hip-Hop still alive…I’m bringing that Rap City style hostin’ and breakin’ it and found out how to break music.

This quote shows that Sebastian is intentionally remixing old Hip-Hop and R&B beats with his experiences as an attempt to make both relevant to a modern audience.

To develop his rap style, Sebastian commuted back and forth, from Rap City to Metropolis. He followed artists, watched their shows, and listened to their music. He researched them, studying their performances and their sounds. During the commute he rapped, “just freestyling,” he said. He texted his songs to himself. When he needed to, he pulled his car to the side of the road and wrote the rhymes down.

Next, he started going to different places and performing what he saw people liked and not performing what they didn’t like. He remarked, “So, I was like, they kinda backed from that, so, maybe I don’t wanna rap about this.” “It’s really just thinking,” Sebastian concluded: “I start seeing more and participating in more things and getting in more trouble. I had more stuff to write about, and it was more serious.” After he established himself as an artist, he began to incorporate methods and techniques that were typically associated with formal writing and abstract thinking. He explained, “just doing reading and research, that’s how a lot of my writing skills get better.” This purposeful and conscientious method was to be a more cognizant attempt on his part to develop as a writer and as a performer. Sebastian took all of the credit for his

\textsuperscript{12} Pseudonym. Metropolis is a large southern city where Sebastian frequently performs.
success. He attributed his success to his hard work, his grind, and his business acumen. He did not credit his English Language Arts classes for developing his lyric writing process, even though his songs contained literary devices such as metaphor, simile, allusions, and other rhetorical devices that demonstrated mastery of ELA standards. He did not articulate how he developed those skills.

**Authenticity.** For Sebastian, what connected him to his audience was his persona and his authenticity, which extend from his funds of knowledge. He explained that for him to have credibility as a rapper, he had to live the life he rapped about. As an artist, it was important to him that he was not pretending to be someone or something he was not. He believed his experiences growing up in the streets of Rap City make his work authentic. As he stated in our interview, Hip-Hop was what he believed to be the essence of life and what he rapped about was what he knew to be true. He was representing himself, his community, and his fans. Conversely, the promoter Sebastian dissed early in his career did not grow up in the streets. He lied about his experiences and then dissed Sebastian by ruining his event and also by dissing him on the internet. Sebastian found out about this social faux pas and called the promoter out on it in a public forum (performance). I think this experience was very important in understanding the role cultural capital in the community. Lying about one's street status negatively affected the promoter's ability to be taken seriously or trusted by members of the community.

**Disengagement**

**Recipe for Disengagement.** After the integration of Rap City public schools, white student populations decreased and African-American student populations increased in the decade leading up to Sebastian’s tenure at Rap City High School West (see Figures 1 and 2). My study does not focus on the reason for these shifts in student populations, but I believe that race plays a
significant role in the decrease of the white student population in Rap City schools. Even though Rap City High Schools’ student populations transitioned from segregated, all-white high schools into integrated, predominantly African-American and Latinx high schools, the curriculum of the schools did not reflect that change. Hence, the social and academic needs of the new student body were not reflected in the transition. When I taught at Rap City High School West in 2004-2005, there was no sign of the Afrocentric courses requested during the meeting in 1970, in which concessions were made for the incoming black students during integration (Rice, 2001).

During our interview, Sebastian did not mention any courses or curriculum that engaged him. His engagement was strictly limited to the athletic programs. He was not engaged at school but seemed grounded in his community. I saw the importance of his community intertwined with his reason to become a rapper:

…some artists rap about what they’ve been through. And that’s how, actually, I became an artist. It’s [Hip-Hop] not a celebration but it’s just a expression of life to me. To me it’s [Hip-Hop] an expression of life…it’s a celebration of life. And the way you grow up. And the way you grow up people express it through music. So to me, that’s my definition of Hip-Hop: it’s an expression of life…Some artists rap about what they’ve been through. And that’s how, actually, I became an artist…I felt I have a story to tell. That’s the main thing. Like, I see people how other artists may have a story to tell. And I’m like, I grew up the same way, you know…

Sebastian didn’t aspire to be a rapper. He became a rapper because rap was a tool available to him that allowed him to tell his story.
Sebastian’s Recipe for Engagement. For Sebastian, the process of becoming a rapper began with his maturation and his ability to collect and reflect upon his experiences. His story was a jeremiad to construct a reality that made sense to him and that gave him purpose. While school may have introduced tools to construct narratives, it did not provide the engagement to motivate Sebastian to create his narrative in his ELA classes. In college, he found an engaging class and an inspiring teacher that provided a flexible assignment in which Sebastian was comfortable enough to begin reconstructing his narrative. After the reconstruction of his experiences, he situated them into narratives. He reproduced this process and consistently
remixed memories and created stylized narratives, recorded them, and sold them, permitting him the ability to support himself as a professional rapper. The remixing of these experiences again and again in live performances, generating another source of income. He created You Tubes and displayed his videos and vlogs to supplement his mixtapes.

The African-American Oral Tradition

*Patient for the Money*\textsuperscript{13} (2013) is Sebastian's first mixtape. In the opening skit of the mixtape, Sebastian signifies and pays tribute to Dolemite,\textsuperscript{14} a pimp and a trickster character that is a remix of The Signifying Monkey, re-establishing the Signifyin(g) trope of the African-American oral tradition for Hip-Hop. Sebastian’s remixing of the pimp as trickster is an example of intertextuality that is used fairly frequently in rap music. As shown in Appendix A, there is a legacy of pimp / trickster characters in Hip-Hop music that are inspired by and make allusions (signifying and paying homage to) to Blaxploitation\textsuperscript{16} films from the 1970s. This legacy is a part of Sebastian’s funds of knowledge. In his homage to Dolemite, Sebastian opens his mixtape with a quote/scene from film (1975), played by Rudy Ray More, in which the protagonist says, “I know what I am, and right or wrong, people look up to me because they think I am a success; I’ve got what they’ve always wanted: Money! Without it you’re nothing!” Dolemite, used the oral tradition of African-American semantics by Signifyin(g) on action movies of the United States, remixing and rewriting them as heroic narratives designed to save African-American communities. These stories are a part of Sebastian’s rap heritage and develop part of his rap persona.

\textsuperscript{13} Pseudonym.

\textsuperscript{14} Dolemite is a character played by Rudy Ray Moore who co-wrote the film and its soundtrack for the movie *Dolemite*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolemite
*Patient for the Money* was Sebastian’s early portfolio. This product showed his transformation from a voiceless high school truant, who could not talk about how bad his life was—parents in and out of jail—into a confident, hip, successful, rapper, that survived racism and poverty and was excited about sharing his story and coming into his manhood. In this text, Sebastian demonstrated his growth and development by sharing his story and openly associated himself with his community by choosing Dolemite to establish the tone of his mixtape. His identification with Dolemite signified texts from the past, (re)introduced his fan base to Rudy Ray Moore, Dolemite, and the African-American oral tradition—making what was old new (and relevant) again.

**Signifyin(g) and Dolemite.** Rap provided an authentic experience that Sebastian could not experience in school (Smagorinsky, 2017). For Sebastian, there was no practical use for the information he received at school. The themes that he exhibited in *Patient for the Money* symbolized his connection to African-American rituals and traditions. Dolemite is an urban hero, who works as a pimp and a nightclub owner. In an example of intertextuality, Sebastian remixes the pimp / trickster character Dolemite and re-introduces “The Signifying Monkey toast and trickster style of narration to his audience. In the seventies, after the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, black artists and Hollywood used Blaxploitation films to develop some black narratives for the big screen. Dolemite and other urban heroes were created to save black communities during this era and to capitalize on the popularity of this film genre created in the wake of the aforementioned black political movements. Blaxploitation films presented black voices telling black stories. These films, like rap music, targeted and engaged African-American audiences by telling their stories about their communities, using their heroes. These stories still resonate with audiences nearly fifty years later.
When Sebastian recreated his memories into narratives, he didn't like the idea of calling them stories; to him, the word story signified fiction—untruths: “But it wasn’t a story,” he said, “It was real; it was reality.” Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) discuss the importance of examining varieties of “individual selfhood and agency” (p. 1). The act of rapping and creating lyrics subconsciously helped Sebastian create narratives to counter what he previously considered stories, that is to say, fiction, that had been fabricated for entertainment purposes. In school, he was taught that these stories were privileged. Beowulf, for example, his favorite story from high school, was one of the privileged stories that made up Sebastian’s literary memory. Because he was taught that Beowulf was what literature looked like, he did not connect himself or his personal stories with literature. Sebastian did not look like his literary hero, nor did anyone in his community. Likewise, Beowulf’s adventures did not resemble Sebastian’s experiences either.

Beyond the confines of the classroom, Sebastian told his story and received positive feedback; it was a confirmation that his voice mattered. It mattered to his professor, in his college acting class, and later, it mattered to his listening audiences, who continued to give him positive feedback by buying his music and attending his performances. Sebastian’s tale about his mother was the only academic assignment that he talked about, during his recollections of school. It was evident from his excitement during his recollection that the assignment engaged him.

**Making the Mixtape.** In *Patient for the Money* (2013), Sebastian demonstrated his movement beyond his voiceless high school persona in which he was unable to publicly deal with the hurt and shame he experienced in his childhood. *Patient for the Money*, depicted a confident, braggadocios young man. Sebastian believed his skills were intuitive because he did
not recollect learning them, in school or from a teacher. In his early career, he relied on cultural memories with which he was familiar. He developed these memories into the stories that became *Patient for the Money*, where he had a platform to tell his story.

The process of developing his lyrical content came from his upbringing in the African-American oral tradition which puts a heavy emphasis on narratives and folktales. Sebastian started out writing about things he saw going on in his community. Eventually, he wrote more and more. Next, he started performing. Then, he started going to different places to perform and noticed and annotated what people liked and didn’t like with his performances. After making connections, he amended his style based upon his analysis. After he established himself as an artist, he began to incorporate methods and techniques that were typically associated with formal writing and abstract thinking. He explained that by “… just doing reading and research, that’s how a lot of my writing skills get better.” This purposeful and conscientious method was to be a more conscious attempt on his part to develop as a writer, performer, and artist.

**Discussion**

Rap engaged Sebastian and provided him a voice and a sense of purpose. School was not able to effectively engage him but did provide examples of grammar, mechanics, and training in writing and other standards. In college, Sebastian became engaged academically when a professor showed interest in his acting performance during an acting class. He was given the opportunity to choose a scene from a text and the scene he chose was from the most engaging and important text that he knew, his life. From that point, rap and writing became vehicles to get him on the stage to perform in front of audiences who valued and appreciated what he had to say.

What I found in my interview and research with Sebastian was that he, as a rapper, came from his community with an array of knowledge and skills but the only ones effectively used
were his athletic abilities. Sebastian was not engaged by school in the same way that he was engaged by his community or by the streets that he grew up in. Whatever role school played in his artistic development, Sebastian did not share it.

Sebastian wanted to speak and be heard, at the beginning of our interview he said he became a rapper because he had something to say. Sebastian enjoyed sports because he was good at them—they came naturally to him. As a football player, he was playing with the first team, within a week after transferring from Rap City East to Rap City West. The reason he enjoyed athletics more than academics was because on the field and court he was permitted to express himself in a way in which he felt comfortable, similar to his scene he performed in college about his mother. Sebastian felt comfortable when he was in charge of his content. He was more comfortable when he could freelance. In the classroom he felt silenced and relegated to the study of texts and a language he considered intellectually irrelevant. On several occasions he spoke about wanting to talk but being afraid to talk.

When I asked Sebastian if he ever had any ELA assignments about Hip-Hop, he said no. Today's ELA texts attempt to use writing strategies to get students to "connect" their lives with the textbook content in attempts to better engage them and help them to relate to the readings. This strategy, however, needs to be supplemented with the students' narratives of their own lives. Textbooks like Pearson's provide the opportunities. It is incumbent for teachers of students with these interests to become cognizant of their funds of knowledge, their interests, and their needs and prioritize assignments that meet those needs, to facilitate engagement.

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15 Reading strategy used in Pearson's *My Perspective* textbook (2017).
CHAPTER 3

"EVERYTHING I SAY IS MY LIFE":

A CASE STUDY OF WHERE RAPPERS COME FROM: MELODY’S NARRATIVE

16 Rhym, D. To be submitted to Journal of Black Studies.
Abstract

In this study I examined the question, where do rappers come from? How does a young person with an interest in Hip-Hop music learn to rap? Are their skills and abilities innate or are they learned? If rapping is learned, where is it learned? In this qualitative study I investigated my participant’s recollections of her experiences growing up in her community and in her high school that led to her becoming a professional rapper. The express purpose of this study was to examine her experiences and determine the roles these experiences played in developing the skill sets that facilitated her to becoming a professional rapper. The analysis of her ELA experiences can help teachers better engage and connect with students.

INDEX WORDS: hip-hop, critical race theory, signifying, double consciousness

Introduction

The goal of this study was to identify and contribute to the legacy of African-American resilience in the United States. This resiliency is evident in many facets of American life, including education. I am interested in research that can help African-American students discover their “authentic” selves (Freire, 2011). Paolo Freire calls upon teachers to liberate and empower students and help them see themselves as authentic thinkers, the way rapper Melody did in this study. I interviewed Melody and asked questions pertaining to how she became a professional Hip-Hop artist. I wanted to explore what role Hip-Hop played in her life. I wanted to know how rap informed who she was. How did she navigate her world and become successful? What can teachers learn from her experience in life and in school and how can they use her insights to better understand their students?
In this case study, the rapper, Melody, allowed me to explore and share her recollections of how she became a rapper. This chapter identifies and investigates the experiences and processes she developed to begin a career as an international Hip-Hop persona, mentor, and community activist. The skills that she honed during the early stage of her career greatly contributed to her development as a rap artist.

Framing the Study Theoretically and Literarily

Critical Race Theory

This study is framed by tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an academic discipline influenced by qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and derived from critical theory (Delgado, 1995, 2013; Gordon, 1999; Yosso, 2005). It began in the field of law and was developed as a means to critically examine society and culture by exploring the relationships and interconnections of race, law, and power. Beginning with the early critical works by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, CRT developed as an academic field in the middle and late 1970s. Bell, Freeman and other lawyers and legal scholars across the country began to realize that the gains of the 1960s civil rights era were, in many cases, being repealed (Delgado, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Critical Race Theory addresses sociohistorical issues, such as the normalization of racism in American society, discontent with liberalism, white supremacy, and white male privilege. The most attractive elements of CRT as it pertained to this study was its views of racism as a normal part of American life, not as an aberration (Ladson-Billings, 2003), the view of racism as part of the context of a specific educational problem such as literacy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), its qualitative approach, and perhaps most importantly, its emphasis on storytelling (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).
The CRT framework permits my participants to tell their own stories, both in the narratives they crafted in our interviews and in the narratives they created in their songs. Bettina Love (2016) states that CRT is “concerned about social constructions of race and most racism, its major principles aligned with the culture and music of hip hop” (p. 418). Hip-Hop and CRT view storytelling as a way for people of color to see themselves in the world and define their place and space (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Duncan (2002), for CRT, storytelling is important, from this theoretical perspective, because it assumes that (1) previously marginalized peoples can narrate their stories and (2) these new stories expand the concept of the ‘normal’ narrator and contest the traditional stories continually told about the experiences of Americans. Critical Race Theory has contributed to framing research on urban schools and the experience of African American students. CRT and Hip-Hop argue that storytelling allows one to name, own, and tell his or her reality.

**CRT and Education.** Gloria Ladson-Billings applied the tenets of CRT and Critical Pedagogy (Lynn, 1999; Jennings, 2000) to the field of education. She recognized that after critical pedagogy was established, theories and epistemological works for gender and class quickly developed but no critical theory for race and education was developed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009; Jennings & Lynn, 2005). Class-based and gender-based explanations are not powerful enough to explain all of the differences or variances in school experiences and performances. For example, an examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, does not account for disparities in school discipline rates, dropout rates, pushout rates, or the disproportionate rates at which people of color who do not graduate are incarcerated.

In her social theory of race and education Ladson-Billings (2009) critiques liberalism, explains the ineffectiveness of civil rights laws, and analyzes social doctrines that she says
perpetuate an American hegemony that continues to affect African-American learners during this period of post-integration. According to Ladson-Billings post-civil rights era acts of educational segregation such as white flight, the dismantling of African-American schools, the displacement of African-American students via busing, and the unemployment of African-American teachers greatly disadvantaged African-American learners. The reward for surviving Black Codes and Jim Crow legislation is de facto segregation—particularly in many U.S. high schools—under the guise of gifted programs, white flight, and a loss of African-American teaching and administrative positions (2009). Inequality is perhaps accepted and tolerated because desegregation programs that fail African-American and Latinx learners can oftentimes help white students academically, hence they may be allowed to flourish (2009). So, while white students flourished, African-American and Latinx suspensions, expulsions, and dropout and pushout rates continued to rise.

The Influence of African-American Oral Tradition

African-American culture and its traditions are evident throughout the music in Melody’s catalog. Her music illuminates her experiences as an African-American woman in an “imaginatively distinctive manner” that Bernard Bell (1987, p. xiii) attributes to texts written in the African-American oral tradition. These imaginative qualities present themselves thematically and stylistically in African-American texts. Borrowing from Bell’s interpretive strategy, I examined Melody’s lyrics, treating them as symbolic acts used to rewrite and remember the African-American past with her present experiences. The African-American oral tradition served as a tool for Melody to tell her story, akin to the way slaves did in their narratives (Andrews, 1988). Bell (1987, 2004) and Gates (2014) explain that African-Americans as an ethnic group become conscious of themselves and celebrate their quests for personal and social freedom,
literacy, and wholeness and create art, such as rap music, as a means to express themselves and survive racism and social oppression through art. Thus, Melody’s music became a conduit through which she gave voice to her identity and consciousness, which were shaped by double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision (Bell, 1987).

The term double consciousness was coined by W. E. B. Du Bois as a metaphor for the sociopsychological process by which African-Americans responded to racial and cultural domination. In 1937, double-consciousness was remixed by anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits as socialized ambivalence and used to explain the existence of conflicting African and European values and behavioral alternatives in postcolonial Haiti (Bell, 1987). The trope of double vision is the third remix of double consciousness:

This trope was further developed in 1963 by Ralph Ellison as double vision to describe the ambivalence of modern black Americans toward all people and events. These interrelated terms do not signify a basic personality type or disorder. On the contrary, they signify both the complex sociopsychological process of acculturation of black Americans--the will to realize their human and civil rights--and the sociocultural relationship of colonized people of African descent to colonizers of European descent. The shifts in allegiance of black Americans between the values of the white dominant culture and those of the black subculture are a normal survival strategy, a healthful self-protective, compensatory response to the oppression and repression fostered by institutionalized racism and economic exploitation. (p. 345)

These racist assumptions also led to whites in America Sambo-izing African-Americans. This term stereotypes African-Americans, particularly adult males, as child-like, shiftless, lazy,
not wanting to work. African-Americans, also, are not schizophrenic or psychotic. Double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision states Bell, are normal survival strategies.

**Signifying and the Black Vernacular.** Gates (2012) describes Signifyin(g) as the trope of tropes in the African-American vernacular, a language African-American people have been cultivating and using since they were brought here from various West African regions. Esu-Elegbara was the central figure of linguistic interpretation in Yoruba culture in West Africa. The Signifying Monkey is his distant relative and what Gates calls "the rhetorical principle in Afro-American vernacular discourse" (p. 234). The Signifying Monkey is more than a character in a narrative; he, according to Gates, is the "vehicle for narration itself" (241). Signifyin(g) is a homonym of signifying. Here is how Gates explains the homonym:

"Signification," in standard English, denotes the meaning that a term conveys, or is intended to convey. It is a fundamental term in the standard English semantic order. Since Saussure, at least, the three terms *signification, signifier, signified* have been fundamental to our thinking about general linguistics and, of late, about criticism specifically. These neologisms in the academic-critical community are homonyms of terms in the black vernacular tradition perhaps two centuries old. By supplanting the received term's associated concept, the black vernacular tradition created a homonymic pun of the profoundest sort, thereby marking its sense of difference from the rest of the English community of speakers. Their complex act of language Signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions, conventions established, at least officially, by middle-class white people. (p. 237)
Carol Lee (1993; 2000), has studied Signifyin(g) as a scaffold for literary interpretation. Mikhail Bakhtin calls Signification a double-voiced word or utterance decolonized by black people for their purposes "by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation" (Gates, 2012). Gates distinguishes between American English signifying from African-American English (which Gates calls the black vernacular or Afro-American English) by physically removing the g from the end of the word, so that it sounds more like the African-American pronunciation: Signifyin'. The capitalization denotes the terms status as the master trope in the black vernacular.

Signifyin(g) is black double-voicedness "because it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation" (p. 239). Signifyin(g) in its multifaceted role as trope acts as a complex rhetorical device that Gates calls a trope reversing trope. In American English these signifying tropes include metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, litotes, metalepsis, aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis (Gates, 2014). In African-American English these Signifyin(g) tropes are called dropping lugs, joaning, marking, loud-talking, calling out (of one's name), capping, sounding, rapping, and playing the dozens (Gates, 2014; Smitherman, 1977). In the latest reinterpretation of the African-American vernacular remixed by rap artists, they include disssing as a remix of calling out and playing the dozens. In this study, I call the loud-taking boasting and connect it to the back woods boaster of African-American folklore, who were known to do yard calls and communicate from one plantation to the next using that method.

Rap music continues the Signifyin(g) tradition in African-American music. Jazz signifies on versions of popular music. The blues signifies on itself; there are more than a dozen versions of The Signifying Monkey. Tropes such as these empower African-Americans, freeing them from what author Toni Morrison calls the white gaze and allowing them to communicate freely
and undetected by audiences who cannot speak the black vernacular (Baldwin, 1993; Du Bois, 1903; Gates, 1988; Morrison, 2012). African-Americans have their own unique languages with linguistic structures that rely on repetition and revision that are fundamental to African-American artistic forms (Gates, 1988). Gates tells us that the African-American tradition is double-voiced. My study will focus on how Melody used her lyrics to continue this African-American oral tradition in her music.

Signifyin(g) is a fairly complex concept to those unfamiliar with the language. Two helpful examples can be found in the writings of Langston Hughes and H. Rap Brown. First, in Hughes's poem “Cultural Exchange” he writes, "And they asked me right at Christmas / If my blackness, would it rub off? / I said, ask your Mama.” H. Rap Brown, in his definition of signifying says, “Some of the best dozens players were girls...before you can signify you got to be able to rap...Signifying allowed you a choice--you could either make a cat feel good or bad” (Gates, 2012, p. 234). Gates explains signifyin(g) as a homonym of the American English term signifying. Signifyin(g) here we see is linguistic, rhetorical, political, and humorous. It is the transformation of the trope also after it has been remixed by double consciousness. “In the extraordinarily complex relationship between the two homonyms,” says Gates, “we both enact and recapitulate the received, classic confrontation between Afro-American culture and American culture” (p. 235). A very important element in understanding Signifyin(g) is that the trope can be used to uplift or to tear down. It can pay tribute to someone or something and it can be used to ridicule or debase someone or something as well. Tone and timing play a key role as well. Users have to be good listeners and very perceptive to determine when and where to place the language in the conversation.
The coded language used by rappers in the trope of Signifyin(g) and talking texts is a remixing of the coded language that has always been a part of the African-American tradition and of African-American music in the United States. During slavery, the coded messages of slaves had to multilayered and constructed for multiple audiences. People who profited from the enslavement of Africans, especially slave owners, worked very hard to suppress and information. Hence coded language was critical to slave survival. This coding by slaves was a deliberate strategy created to disguise their messages. Slaves took items they were permitted to have and literally wove them into their cultural heritage. Quilts for example became tools through which slaves deliberately embed messages and planned their escapes, stealing themselves from their masters. One quilt pattern known as “trip around the world was used to indicate a path around a mountain instead of over it. If a non-slave overseer, master, or mistress overheard a slave talking about a trip around the world they would have dismissed it as nonsensical (Tobin & Dobard, 2000). The slaves were very good at reading their masters.

Slaves remixed common, everyday items into complex tools. Another cultural item which became a tool of signification was dance (Rice). Slaves created dances, like the limbo, which was created to speak directly to the limited space that slaves endured on slave ships when they were forced to dance as exercise on the ship’s deck. Another dance, the cakewalk, mocked southern states by making fun of plantation owners (Rice). In music (e.g. drumming) and songs “Talking drums” were used to communicate long distances even between villages in Africa. They were also used for religious services and social gatherings (Finnegan, 2012). Negro spirituals, in particular, were used by some slaves to send messages to coordinate meetings and as maps for running away from their masters. Slaves took existing songs that already had meanings and added their style, tone, and idiomatic significances to the texts. These repurposed
songs now maintained multiple meanings that comfortably coexisted in the music. The new meanings lay dormant until audiences who could read and understand their meaning and context could use them. The song’s original meanings continued to entertain and soothe the song’s original audiences as well. In Negro spiritual such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” the double meanings included words like “traveling shoes,” “chariots,” or “wheels.” Any time these words were referenced, they were often codes that denoted that a slave was planning to run away. Places in songs were coded metaphors for destinations or meeting places, for example the Jordan River in “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” symbolized the Ohio River for slaves who used that song in Ohio.

Rappers perpetuate the African-American oral tradition of coded messages in music by signifying, boasting, dissing, and using other methods to hide messages in texts to various audiences separated by race, ethnicity, age, class, region, and gender. Rappers, like bluesmen have always cleverly hidden message in lyrics for audiences so that they permit themselves a modicum of freedom to say what they want without censorship. The coding of language, language enables Melody to create spaces in the music that free her from the white gaze and allow her to connect with members of her audience who can read the codes and understand her language.

Intertextuality

The theory of intertextuality suggests that every text has its meaning but only in relation to other texts. According to the theories of intertextuality, all texts are built from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works (Kalogirou & Economopoulou, 2012). Reading from the intertextual perspective becomes a process of moving between texts and not necessarily one of creating texts independently. Gates (2012) refers to a similar tradition in African-
American literature with his theory of Signifyin(g). He calls texts that move in and out of one another “speakerly texts” because they speak to each other across time. Roland Barthes (1977) says literary meanings cannot be stabilized by readers. Texts are “multidimensional space” in which a variety of writings blend and clash and none of these writings are “original” (p. 46). Julia Kristeva (1980) in her development of Bakhtin’s spatialization of literary language argues that “each word is an intersection of other words and texts where at least one other word or texts can be read” (1980, p. 66). Through sampling and Signifyin(g) rappers are constantly dancing back and forth, remixing and recreating black texts, black talk, and black culture, making what was old, new again.

Methods

Researcher Bias

I grew up about sixty miles from the South Bronx, where it all began, and Queens, where Melody is from. I grew up listening to Hip-Hop. My early connection to Hip-Hop is why I chose the research topic. Hip-Hop culture is transmitted through the African-American oral tradition and porch culture and family stories and family histories. Double consciousness has played a large role in my life and has played a role in shaping my perception of the world and how think about Hip-Hop. It has generated bias in me and my participants as well, my analysis and findings will discuss these biases and what they mean.

Every Hip-Hop head remembers when he or she fell in love with Hip-Hop. I remember Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh when they first sang “La Di Da Di” and “The Show.” I remember “Rapper’s Delight,” by the Sugar Hill Gang. I remember the powerful effects of this music on me and my identity. So, I connect with Melody when she reminisces about rewriting Das EFX songs and Method Man songs. I did the same thing with Run DMC and “Rapper’s Delight.”
also remember the importance of porch culture when families came together for parties or other social gatherings to experience cultural rituals (Moyer, 1998). Parents and grandparents provided exemplars and their children repeated them and then remixed versions of their own. Even though Melody and I grew up in different generations, in different states, we both grew up in African-American, urban families, and we both grew up with Hip-Hop. During our interview, even though some of the slang was different, we able to bond and connect ideologically, culturally, and musically.

**Interview**

This study used a qualitative approach in which I conducted interviews with my participant, Melody, a rapper born and educated in Queens, New York. She moved to Florida as a young adult; it was the location where her career in Hip-Hop career began. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) explain that respondents have funds of knowledge from which they can formulate their narratives. There are two ways of viewing their funds of knowledge, first we might think of them as “vessels” of answers that they might access. These types of responses could be concise and accurate and contain the respondents “sentiments, feelings, and behaviors” (p. 30). Narrative inquiry justifies using interviews, which Holstein and Gubrium (2003) label “special conversations” instead of empirical data in which people talk about their lives (p. 30).

**Participant Selection**

I started informal ethnographic research and informal interviews on Hip-Hop in 2014. I interviewed rappers, DJs, and promoters in Rap City. Each of the participants for my research raps professionally. In the informal interviews, I asked rappers, DJs, and Hip-Hop promoters what makes a good rapper. I wanted to know what, in their opinions, industry people thought, distinguished a good rapper from a bad rapper. From my informal interviews, three criteria
emerged: the ability to create lyrics, access to beats, and the ability to move the crowd; the artist must have stage presence. I was unable to develop a consensus for the order of these items because they are intrinsically interwoven. These criteria, according to my research, are what connect the rapper to the audience and what makes a rapper, a rapper, according to the Rap City Hip-Hop community.

After I knew what I was looking for in a participant, I applied aspects of criterion based sampling, purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling to select my participants (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). I used one-on-one interviews, in which my participants talked about their lives and their ELA experiences. These conversations varied from semi-formal guided conversations to free-flowing informal exchanges (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

I met Melody at an annual Hip-Hop conference in Atlanta. She attended a panel on Hip-Hop that I moderated. She came up to me afterward, introduced herself and asked questions about the panel discussion. After I answered her questions, I asked if she would be interested in participating in my study. After I explained the study to her, she said she was interested in participating. She gave me her information. I called her the following week and set up a time to meet for a phone interview.

Document Analysis

In my study, I also used various data sources including song lyrics from mixtapes, EP/CDs and videos. Other documents will include interviews, articles, and critiques of lyrics and performances on websites and blogs. See Figure 3.1 for a list and description of data sources analyzed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview transcripts (phone)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Semi-formal interviews were conducted via cellular phone. Total time of all three interviews is just under 55 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook / Messenger</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Follow ups to the cellular interviews were conducted during six (6) Facebook Messenger exchanges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTubes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Videos of Melody’s songs. Approximately 61 minutes of video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPs / CDs / Mixtapes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Melody has published four full length projects. I was unable to access one of her EPs. She has published a total of five.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs / tracks</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Melody has published more than 37 tracks and more than 110 minutes of content. I was not able to access one of her extended play (EP) CDs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody’s website</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Visually attractive, well organized, updated, and maintained website. Content includes links for a homepage, a biography, lists of shows. There are pictures on the site, most of the artist performing on stage or pictures from videos. There is a link for a store where the artist’s music, merchandise, like t-shirts, can be purchased, and a lyric book can be purchased as well. There is also a link on the store link to make donations to Melody’s non-profit organization that provides a summer camp and mentoring for young people in her community. There is a music link to purchase her music, from compact disc and mixtapes, digitally. One can purchase individual songs or an entire digital CD or mixtape. There is a media link that lists quotes and critical acclaims about Melody’s music, from various critics and sources. There is a “Look and Listen” link that open up to Melody’s latest videos; there is a link to the artist’s blog, a link to her nonprofit, and a link to contact the artist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Melody’s interview was held via cellular telephone and was semi-structured. I asked Melody a series of prepared questions that I believed would help generate data for this study.

The questions related to social and cultural factors that led to Melody becoming a rapper. During
the interview, I did not have time to ask each of the eight questions, (see Figure 2.1), but each was addressed directly or indirectly by her narrative.

**Figure 3.2: Interview Questions**

1. What is Hip-Hop?
2. What does it mean to be authentic?
3. How did you learn to write lyrics?
4. What was your writing process?
5. Who were your mentors / role models (who did you emulate)?
6. What do you remember about your ELA experiences in high school?
7. What roles did teachers play in your development as a rapper?
8. What role did your community play in the development of your Hip-Hop skills?

**Data Analysis**

In my data analysis, I explored how Melody became a rapper. I focused on her origins, the processes she developed and used to write lyrics and create a stage persona. I analyzed what roles her experiences and her upbringing in her community played in her artistic development. I also focused on what role her high school experiences played in her development as a rapper, including her levels of engagement while in school, her relationships with her teachers or mentors, and whether or not she perceived her work as authentic and what that meant to her as an artist.

From my analysis, I discovered that Melody was exposed to and acquired the skills she uses as a rapper by listening to and participating in family and community rituals like Signifyin(g), boasting, and cyphering. Her interview and her lyrics provided examples of these standard African-American practices. I, myself, was exposed to and participated in similar rituals. As a high school teacher in a rural, African-American school, I hear and see my students participating in the same rituals daily.
After rereading Melody’s interview several times, I began to recognize themes and codes in the text. The themes I discovered were origins, identity, the role of school, engagement, and signifying. It was then that I was able to begin to make theoretically-informed connections. After the interview, I transcribed it. I eliminated pauses and buzz words. After transcription, I read and reread the interview and took notes on words, phrases, and experiences that were repeated or that I identified as elements of the African-American oral tradition. During this stage, I read the interview on my laptop, writing comments digitally in the margins and highlighting the salient Afrocentric\textsuperscript{17} points that I thought were generated by exposure to the African-American oral tradition and were poignant enough or occurred frequently enough in the text to be viewed as themes. After I did this for the entire document, I printed out the document, reread my comments again, making notes on those comments, writing on the text. I added the newest written notes as digital comments and recreated another draft of the text. I repeated this process four times.

To reinforce what I learned from the text, I went back to the audio. Reading Melody’s words sometimes caused a dissonance from the content of the interview. Going back to the audio helped me recalibrate. When dealing with oral traditions, sounds and tones are critical. Listening to the audio helped me get a better feel for the tone and the pace of the interview, which is very helpful for analyzing Signifyin(g) and boasts.

Rap and its lyrical content is part of the African-American oral tradition. I found evidence of Melody’s competence in African-American literary tropes in her published lyrics. The tropes of Signifyin(g) and boasting occur frequently in her music. She also rapped about voice and identity in her songs. In the data section I discussed direct correlations between Melody’s process of becoming a rapper, the development of her voice and stage persona, her

\textsuperscript{17} From an African-centered perspective.
engagement to Hip-Hop and her formal education and those connections and her view of authenticity and how that was reflected in her work.

In analyzing Melody’s lyrics, I used an interpretive strategy and approach that I adopted from Bernard Bell’s (1987) work on the African-American novel and viewed the rapper’s work holistically as a socially symbolic act. In this symbolic act, texts were examined as a rewriting of the survival strategies: boasting, dissing (which is Hip-Hop’s remixing of the African-American linguistic, social word game, the dozens\(^{18}\)), and signifying. Thus, Melody’s music becomes a conduit through which she gives voice to her identity and consciousness, which are shaped by double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision.

In identifying occurrences of the African-American oral tradition in Melody’s music, I used a method similar to the one I used when coding her interview. After I identified examples of boasting (Gates, 2014; Smitherman, 1977) signifying, (Gates, 2014; Smitherman, 1977) and dissing, I then listened repeatedly to the identified tracks with the coded language. From this process I created a transcript of words, phrases, and sometimes bars, making sure that I was able to interpret and understand the context of the usage incorporated into the figurative language.

**Origins**

Melody is an internationally known Hip-Hop performer who has released 4 EPs, 1 mixtape, and more than 37 tracks in those recordings\(^7\). She has opened for Erykah Badu, The Wu-Tang Clan, Mos Def, and Talib Kweli. Melody was not born in the South. She is from the borough of Queens, New York. A persistent motif in the rapper’s early work was the “dream”

motif. This motif was the title of one of her earliest works, a mixtape produced by Sleeper,\(^{19}\) a popular DJ in the Tampa area who was influential early in her career. Several tracks (See Figure 3) incorporated the dream motif, 16%, and it is a part of the very positive message that she incorporated in her music and in her work in her community.

In Figure 3.3 below is a list of themes in Melody’s music. In the middle column, Melody was asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 how important particular themes were for her music. She chose 4 of the themes I suggested: identity, dissing, voice, and authenticity. The data analysis column is the frequency at which the top 5 themes occurred in the songs I had access to for the study.

Figure 3.3: Melody’s Frequently Used Lyrical Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Melody score Range 1-10</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>Not rated (NR)</td>
<td>16/37 = 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>17/37 = 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissing</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>11/37 = 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream motif</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>6/37 = 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>16/37 = 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Identity.** Melody defined herself as a femcee instead of an emcee (MC) throughout her music. I categorized this as a boast, in the tradition of the African-American toast, which is a boasting ritual. The Library of Congress defines toasts as narrative poems from the African-

\(^{19}\) Pseudo
American oral tradition that are usually rhymed, rhythmic, epic representations of extended conflicts between protagonists, expressed in nonstandard African-American vernacular. Traditionally, these are performed in public informal recitals by males (Toasts).

In S2MT Melody boasted, “Femcee, put ‘em in a frenzy!” announcing herself and simultaneously proclaiming her femininity and her rapping prowess. This creative moniker established the artist’s tone, persona, and identity. I associated Melody’s identity with her voice. She rated her identity as a 9/10 and her voice as an 8/10 in terms of themes important to her in her music. Her self-ratings were supported by the lyrics in her music. At 46%, identity was the theme I was able to identify most frequently in her music. Since her identity was also defined by her gender, the 46% of that particular theme also supports her identity assertion. Therefore, voice, identity, and self-esteem are all very important themes for Melody and essential in developing her voice and her narrative. Her gender was an overarching theme of her music.

In a dream-motif song on her mixtape, she referenced herself to her listeners as that, “little brown girl from Queens” who became “that great black hope.” The artist took pride in her work and her role as a rapper and as a role model. She learned her craft in part from other famous New York born rappers, such as The Wu-Tang Clan, Talib Kweli, and KRS One.

**Process of Becoming a Rapper**

Good rappers devise unique and innovative methodologies that enable them to reflect upon their experiences and construct insightful and inspiring lyrics. They use these lyrics to entertain their audiences and to sustain themselves, mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Melody said her process of becoming a rapper started when she first tried to write lyrics at twelve or thirteen years of age. The process she used in her first attempts included rewriting songs by switching a few lines to make the songs feature her and thereby more relevant
to her and her life. She said, back then, she might take a Das EFX song or a Method Man song and replace their names with her own. Das EFX and Method Man were very popular in Hip-Hop music at the time, which explained why Melody was influenced by the groups.

By the 9th grade, Melody began to discover the power and influence of Hip-Hop. At a 9th grade talent show, she said that she experienced her “biggest first moment on stage”:

It was awesome because that’s when I realized that I could do this thing because I started telling people to do stuff and they were doing it. So, like I’ll say, “say this” and they’ll say it, or “get up” and they got up. I’m like, you know what, I think I’m onto something here.

This experience is significant for two reasons. First, Melody had a very positive memory about rapping. It was also a lasting memory. Second, the experience happened at school. The fact that the event occurred at school allowed her to see school as a positive environment and that rap—a skill she was learning—was welcome there, which made the experience positive.

**Perceived Role of School While Learning to Be a Rapper.** During Melody’s adolescence she began her metamorphosis into becoming a rapper at the school talent show. Early in the development process, she repurposed rhymes. In rap, as in education, repetition and imitation are a common and important technique for learning (Jones, 2009; Kazdin & Rotella, 2009; Markman, 2011). As the content and structure of Melody’s music developed, so did her persona. She grew more confident. According to Melody, as she matured her writing matured, and she began to become more self-aware. This maturity enabled her to accentuate gendered themes, conflicts, and obstacles in her music. At this stage of her career, she began to produce music. Her music covered a variety of topics and focused on themes that are consistent to who she is a person.
Engagement in School. Melody was engaged in school as well as her culture. Informal lessons from the African-American oral tradition and classroom learning in school provided Melody with the skills necessary to express herself and her way of being in the world, as a rapper. She demonstrated mastery of these skills in her song lyrics. For technical refinement of her lyrical skills, Melody assigned some of the credit to school. Her experiences in school were positive. While there were no Hip-Hop lyric writing classes or classes that prepared her for life as a professional rapper, she used what she learned about grammar, mechanics, diction, syntax, usage, and figurative language to help her as a writer.

Learning grammar and mechanics from school were skills that Melody confidently admitted were important to her development as a rapper.

My grammar is pretty good. And diction, when I deliver my rhymes, people know what I’m saying...the biggest thing that people say about rap is, “I don’t even know what they saying”; “I can’t even understand that.” But, you know I do take pride in that; that is something that I took away from my English courses both in high school and college is good diction. And being able to get in front of people and speak well and not be nervous about it and be confident in my speaking ability. Those are a few things that I know that I got from my high school English courses and I took that into my college English courses. Those things have really helped me as an MC to get on the stage and project and be clear. You know, actually have a point, actually have something to say. And know how to paint a picture, with my lyrics. You know, not just get on the mic and make noise for the sake of making noise [laughs].

Melody viewed her acquisition of language skills as important. Her interpretation and perception of her success spoke to the complexity of double consciousness and the white gaze and the
potential dilemma it could cause for African-American students. Her descriptions of “good diction” and “speaking well” symbolized her understanding that her mastery of these skills in school were a necessary part of her survival skills. I attributed her willingness to master these skills and her understanding of the importance of mastering these skills as a part of her social survival skills.

Each product that Melody constructed exemplified her ability to fuse African-American culture with the African-American oral tradition as a vehicle to tell her story and to manipulate her audience to read her texts. The linguistic skills that she learned from her community coupled with the classroom learning she demonstrated in her ELA classes allowed Melody to develop into a professional rapper. Her ability to manipulate language and connect with people, enabled her to develop creatively in a way that she did not think she would have been able to, without the academic training that she received in her ELA classes. In addition to the classroom learning, she was exposed to many different types of students. Of her ELA experiences she remembered that she had English classes in which she studied theater and television content and production. Those classes, she said, were “good for her.” They helped her develop her stage persona and confidence on stage, and in front of the camera, in the numerous performances and videos she starred in. Even though she did not identify any teachers as mentors, she did mention, however, that her teachers did not “judge” her and that her classes were a “good experience” for her. She said her teachers did well by her and that she had a “great experience” in school.

Melody recalled being well adjusted. She “got along with everybody,” she recollected:

I wasn’t the popular pretty girl, but I wasn’t an outcast. I got along with the jocks; I got along with the theater crew; I got along with the nerds; I got along with the cool people. I was kind of in my own lane. I did raps. I was the girl that rapped. Maybe that helped me.
It was a smooth experience. I kinda just played my position; I had my own lane. I had my own thing. And for the most part I just got along with everybody and made my way through it.

Her ability to interact comfortably with various groups proved an asset to her as a professional artist. It gave her access to a larger, more diverse audience.

**How Melody’s Strategies Might Apply Today.** During our interview, Melody observed that kids today are different from the kids from her generation. She recalled:

Like, the reality shows, the music that’s on the radio, I mean, it’s grown folks stuff [laughing]. You know what I mean? We had our little things. We had Kim 20 you know...Now they can be watching TV at 10 o’clock on a Saturday morning and see explicitly sexual scenes, on the television. Our primetime was *Family Matters*...the things that these kids are watching now...they are just being exposed to music and television with a lack of discernment, with a lack of discretion; anything goes and we’re seeing that in their behavior. We are seeing that in the way they are acting, in the way they are speaking, their lack of regard for their elders, their lack of respect. So, I think that unfortunately, it does fall a little bit more on the teachers because that’s where they spend the most of their day, to find a way to meet them where they are. You can’t just throw a textbook out anymore and say “do this.” Take it home; do your homework; come back tomorrow; we’re sticking to the script. I think these days, educators have to step outside the box a little bit and find a way to meet these kids where they are.

It is not unusual for one generation to be critical of the next. What distinguished Melody’s criticism was her willingness to do something about the problems she saw in her community.

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20 Rapper Lil’ Kim.
through social programs she created. Melody’s statement also addressed a topic in my problem statement: the disconnect between students and school learning in some communities. Although the reflection did not speak directly to how Melody became a rapper, it did give insight into how rappers and rap music may be able to help teachers engage today’s students more effectively. Melody’s identification of differences in culture and student behavior was observed during her interaction with the youth in her community as part of the non-profit organization she started. Her organization focused on “youth empowerment.” Her non-profit provided programs during school and after. Melody spoke at schools and throughout her community. She provided community workshops focusing on empowerment; she provided a summer camp for kids; she also provided group empowerment coaching, performance coaching for artists, and was a certified life coach. Melody worked on sharing her skills and talents with her community in school and community environments. Her involvement in her community created a link between her and the young people in her community.

**Development of Her Rapping Style.** As she developed her language arts skills in school, she was influenced by artists to which she was exposed. Her early influences were R&B singers not rappers, including Grammy winners Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson. Her earliest rap influences included Das EFX, Method Man, Mos Def (now known as Yasiin Bey), and Talib Kweli.\(^{10}\) Another very influential artist for Melody was Lauryn Hill. Hill's (1998) solo debut album garnered ten Grammy nominations and five awards, inspired Melody to make music “mean something.”

When I started doing the rap thing I just happened to randomly like Das EFX for some reason. I just loved the way they spit.\(^ {11}\) So, and I was a tomboy when I was a kid. So, the boys were rappin’ so that’s kind of what made me get into it. Just being a tomboy and
you know, you can do it, I can do it too. And I like Das EFX. So I started messin’ around with that. But it wasn’t until a little bit later on that I really started listening to anything that wasn’t on the radio, as far as Hip-Hop goes. I mean I listened to the BBD, “Dwyck,”12 Gang Starr, Greg Nice, all that. Whatever was on the radio and we were dancing to. That’s what I was listening to. But I wasn’t listening to like Eric B and Rakim necessarily or L.L. aside from like the commercials, you know, stuff that was on the radio. “Jingling Baby” and all that stuff, you know. It wasn’t until a little later I kind of liked Method Man, you know, when I started getting into his Tical album, then a little after that, later in the nineties, the end of the nineties, I guess, Black Star. That was really the most—that was when it changed for me—when I really started listening to lyrics and kind of being influenced—definitely being inspired—by art, by Hip-Hop artists would probably be the Black Star Album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, that album is when I really started getting’ into—really, really making music mean something. Before that it was for fun. But when those albums came out that’s when I kinda saw a change and actually began to be influenced by Hip-Hop artists.

This transformation also showed her shift from popular urban music to Hip-Hop. As she said, Lauryn Hill was a major influence for female artists, in several music genres.

**Signifyin(g) Influential Rappers: "Bad."** As she stated in the quote above, Melody, was inspired by Lauryn Hill. She signified on Hill in song S15MT, rapping that people compared her to Hill. This comparative compliment stemmed as much from Melody’s persona as it did from the thematic approach that she took in her music and lyrics. Even though Melody called herself the Femcee, Hill was arguably the archetype of that persona.
The most interesting signification that I found in Melody's music came during her Signifyin(g) of Michael Jackson, in song S6MT. In this example of intertextuality, Melody compiles pieces of several classic R&B and Hip-Hop songs to create her new text. The title of her song is a remix of Jackson’s (1987) title song from his Bad album. She remixed and recreated Jackson’s double-voiced theme of badness from his song “Bad.” Her song sampled the track and remixed some lyrics as well. Her coded song was a tribute to Jackson and his bravado.

To comprehend the signification and the double-voicedness of the video, which was directed by Martin Scorsese, we actually have to go to the video to deconstruct Jackson's lyrics and the video's images. The song, Jackson (2009) stated, came from a real-life story he read about. He based the character Daryl, from his Bad video, on this real life character.

The 18-minute video opened with Michael Jackson, who played the role of Daryl, the protagonist, ending the semester at an all-white, boarding school somewhere in upstate New York or New England and returning home to his rundown urban neighborhood in Brooklyn. Daryl is reunited with his friends, as they hang out around New York City, somewhat awkwardly, with drug dealers and in the subways, where they are scoping out targets to rob.

During this process, it became evident to the group that Daryl was no longer "down" or willing to do the illicit behavior they used to do before he left for his boarding school. This created a conflict between Daryl and his friends; Daryl struggled to co-exist in two worlds. Hence, his peers pressured Daryl to show them he was "bad!" Daryl got into a yelling match with the antagonist, Mini Max, played by Wesley Snipes. Daryl told Mini Max, "I'll show you who’s bad," as the film version of the video transformed from black and white into color and began the music video portion of the text. Jackson transformed also, into a leather outfit with buckles and straps everywhere.
The irony of the video was evident because of the history of Jackson's transformation from Jackson 5 Michael Jackson, who looked African-American, to *Thriller* (1982) Michael Jackson, who looked African-American but traded in his afro for a Jheri Curl, to *Bad* Michael Jackson, who still looked African-American but was noticeably lighter skinned and sans his original nose and still sporting a Jheri Curl. "Bad" signified on blackness lyrically and visually. Jackson's signification was a tribute to a man's story that he connected with and that he felt allowed him to tell his story about his blackness.

"Who's bad" could be symbolic for, who is or what is black and how is blackness defined? This question is one that plagued Jackson most of his adult life. In Quincy Jones's interview (Leight, 2017) he recalled that when he and Jackson met about the album, all the turmoil in Jackson's life was starting to mount up, so he suggested that Jackson do a really open and honest album in which he wrote the songs. "Bad" was one of the songs he wrote about being "black" in the way he experienced being black. The video also exemplified double consciousness, symbolizing Jackson's struggle with the conflict between African-American and American cultures and how he was perceived by African-Americans and whites. He was trying to come to terms with both cultures in his music.

His video also spoke to both cultures artistically, as only he could at the time, he privileged Hip-Hop culture in his video by having his dancers stylishly attired like Hip-Hop B-Boys: some sported Kangol hats, Gazelle glasses, and phat gold chains. They looked like LL Cool J did in his video for his song, "I'm Bad" (1987), which I discuss later and which is also signified by Melody. As Jackson danced around in the video with a troop of tough-looking, urban dancers dressed like gang members and B-Boys, he boasted, grunted, and hollered, like James Brown did in "Super Bad," another intertextual connection. Here Jackson signified the
texts of James Brown and the b-boy stylings of Hip-Hop culture and remixed them into his text. There was an improvisational synthesizer solo that was reminiscent of James Brown's extended fifteen and twenty minute songs that often included improvisational horn solos by Maceo Parker. Jackson, in Signifyin(g) James Brown and his texts, recalled and remixed black soul, R&B, and funk music traditions and fused them with Hip-Hop images as his dancers incorporated Hip-Hop breakdancing and pop locking into their dance moves. Melody's Signifyin(g) of Jackson's text allowed her to use his song as a conduit to also take a sociopolitical stand with her sexual and racial identify as well, which I will discuss when I focus on her lyrics.

As I mentioned, Jackson signified R & B legend James Brown and his classic funk song, “Super Bad.” Brown used the term super bad to signify on white audiences and empower black audiences while boasting to them that he was super bad because he had "soul." James's song was layered with American English and African-American idioms that created a double-voiced signification. Bursting with holler, grunts and gospel and blues styles, Brown repurposes the term bad, meaning good, an idiom popularized at the height of the Black Power Movement and certainly made even more popular by the soul singer. Jackson remixed Brown's usage of bad and said the theme of his song was "doing good is bad!" meaning cool (2012). Melody sought to remix Jackson’s revival of the term in her tribute to him. To intensify the intertextual complexity, Melody added another text to her Signifyin(g) and language coding. Her additional text in S6MT, included the lyric, “not bad meaning bad, but bad meaning good,” which signified Run DMC’s (1986), “Peter Piper,” which signified the nursery rhyme “Peter Piper.” In the song, after Run DMC signified on Trix cereal, they then called their DJ, Jam Master Jay, the Big Bad Wolf:

Tricks are for kids he plays much gigs.
He's the big bad wolf and you're the three pigs.

He's the big bad wolf in your neighborhood,

Not bad meaning bad, but bad meaning good!

In this example, Run DMC, like Melody, James Brown, and Michael Jackson were all using the trope of Signifyin(g) to recreate the African-American oral tradition of boasting; and Melody and Run DMC also dissed other MCs in their songs. Thus, in one song, Melody actually signified and paid tribute to four texts spanning multiple artists and music genres. The last rapper signified in her text was fellow Queens native, L.L. Cool J. (1987). In "I'm Bad," in turn, L.L. signified the theme song from "Courageous Cat and Minute Mouse" (1960), a popular cartoon that was in syndication during his youth. "I'm Bad," also sampled the theme song from the television show "S.W.A.T." (1975). L.L. incorporated two popular samples that served as allusions in his song. Melody borrowed elements of these works to lend her song a retro vibe. The beats are close enough to the "Courageous Cat and Minute Mouse" theme song to sound familiar. What Brown, Jackson, and Cool J. all shared in their versions of "Bad" was a raw, aggressive, powerful tone. Melody, however, chilled with her lyrics, her style was cooler and smoother, which made for a nice contrast to the songs upon which she signified.

The complexity of S6MT, continued in the lyrical content of the song, in which Melody targeted several audiences with a feminist anthem that focused on her sexuality and her right to self-definition and self-determination. S6MT opened with the chorus, sung by a male: "My chick bad, my chick good, my chick do stuff that your chick wish she could / My chick bad, badder, badder, than good." This double-voiced boast proclaimed her badness, dissing all emcees in a hybrid of school English and the black vernacular. Her ownership of traditionally sexist terms like "chick" and "broad" was reminiscent of African-American rappers taking linguistic
ownership of the word nigger, during the Black Arts and Black Power movements. Melody boasted that she was "about that grind" as she dissed women and other rappers: “When I come through, the hattin’ broads get mad”; "I’m badder than any chick you ever had." Like Jackson, in "Bad," Melody used her narrative voice to tell her tale and define herself using her medium and her language. She did not limit herself to the old connotations. She created new ones.

**Diss Lyrics.** Another stage of development in her rap persona was her construction of diss lyrics. Diss songs are important in the history of rap music. It is a technique used by certain rappers over the years to gain notoriety at the expense of other rappers. Generally, a lesser known rapper will take an unprovoked shot at a more well-known rapper, usually in hopes of having the more well-known rapper respond. One of the earliest examples of diss songs in rap was Roxanne Shante, who was created by Liolita Shante Gorden to respond to the rap group U.T.O.F.’s (1984) song, “Roxanne, Roxanne.” In the initial Roxanne song, the group dissed Roxanne for not responding to their advances. In Roxanne Shante’s response she dissed them (U.T.F.O.). The popularity of both songs created what today is referred to as the Roxanne Wars, in which more than ten songs referring to U.T.F.O.’s “Roxanne” were created. Other examples of famous and very popular examples of artists who used diss songs include Jay Z, Nas, Tupac and the Notorious, 50 Cent, LL Cool J, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, and recently Drake. Melody began incorporating disses into her early attempts at rap songs at first because it was fun; it was an extension of the language games she played as a kid. Melody started writing diss songs and performing in cyphers:

The transition from just re-creating rhymes into writing fun lyrics, writing diss lyrics for the cyphers, being the only girl. So just writing little competitive bars, kid’s stuff. Later on when I started performing and realizing how powerful it is to be on stage commanding
a crowd—that really stuck with me. Then when I started just expanding the music that I listened to my thinking—as my thinking changed my writing changed. You know, as I matured my writing changed. I still had the braggadocios battle rhymes but the content changed. There might be stuff about love; there might be stuff about life and challenge; that kind of thing. So, as I grow, you kind of see that reflected in the lyrics.

Melody gave dissing a 6 of 10 (see Figure 3.3) in terms of importance in her music. Dissing (the dozens) is frequently a humbling activity that can lead to arguments and fights. Melody dissed MC’s in about 30% of her songs. She demonstrated mastery of the trope in several examples provided in the Figure below:

Figure 3.4: Melody's Disses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lyric</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These suckas love wasting my time, you got a whole twenty-four, why you messing with mine</td>
<td>S1EP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know who I am, I just need a little push / I am truth personified, the opposite of Bush</td>
<td>S2MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You never say nothing dope on a microphone / Dudes listen cause they hopin’ they might can bone”</td>
<td>S3MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a F-150 you a lil’ Mini-Cooper</td>
<td>S3MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can sit and argue about who’s cuter / But they turn their sound off when they play you on the computer</td>
<td>S3MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t ever want to fix your face to try to sun us / Foreclose on your flow like Suntrust” / Gotta predatory flow on that microphone</td>
<td>S3MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They all say that they so street / Then come in peace like vegans / Y’all don’t want no beef</td>
<td>S3MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhymes blazing at Jamaica station where I ate the illest MCs, I got sick tastes</td>
<td>S12MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about what you got, ain’t got a pot to piss in</td>
<td>S6EP3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to Melody’s mastery of the dising trope, she also demonstrated mastery of American English with her complex use of rhyme and other rhetorical devices like simile, metaphor, homonyms, metonymy, allusion, idioms. She mastered African-American English also, with her use of Signifyin(g), idioms, boasting, and dising as she crossfades the two languages and cultures in her music.

**Dealing with Gendered Space.** Melody said participating in cyphers\(^\text{21}\) “grabbed” and engaged her. She enjoyed and was inspired by the “competitive nature” of cyphers. She took pride in performing in them and not being the one to mess up the flow. She took pride in usually being the only woman / girl (or “one of the few girls) rapping and cyphering. Being the only one gave her confidence that she could hold her own with the boys. She remembered having to always be “on point,” she called it. She always had to be good and outdo the boys. She said they never excluded her but they definitely treated her differently because of her gender.

In our interview, Melody explained, Hip-Hop as a positive experience, like school. Even though the male-dominated rap genre has a reputation for being sexist and misogynistic, the rapper said, she could not recall a really negative experience. In a video on her website, however, Melody contradicts what she said in our interview. She expressed a different sentiment about being a female rapper in the industry:

> Being a woman in a male-dominated industry, especially when you’re not talking about sex, or half-naked (laughs), is challenging because I know that I’m slept on\(^\text{14}\) or that people don’t give me the credit that I deserve and I don’t mean that in an arrogant way,

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\(^\text{21}\) A cypher or cipher is an informal gathering of rappers, beatboxers, and/or break-dancers in a circle, in order to jam musically together. The term has also in recent years come to mean the crowd which forms around freestyle battles, consisting of spectators and onlookers. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GGRV-enUS787US789&ei=wp3OWQijEBMySzwKGpmQBA&q=cypher+rap&oq=cyphers&gs_l=psy-ab.3.1.0i71k1j8.0.0.11961.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.1c.64.psy-ab..0.0.0....0.xbimdtmG2Vw
but I work hard and I’m an independent, unsigned, self-managed artist that has been overseas eight or nine times on tour. There are artists who are signed to major labels who haven’t been overseas yet. (Melody, 2017)

Hip-Hop and Melody’s community provided her with spaces and places to grow and evolve as a person and an artist, despite the sexism inherent in the society and the music industry.

**Tampa.** Growing up in Queens, Melody translated her experiences into lyrics that became commodities that she was able to sell in Tampa, Florida, where she migrated to after high school and continued her professional career. Melody’s move was significant. I initially found the move, which she made after high school, ironic because she left one of the Meccas of Hip-Hop, for Tampa, Florida. She explained, however, that this move was excellent for her career. It gave her the opportunity to be a big fish in a small pond. When she packed up her car and moved to Florida, she explained that she, “left the city of dreams where it’s oversaturated and everybody’s going to pursue their dreams and goals and came down to Tampa, Florida and was able to stand out.” In addition to changing her location, Melody stepped outside of the box and explored opportunities and possibilities for Hip-Hop on internet radio. In another insightful maneuver, she developed international connections and began touring internationally, which broadened her audience and her appeal as an artist. In Tampa she was able to grow and develop her narrative in ways that she would not have been able to in Queens, or perhaps anywhere else in the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut). Tampa provided Melody with a person to focus on her career and its growth, DJ Sleeper. He was instrumental in producing her mixtape and arranging many of the featured artists who assisted Melody on the project.

**Grit.** Melody developed her artistic voice and her Hip-Hop persona in high school. She said her “biggest challenge” was staying motivated: “pushing yourself” and “believing in
yourself,” were phrases that she used when talking about staying motivated. It is common in rap music for rappers to embody the trickster persona of The Signifying Monkey and then boast about their prowess in some way. Melody invoked grit, grind, and the hustle to counteract racist and sexist obstacles of her narrative. As I alluded earlier, hustling and grinding were culturally transmitted survival techniques from the double-imaged trickster Esu Elegbara. The Signifying Monkey, is Esu's double-voiced American embodiment. From the black double-voiced tradition, grit too conveyed multiple meanings to various audiences and symbolized ingenuity, bravado, trickery, and femininity while maintaining the stylistic lyrical speech that sought to promote African-American survival through a coded language.

Braggadocios grit developed from the idiom, “making a way out of no way.” African-American people established this idiom from the Bible verse, Isaiah 43:16, which explains how God makes a way and provides for his people. Grit and determination, coupled with her linguistic prowess, empowered Melody to push boundaries. Her music pushed and challenged misogynistic boundaries so it and she could evolve. Some examples of how Melody used the concept of grit/grind/hustle can be seen in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5: Grit

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I’m about that grind (S6EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I always gave a hundred and ten (S11EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Pushing until the air is no longer in my lungs (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Through it all I’m steadfast on my spot (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The one who keeps it moving is the one who overcomes (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I’m steady on my grind (S3EP4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>So gritty, they hear me and wonder if I’m pretty (S6EP4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melody used grit also as a motif to accent her tough, Queens exterior and to provide an edgy uniqueness to her persona. Hard, tough, and feminine, this persona was critical as Melody forced
her audiences to address gender issues as she boasted and demanded to be heard. While never dominant, female voices, historically, have been prominent in Hip-Hop, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. Voices such as hers provided a much needed balance to the genre.

**Engagement in the Community.** In my analysis of the data, I found it interesting and ironic that Melody did not have a mentor. She was exposed to a lot of influential personalities early in her career. I initially thought that these meetings were the result of a mentor or someone advocating for her. Melody’s use of artists’ lyrics as scaffolds was the closest activity that she mentioned that resembled a mentoring. Melody said that she did not have an individual she called or considered a mentor, in school or in her community. Although she did not formally identify one individual, she did get access and exposure to prominent figures in Hip-Hop and was able to work with those individuals.

When I pushed her further on the mentor issue, in subsequent correspondence, she said:

> I did not have a mentor as a teen. My grandmother and my aunt were my role models. They taught me how to go for mine. I got a few big breaks in Queens by showing up, but most of my breaks happened when I moved to Tampa. I wouldn’t say Sleeper is a mentor but he did encourage me to record and did put me on to lots of great shows once we met in Tampa. He is a great friend and encourager who saw something in me and helped create amazing opportunities for me. I have much gratitude for him.

Whether Melody’s and Sleeper’s relationship was one of mentor and mentee is debatable. Her response, however, reinforced my perception of the rapper as gritty. She was confident because she did the work.

In Melody’s response to my re-asking of the mentor question, she shifted the focus from Sleeper, where I put it—perhaps from a subconscious bias—and placed it on her grandmother
and her aunt. She deemphasized Sleeper’s role in her success and increased her role, and rightfully so, paying tribute to her female role models.

**Findings**

Seeking to discover where rappers come from, I learned that Melody’s exposure to African-American English and its oral tradition and her mastery of English Language Arts aided her greatly in becoming a professional rapper. She skillfully and creatively used Hip-Hop and intertextuality to develop a critical voice in which she created narratives about her experiences, reintroduced old artists, and perpetuated the African-American oral tradition. Hip-Hop has remixed the dozens, boasting, the toast, signifying, and continues to make blackness not only relevant but cool and topical.

Hip-Hop is more than culture for Melody; it is a way of life: the way she sees the world is through a Hip-Hop lens. In learning to be in the world she used her experiences to create lyrics and become an artist. She developed an authentic message. Melody learned to write lyrics by using artists’ works as templates. By replacing their names and actions with her own she used this scaffolding method to create her first rap songs. Writing in school helped her develop a more complex writing process.

I was surprised to find that mentors did not play a substantive role in Melody's development. Melody has a very good relationship with her DJ\(^{22}\), DJ Sleeper. Earlier in Hip-Hip DJs and rappers had very close relationships and often performed as duets or the DJs were active members of the groups. In modern rap music DJs play lessor roles. Because of their close friendship, I assumed Sleeper was Melody’s mentor. My assumption about DJ Sleeper’s

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\(^{22}\) DJ is an abbreviation of deejay or disc jockey. The disc jockeys played the records are radio stations when recordings were on wax discs, before compact discs and digital formats.
mentoring role stems also from Melody’s move from Queens to Tampa and DJ Sleeper already being an established DJ in the city before she arrived. Melody insists, however, that he was just her DJ. She credits him for giving her an opportunity to grow and to perform at some great events but stops short of anointing him as a mentor. Melody's teachers are credited with doing a good job of teaching her grammar, mechanics, organization, and style, but no teacher was considered a mentor either. She was fond of her high school experience. She got along with everyone and stayed in her lane, she said. It was a good experience that allowed her to learn and grow as an artist.

The role of Melody's community can best be measured by her attempts to recreate her community's impact on her by duplicating the experience through her non-profit organization. Her non-profit organization attempts to provide services for several groups in her community including youth empowerment, in-school programs, after school programs, she speaks at the schools, she provides workshops for kids and community members, and she is a certified life coach.

**Discussion**

A goal of this study was to identify connections and contributions to the legacy of African-American resilience in the United States and to encourage teachers to take note of these stories and see what students can do when they discover their authentic selves and become liberated and empowered. The data in my interviews showed that students performed better in school when they had a purpose. Students with purpose were motivated students. Purpose is the key to engagement. Melody used her writing skills, communications skills, and business acumen to establish and maintain her career.
School was not the space that I anticipated it would be. I anticipated that high school for Melody would be a space in which mentors would abound and networks would be developed that set Melody on her way to becoming a rapper. I thought Melody would be celebrated as a poet and a lyricist. While school was not a deterrent, nor was it a direct pathway to success. So, what are some steps to making education a more direct pathway to student success? This is the key to student engagement.

I think programs like Melody's are a step in the right direction. Unless teachers get involved in their students’ lives and find a way to better incorporate the reality of students’ lives with what they are learning in school, they will continue to struggle to engage students. Disengaged students see school as totally separate and even injurious to their ways of being. A part of the legacy of education is the United States is character education (Smargorinky & Taxel, 2010), in which institutions seek to mold and shape students into what the institution decides a student needs to be. For students who believe that schools do not have their best interests in mind, it is counterintuitive for them to engage or be complicit.

Melody's rapping skills and her ability to craft lyrics are excellent. Her content and her style are engaging. She has the ability to transfer her narrative from her head to her notepad to her microphone. Her skills stem from her linguistic intelligence, her interpersonal intelligence, and her desire to serve and represent her community. Many writers have good ideas but she has the ability to craft good ideas into songs; this is a complex skill that not only takes intelligence and creativity but teamwork and diligence.
CHAPTER 4

CLARKE AND THE YELLOW BOOK:

A CASE STUDY OF WHERE RAPPERS COME FROM\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} Rhym, D. To be submitted to \textit{Journal of Black Studies}. 
Abstract

In this qualitative study I examined the question, where do rappers come from? I sought to learn how a young person with an interest in Hip-Hop music became a rapper. I conducted an interview with an independent professional rapper and asked questions pertaining to his skills and abilities and what he remembered about developing them. I investigated my participant’s recollections of his experiences growing up in his community and in his high school that led to his development as an artist. The express purpose of this study was to examine how his experiences developed into skill sets that facilitated his becoming a professional rapper. I also wanted to know if there was a connection between the artist's English Language Arts experiences in high school and his success as a rapper. I wanted to know if school played a role in his success and if his story could be used to inspire and engage other potential rappers still in high school. INDEX WORDS: hip-hop, critical race theory, signifying, literary signifying double consciousness

Introduction

The goal of this study was to identify and contribute to the legacy of African-American resilience in the United States. This resiliency is evident in many facets of American life, including education. I am interested in research that can help African-American students discover their “authentic” selves (Freire, 2011). Paolo Freire calls upon teachers to liberate and empower students and help them see themselves as authentic thinkers, the way rapper Clarke did in this study. I interviewed Clarke and asked questions pertaining to how he became a professional Hip-Hop artist. I wanted to explore what role Hip-Hop played in his life. I wanted to know how rap informed who he was. How did he navigate his world and become successful?
What can teachers learn from his experience in life and in school and how can they use his insights to better understand their students?

**Framing the Study**

**Critical Race Theory**

This study is framed by tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an academic discipline influenced by qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and derived from critical theory (Delgado, 1995, 2013; Gordon, 1999; Yosso, 2005). It began in the field of law and was developed as a means to critically examine society and culture by exploring the relationships and interconnections of race, law, and power (Gordon, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Beginning with the early critical works by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, CRT developed as an academic field in the middle and late 1970s. Bell, Freeman, and other lawyers and legal scholars across the country began to realize that the gains of the 1960s civil rights era were, in many cases, being repealed (Delgado, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Critical Race Theory addresses sociohistorical issues such as the normalization of racism in American society, liberalism, white supremacy and racial power, white male privilege, and as a social construct. The most attractive elements of CRT as it pertained to this study was its views of racism as a normal part of American life, not as an aberration (Ladson-Billings, 2003), the view of racism as part of the context of a specific educational problem such as literacy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), its qualitative approach, and perhaps most importantly, its emphasis on storytelling (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

The most important and informative element of CRT is that it privileges my participants’ narratives. My participants constructed narratives in which they told their own stories, both in our interviews and in the narratives that they created in their songs. Hip-Hop and CRT view
storytelling as a way for people of color to see themselves in the world and define their place and space. According to Duncan (2002), for CRT:

> Storytelling is important, from this theoretical perspective, because it assumes that (1) previously marginalized peoples can narrate their stories and (2) these new stories expand the concept of the ‘normal’ narrator and contest the traditional stories continually told about the experiences of Americans. Critical race theory has contributed to framing research on urban schools and the experience of African American students. (p. 418)

CRT and Hip-Hop argue that storytelling allows one to name, own, and tell his or her reality.

**CRT and Education.** Gloria Ladson-Billings applied the tenets of CRT and Critical Pedagogy (Lynn, 1999; Jennings, 2000) to the field of education. She recognized that after critical pedagogy was established, theories and epistemological works for gender and class quickly developed but no critical theory for race and education was developed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009; Jennings & Lynn, 2005). Class-based and gender-based explanations are not powerful enough to explain all of the differences or variances in school experiences and performances. For example, an examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, does not account for disparities in school discipline rates, dropout rates, pushout rates, or the disproportionate rates at which people of color who do not graduate are incarcerated.

In her social theory of race and education Ladson-Billings (2009) critiques liberalism, explains the ineffectiveness of civil rights laws, and analyzes social doctrines that she says perpetuate an American hegemony that continues to affect African-American learners during this period of post-integration. According to Ladson-Billings post-civil rights era acts of educational segregation such as white flight, the dismantling of African-American schools, the displacement of African-American students via busing, and the unemployment of African-American teachers
greatly disadvantaged African-American learners. The reward for surviving Black Codes and Jim Crow legislation is de facto segregation—particularly in many U.S. high schools—under the guise of gifted programs, white flight, and a loss of African-American teaching and administrative positions (2009). Inequality is perhaps accepted and tolerated because desegregation programs that fail African-American and Latinx learners can oftentimes help white students academically, hence they may be allowed to flourish (2009). So, while white students flourished, African-American and Latinx suspensions, expulsions, and dropout and pushout rates continued to rise.

When CRT is used in educational research it seeks to challenge the notion that educational systems are objective, merit based, color blind, racially neutral institutions that provide equal opportunities for all students. The CRT framework also rejects deficit theories which are used to explain the inequities in the education of African-American students.

The Influence of African-American Culture

The African-American Oral Tradition. African-American culture and its traditions are evident throughout the music of Clarke's catalog. His music illuminates his experiences as an African-American in an “imaginatively distinctive manner” (Bell, 1987, p. xxix). These imaginative qualities, according to Bell, present themselves thematically and stylistically in African-American texts. Borrowing from Bell’s interpretive strategy, I examined Clarke's lyrics, treating them as symbolic acts used to remember the African and African-American past by remixing and recreating it with modern technology, supplemented with more recent experiences. The African-American oral tradition served as a tool for Clarke to recreate his narrative akin to the way slaves told their stories in slave narratives (Andrews, 1988). Bell (1987, 2004) and Gates (2014) explain that African-Americans as an ethnic group become conscious of themselves and
celebrate their quests for personal and social freedom, literacy, and wholeness and create art, such as rap music, as a means to express themselves and survive racism and social oppression through art. Thus, Clarke’s music became a conduit through which he gave voice to his identity and consciousness, which were shaped by double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision (Bell, 1987).

**Double Consciousness.** The term double consciousness was coined by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) as a metaphor for the sociopsychological process by which African-Americans responded to racial and cultural domination. In 1937, double-consciousness was remixed by anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits as socialized ambivalence and used to explain the existence of conflicting African and European values and behavioral alternatives in postcolonial Haiti (Bell, 1987). The trope of double vision is the third remix of double consciousness:

This trope was further developed in 1963 by Ralph Ellison as double vision to describe the ambivalence of modern black Americans toward all people and events. These interrelated terms do not signify a basic personality type or disorder. On the contrary, they signify both the complex sociopsychological process of acculturation of black Americans—the will to realize their human and civil rights—and the sociocultural relationship of colonized people of African descent to colonizers of European descent. The shifts in allegiance of black Americans between the values of the white dominant culture and those of the black subculture. (p. 345)

Bell is very careful to explain that these tropes are not “psychopathological models” based primarily on the assumption that slaves in the United States were completely stripped of all African culture. These racist assumptions also led to whites in America Sambo-izing African-
American Americans. This term stereotypes African-Americans, particularly adult males, as child-like, shiftless, lazy, and not wanting to work. African-Americans, also, are not schizophrenic or psychotic. Double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision states Bell, are normal survival strategies and make up a “healthful, self-protective, compensatory response to the oppression and repression fostered by institutionalized racism and economic exploitation” of African-Americans (p. 345).

**Signifying and the Black Vernacular.** Henry Louis Gates (1988) considers Signifyin(g) the "trope" of tropes in African-American literature. These tropes, he says, encompass the beauty and power of the black vernacular. Tropes such as these empower African-Americans, freeing them from the white gaze and allowing them to communicate freely and undetected by audiences who cannot speak the black vernacular (Du Bois, 1903; Gates, 1988; Morrison, 2012). African-Americans have their own unique languages with linguistic structures that rely on repetition and revision that are fundamental to African-American artistic forms (Gates, 1988). Gates tells us that the African-American tradition is double-voiced so that they can have one language for white people and another language for themselves.

The aforementioned coded language used by rappers in the trope of talking texts is a remixing of the coded language that has always been a part of the African-American oral tradition and of African-American music in the United States. Music (i.e. drumming) and songs were used by slaves to communicate with and to entertain one another. Negro spirituals and work songs, in particular, were used to send messages and to coordinate meetings. Slaves used songs for religious rituals, social gatherings, work, and to plan their escapes either alone or with the network of the Underground Railroad. Wyatt T. Walker (1992) calls early Negro spirituals protest music. Later in the twentieth century, jazz and blues performers continue the trope of the
talking text. Rappers perpetuate the African-American oral tradition of signifying by speaking through texts and dissing other texts, rappers, and social institutions.

**Hip-Hop Sensibilities**

Bettina Love’s (2014) research focuses on students’ character strengths and mindsets. These strengths and mindsets I believe are African-American survival strategies that African-Americans have inherited from their ancestors. Love asserts that students who grew up identifying with Hip-Hop culture have Hip-Hop sensibilities. Hip-Hop sensibilities are linked to character strengths that Love calls cultural strengths. These strengths include social and emotional intelligence, improvisation, curiosity, optimism, and grit. These sensibilities are the incubator of African-American genius in these Hip-Hop communities, according to Love.

**Intertextuality**

The theory of intertextuality suggests that every text has its meaning but only in relation to other texts. According to the theories of intertextuality, all texts are built from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works (Kalogirou & Economopoulou, 2012). Reading from the intertextual perspective becomes a process of moving between texts and not necessarily one of creating texts independently. Gates (2012) refers to a similar tradition in African-American literature with his theory of Signifyin(g). He calls texts that move in and out of one another “speakerly texts,” because they speak to each other across time. Roland Barthes (1977) says literary meanings cannot be stabilized by readers. Texts are “multidimensional space” in which a variety of writings blend and clash and none of these writings are “original” (p. 46). Julia Kristeva (1980) in her development of Bakhtin’s spatialization of literary language argues that “each word is an intersection of other words and texts where at least one other word or texts can be read” (1980, p. 66). Through sampling and Signifyin(g) rappers are constantly dancing
back and forth, remixing and recreating black texts, black talk, and black culture, making what was old, new again.

**Methods**

**Interview**

This study applied a qualitative approach that I co-constructed with Clarke. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) explain that respondents have funds of knowledge from which they can formulate their narratives. There are two ways of viewing funds of knowledge, first we might think of them as “vessels” of answers that they might access. These types of responses could be concise and accurate and contain the respondents “sentiments, feelings, and behaviors” (p. 30). Narrative inquiry justifies using interviews, which Holstein and Gubrium (2003) label “special conversations” instead of empirical data in which people talk about their lives (p. 30).

According to deMarrais (2004), “different purposes and theoretical perspectives shape qualitative interview approaches” (p. 55). Thus, by focusing on the narratives that Clarke constructed during our interview, and created for his songs, I was able to identify his voice and understand his process of becoming a rapper (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). The establishment of this voice permitted me to learn and understand how African-American culture contributed to Clarke’s transformation into a professional rapper.

**Participant Selection**

Clarke became a participant in my study when he was recommended by a friend who runs an entertainment group that produces Hip-Hop events and manages artists in Rap City. I explained my study to my friend and asked if he might know some artists who would be interested in participating in an interview. He recommended Clarke. I contacted Clarke and
discussed the interview with him. Next, I emailed information about the study. We set up a time to meet and conducted the interview.

**Document Analysis**

In my study, I also used various data sources including song lyrics from EP/CDs and videos. Other documents will include interviews, articles, and critiques of lyrics and performances on websites and blogs. See Figure 4.1 for a list and description of data sources analyzed.

**Figure 4.1: Data Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview transcripts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Semi-formal interview. Downtown Rap City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTubes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Videos of 6 or Clarke's songs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPs / CDs / Compilations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Clarke has published three full length projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs / tracks</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Clarke has published more than 36 tracks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

During Clarke’s interview I asked a series of prepared questions that I believed would help generate data for this study. The questions related to social and cultural factors that led to Clarke becoming a rapper (see Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2: Interview Questions**

1. What is Hip-Hop?
2. What is your writing process?
3. Who were your mentors or role models (who did you emulate)?
4. What roles did teachers play in your development as a rapper?
5. What role did your community play in the development of your Hip-Hop skills?
Development of Themes and Codes

I collected themes and codes from listening to and reading recordings and transcripts of Clarke's interviews, EPs, and You Tubes. After listening to the recordings repeatedly and rereading the transcripts, I was able to see patterns and make thematic connections. After my interview with Clarke, I transcribed the recording I made of it. I eliminated pauses and buzz words that enabled the session to flow better, on paper. After transcription, I reread the interview and took notes on words, phrases, and experiences that were repeated. I focused on Signifyin(g) and the African-American oral tradition, Clarke’s Yellow Book, origins, grit/grind/hustle, misogyny, and the role of school. Clarke's recollection of these experiences shaped how he became a rapper. During this part of the analysis I created notes from the interview by writing comments digitally, in the margins and highlighting the items that fit in the aforementioned categories. These frequent and salient points became my themes. After I developed my initial themes, I printed a hard copy of the document and repeated the process.

To verify my accuracy, I went back to the audio recording of my interview with Clarke. My concern was that collecting data from the text alone might cause a dissonance from the content of the interview. Thus, I went back to the audio of the interview to help me re-center and reconnect with my participant and his tones and verbal cues. Dealing with the black vernacular and oral traditions, sounds and tones were critical. Listening to the audio very much helped me get a better sense and feel for the tone and the pace of the interview, and of course it also prepared me for the heavy rotation of African-American tropes in the music as well.

Rap and its lyrical content is part of the African-American oral tradition. I found evidence of Clarke's competence in African-American literary tropes in many of his published lyrics. The tropes of Signifyin(g) and boasting occur frequently in his music. Mostly, however,
his songs are about him. In his music I saw how Clarke viewed the world. There was a definite connection to his community. He grew up poor, in a Rap City government housing project, around violence, drug purchasing and drug distribution. Drugs were a frequent motif.

**Data Analysis**

In my data analysis, I set out to explain how Clarke became a rapper. I focused on his origins and the processes he developed to write lyrics and to create a stage persona. I analyzed the roles his experiences and his upbringing in his community played in his artistic development. I also focused on what role his high school experiences played in his development as a rapper, including his level of engagement while in school, his relationships with his teachers or mentors, and whether or not he perceived his work as authentic and what that meant to him as an artist.

From my analysis of our interview, I discovered that Clarke was influenced greatly by his mother and exposed to family rituals and activities that contributed to his rapping skills. Some of those rituals included signifying, boasting, joaning (the dozens), and cyphering. These oral African-American strategies and tropes are prevalent in Clarke's music.

**Origins**

Clarke was born and raised, in a semi-urban, mid-sized city in the Southeastern, United States. In my study, I called this city, Rap City. During his elementary and middle school years he moved to another, larger city in the South, in a different state, west of Rap City. He returned to Rap City for high school, attending Rap City West, graduating in 2001.

Growing up in the streets of his southern, urban environment, Clarke viewed his upbringing as significant and authentic. Both of these themes are pertinent to his music and to his life. During an interview, outside of his Rap City housing project, a local internet music personality asked Clarke for whom he made his music. Clarke responded that his music was for
his community, but that it was also for “commercial,” meaning to make money. This dilemma established a duality in which Clarke was torn between making commercially successful music and music which he deemed as good and productive for consumption in his community. In our interview, Clarke explained that rappers had a responsibility and a connectivity to their communities. From this perspective, we can see that rappers view themselves like modern griots. Griots were members of a class of traveling poets, musicians, and storytellers who maintained a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa. Like the griots, Clarke believed rappers had a responsibility to the community. Clarke's drug world and his trap life were a part of who he was also. He viewed his community as his space, a part of his world; drugs provided income and security. He used drug money to finance his American Dream, obtain power, and status. These three objectives become the theme of his first professional EP (record) project as well. Nothing else that he has been exposed to, outside of his community, could provide him access to the things that he rapped about. This reality connected to double consciousness and the conflict between the morality stories he was exposed to in school and the reality stories he was exposed to during his upbringing.

**Themes and Codes**

From our interview, the themes that emerged after numerous readings of the text included Signifyin(g) and the African-American oral tradition, the Yellow Book, grit/grind/hustle, rapper origins, misogyny, and role of school. In Figure 4.3, I tracked Clarke’s themes in his music. In 56% of his songs, Clarke used the techniques boasting, signifying, or dissing. In 39% of his songs he rapped about women and his love for them, his interaction with them, and his experiences with them in his community. The essence of the music, however, was Clarke-centered. The songs were about Clarke and his way of being in the world. Clarke rapped about
Rap City, the projects, and the world he grew up in, where life was rough. Several of the tracks focused on trap (drugs) life: production, sales, and dealing with police. After his trap EP, Clarke dedicated an entire EP to his interaction with women and relationships. His representation of women in his lyrics are consistent with the way many men in his community and male artists in other popular genres of music in the United States portray women in their cultures. Misogyny and its legacy in Hip-Hop will be discussed later in this article.

**Figure 4.3: Clarke's Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>6/36</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>S2T4; S1EP1; S2EP1; S5EP1; S8EP2; S1EP3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signifying</td>
<td>10/36</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>S1T4; S2EP1; S7EP1; S1EP2; S2EP2; S3EP2; S4EP2; S5EP2; S7EP2; S1EP3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissing</td>
<td>4/36</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>S3EP1; S12EP1; S2EP2; S2EP5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit / Grinding</td>
<td>5/36</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>S4EP1; S9EP1; S11EP1; S12EP1; S8EP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug culture / Trap Life</td>
<td>11/36</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>S2T4; S1EP1; S2EP1; S3EP1; S4EP1; S6EP1; S8EP1; S9EP1; S10EP1; S11EP1; S12EP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misogyny</td>
<td>14/36</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>S7EP1; S2EP1; S6EP1; S3EP1; S5EP1; S1EP2; S1EP3; S2EP3; S3EP3; S4EP3; S5EP3; S7EP3; S6EP3; S12EP3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grit, Grind, Hustle.** Clarke grew up in a city where he encountered racism, white supremacy, and white male privilege in his community and in his high school. He viewed these experiences as a normal part of his life. From this experience, Clarke adopted the mindset of
grinding and hustling as a lifestyle that he would have to adopt in an attempt to impose his will on society. My interview with Clarke portrayed the rapper as an intelligent young man who was very conscious of the importance of school as a tool in attaining economic success in his life. Clarke was also aware of the need to “hustle” and how to use the system and his environment to make money to survive. This sociocultural awareness motivated him and influenced his decision-making in school.

In his life as a commercial artist, he rapped about trap life, sometimes glorifying it and boasting about how he excelled at it. In his music Clark represented the community and the importance of that space, and how that community needed to have its story told too. In the words of Langston Hughes, he too "sings America" 24. Ethical and moral conflicts like these, demonstrated double consciousness, in which the rapper was conflicted between representing Rap City in his music in the way white people would want it represented, the way that the city was in reality, and the way black people wanted to see it. Clarke felt pulled in three directions: raised in one place, formally educated in another, settled in yet another. As an artist, Clarke was on a journey to make meaningful music, make money, please his fans, and attract a major record label. Frequently these goals contradicted one another.

In Clarke's early music, he rapped about hustling. The themes of his early work were brash and egocentric; he signified and boasted. He rapped about what he saw on a daily basis in his community. The narrative of EP1 was about the economic reality of trap life. Grit, grind, and hustle developed as part of his coded language imploring listeners to get theirs "by any means necessary." The hustle, for example, carried multiple meanings; it signified trap life and getting things done in timely manner because business depended on it: "Gotta go hard / Trap door still

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24 from Langston Hughes's poem, "I, Too, Sing America" (1926)
swinging, ain't no knob" (S4EP1). The hustle also signified Malcolm X's adage, "By any means necessary" (1964), or at all costs. In the same song, S4EP1, Clarke sang that he was going "so hard" and that he wasn’t "taking no losses." Other lyrics included "Wake up every day and do the right shit so we don't have to ask what the price is" (S10EP1). The hustle implied what needed to be done or what had to happen for the oppressed to compete with the oppressors to experience the American Dream. Grit/grind/hustle was a greater focus in Clarke’s earlier work: 42% in EP1. Grit, grind, hustle constitutes a theme in only 14% of his total songs.

Before Clarke became a rapper, he grew up in a community with drug activity. While illicit behavior is not indicative of all rap music, illicit behavior and tough personas frequently serve as prevalent themes in rap music. The history of rap music is filled with notorious gangsters and bad boys. With the advent of gangster rap in the late 1980s and 1990s with artists like NWA, Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., and Jay Z, the gangster persona and hustler element have long been an integral part of Hip-Hop. This history has an influence on education in the United States because many students who listen to Hip-Hop music are influenced by Hip-Hop stars and their personas. Hence, students who listen to Hip-Hop feel pressured to choose to emulate rap personas exhibiting poor behavior verses emulating more appropriate behaviors made by their parents, teachers, or other more positive members of their communities.

Clarke’s life experiences and behavior choices were the foundation for the skills he needed to survive growing up in his community. These life skills increased his cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) define cultural capital as a collection of norms, values, and customs that help govern/orient a group’s ways of talking, acting, dressing, and even raising their families. Clarke, like many rappers, believed these experiences gave him license to represent his
culture and rap about his reality as he understood it, in what he considered an authentic and real
way. He implied that this sense of realness allowed him to connect with his audiences.

The Yellow Book. Early in his lyric learning process, in ninth grade, Clarke kept a
writing journal. He called it his Yellow Book. He said "everybody (who rapped) had a notepad
or something they wrote on, before phones came out.” The Yellow Book contained his earliest
work. “It had everything from hooks, to full songs, to poetry,” he explained. The concept of the
Yellow Book, he said, “actually might have come from my mom’s poetry books. She had books
on books.” Because of this, Clarke believed that he needed to get his “catalogue up.” In his
catalogue of music, the young rapper recalled he might have produced as many as seventy-five
hooks, thirty songs, and ten poems or other writings. He referred to his Yellow Book as his
“outlet” book. Some teachers, however, viewed this book as a distraction from his school work.
“Everything, was in this book, and they [teachers] knew that.” In our interview, Clarke explained
that the hooks and songs that he created and put in his Yellow Book were based upon what was
going on around him. A lot of it, also, he interjected, “was just concocted in my head.” During
this developmental stage, Clarke refined his creative process:

As a good artist, you have to be able to just come up with concepts and be able to stick to
those concepts. It’s easy to write about what’s going on in the hood. Same thing going
on in the hood every day! So I had a lot of that, but at the same time, I had a lot of stuff
that I was trying to incorporate that substance into then, and me not having the
knowledge that I did now, it wouldn’t necessarily be up to par with what I’m doing now,
but that was a start. Because, I can guarantee you that at that time nobody in my age
range or anybody else that considered their self-rapping, my age, was trying to actually
write about stuff or something instead of just being relevant. And a lot of those songs
actually went on my first project, like a lot of ‘em. I listen to what I’m doing now, as far as some of this dumbed down music, to what I was doing then, I’m like ten times as hungry as in my first CD and I’m actually speaking about ten times more than I am in my third, my fourth project. Stuff like that. It just showed me, I recently just came to the conclusion that I needed to revert back to my ways in my Yellow Book. The Yellow Book represented Clarke’s roots. He used it when his writing was raw, hopeful, and inexperienced but willing to take chances artistically. Most importantly, the book represented when he was unencumbered by negative elements of the music industry. In his Yellow Book, Clarke wrote for the enjoyment of writing. After the Yellow Book and after Clarke became a rapper his writing had an agenda, deadlines, and expectations from outsiders.

It was no surprise during the interview when Clarke reflected that he needed to get back to the Yellow Book, which had become a metaphor for getting back to writing for himself and not for the industry or for fans, something he thought he had been avoiding. After his critique of his music, during our interview, he realized that he had strayed away from the most important thing that made writing in his Yellow Book enjoyable; he had stopped writing for himself.

**Dumbed Down Music.** During our interview, Clarke had an epiphany. During a moment of reflection, he said he realized from our interview that lately in his work he, “hadn’t really been talking about anything as of late and just fitting in.” When I asked why he thought he was doing this in his work, he responded: “The industry.” He also said that he was paying too much attention to what was going on in the mainstream. “That’s why I don’t listen to mainstream music,” Clarke said. He believed that the record industry and mainstream culture were powered and driven by wealth and prestige.
After talking to Clarke about creating his music, I wanted next to understand why he was creating his music. When I asked what the purpose for his music was, he responded without hesitation, that his music was for his community, but he quickly added that it was also for, "commercial," meaning to make money. The duality of double consciousness pits the African-American between capitalism and African-American culture. African-American rappers frequently have to choose between uplifting the culture and pimping the culture. When artists have to sacrifice substance for style they can jeopardize their ability to have an impact on their communities. The sense of worry that Clarke experienced about his art's contribution to pimping the culture by what he called the "dumbing down" of his music, was his struggle with double consciousness. To dumb something down is to simplify it so that it is easier to understand. Dumbing down of music has a negative connotation and can be used when signifying. Music that has been dumbed down in Hip-Hop is without a message and void of an attempt to uplift or inform the audience. Dumbed down music is considered void of intellectual substance (Fiasco, 2007). Some artists also argue that dumbed down music is inauthentic and not true Hip-Hop (Boogie Down Productions, 1988; Public Enemy, 1990).

Clarke admitted that he has made dumbed down music, like mumble rap, (a form of music that is unintelligible) but explained that the creation of that type of music did not feel the same as the music that he believed was true to his nature as an artist. Music that has been dumbed down did not feel like his socially relevant lyrics did. When he had his epiphany that I alluded to earlier, he said:

"It’s nerve-wracking man, because sometimes I go back and listen to some of my stuff and be like, “what is you talkin’ about?” Because I know like, I know what I’m capable of. But if I were to draw everything that I like I knew or I really felt I wouldn’t have such a
strong following because the masses is just like ignorant. They wouldn’t even sit there and try to decipher or even try to relate to what I’m saying because they don’t understand it. So yeah, yeah, it’s a challenge, man. It really is. I talk to people about that all the time. I’m like, man I’m like dropping too much bubble gum. Like honestly, like I’m puttin’ out too much bubble gum.

The African-American experience that Clarke was trying to capture in his narratives about his community, the trap house, and his set, involved his constant struggle against the state to obtain the "American Dream" that is at the forefront of most American's realities. That success, the American Dream, was his grind; the motif for EP1: "10 band, 20 band, 50 band, 100 band" (S8EP1), signifies the exponential financial growth he is experiencing in the trap life, which is also code for the rap life. Through his coded language Clarke used the references interchangeably with his audiences. His narratives prioritized his voice, his culture, and his artistic dilemma. This is the content that shaped Clarke's music and made him a rapper. His products were a manifestation of Du Bois's double consciousness.

**Power of the Yellow Book.** The Yellow Book symbolized Clarke as a writer, even though his teachers did not privilege his work or view it as academic; it was valuable to his development as a writer/rapper. In retrospect, the Yellow Book was the writer's creative epicenter. The early invention, drafting, and creative development of his ideas began in the Yellow Book. The work in his Yellow Book was important to his artistic development because it provided the space to practice and rewrite lyrics, hooks, and bars. The collection of the product, however, was not as crucial as the writing process itself. The Yellow Book was where Clarke was able to write himself into an artistic existence. He took pride in the book; he took risks and explored with language in a way that he was not able to any other classroom writing. The book
was the physical manifestation of him writing himself into existence, word by word; lyric by lyric; bar by bar. Clarke's purpose was derived from the pleasure he extracted from creating meaning from words and beats from sounds that no one had ever thought to say or make people bob their heads to before.

**What Is Hip-Hop?** Good rappers devise unique and innovative methodologies that they are able to apply to their experiences and construct lyrics. They use these lyrics to entertain their audiences and to sustain themselves physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Clarke’s early influences were Goodie Mob, Outkast, and the Dungeon Family, music his mother introduced him to. As for his lyrics, he started writing in the 7th grade, he remembered:

Seventh grade; It was a basement project. A neighbor up under me, she had a boyfriend that was rough recording on the computer. Me and a couple of my friends just took it upon ourselves to try something new. From there, I just wanted to write.

In Clarke’s recollection of his writing origins, he remembered that it didn’t just happen. This experience was a powerful one for Clarke. It almost seemed by chance that he was exposed to a person that had access to this technology. It was one of his clearest memories. It seemed to be a very pivotal moment for him.

**Coded Music.** The coded language used by rappers in the trope of talking texts is a remixing of the coded language that has always been a part of the African-American tradition and of African-American music in the United States. During slavery, the coded messages of slaves had to multilayered and constructed for multiple audiences. People who profited from the enslavement of Africans, especially slave owners, worked very hard to suppress and information. Hence coded language was critical to slave survival. This coding by slaves was a deliberate strategy created to disguise their messages. Slaves took items they were permitted to have and
literally wove them into their cultural heritage. Quilts for example became tools through which slaves deliberately embed messages and planned their escapes, stealing themselves from their masters. One quilt pattern known as “trip around the world” was used to indicate a path around a mountain instead of over it. If a non-slave overseer, master, or mistress overheard a slave talking about a trip around the world they would have dismissed it as nonsensical (Tobin & Dobard, 2000). The slaves were very good at reading their masters.

Slaves remixed common, everyday items into complex tools. Another cultural item which became a tool of signification was dance (Rice). Slaves created dances, like the limbo, which was created to speak directly to the limited space that slaves endured on slave ships when they were forced to dance as exercise on the ship’s deck. Another dance, the cakewalk, mocked southern states by making fun of plantation owners (Rice). In music (e.g. drumming) and songs “Talking drums” were used to communicate long distances even between villages in Africa. They were also used for religious services and social gatherings (Finnegan, 2012).

Negro spirituals, in particular, were used by some slaves to send messages to coordinate meetings and as maps for running away from their masters. Slaves took existing songs that already had meanings and added their style, tone, and idiomatic significances to the texts. These repurposed songs now maintained multiple meanings that comfortably coexisted in the music. The new meanings lay dormant until audiences who could read and understand their meaning and context could use them. The songs’ original meanings continued to entertain and soothe the song’s original audiences as well. In Negro spiritual such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” the double meanings included words like “traveling shoes,” “chariots,” or “wheels.” Any time these words were referenced, they were often codes that denoted that a slave was planning to run away. Places in songs were coded metaphors for destinations or meeting places, for example the
Jordan River in “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” symbolized the Ohio River for slaves who used that song in Ohio.

During the interview with Clarke, after he had his epiphany that he had gotten away from the principles he once wrote by in his Yellow Book, I asked him to explain what he meant when he said that his lyrics were “of no substance, content wise.” I wanted him to reflect upon what he believed his Yellow Book content contained that his early professional music lacked. He said his early work lacked a message:

I feel like—honestly—I do those repetitive songs to give that audience that type of music. Like I know that I have different people listening to my music. I tried to make it where, not only the people that I’m coming up around are able to relate to what I’m saying. I just had one of my white friends from high school, like I sent him a link from my EP tape that I dropped probably like a month-and-a-half ago and he just kept asking me like, “Bro, what is a plug, what is a plug?” and I had to break that down to him. But it’s just like saying to connect and whatnot. But, I had to break that down to him. You know what I’m saying? So, I mean, it showed me that he went in looking for me, feel me? And he found something. He just wanted to connect. When I say substance I mean, a message. Yeah, that’s it, a message.

This statement captured the complexity and the double voiced-ness of Clarke's coded language. Historically, African-American music from slave songs to Negro spirituals to work songs to the remixing of spirituals for use during the civil rights movement served to convey multiple messages to multiple audiences and sometimes those messages were hidden. Clarke's use of the term plug was an example of intertextuality that signified the group De La Soul. They referred to themselves as plugs (1989, 1991): Plug 1 and Plug 2 (their DJ was plug 3); they, like the
microphones they held—that were plugged into speakers—which metaphorically brought the beats and rhymes to their audience. Clarke's remix of De La's metaphor is common knowledge for his audience. They easily make this sociohistorical connection that his friend could not.

Rappers perpetuate the African-American oral tradition of coded messages in music by Signifyin(g) and using other methods to hide messages in texts to various audiences separated by race, ethnicity, age, class, region, and gender. Rappers, like bluesmen, have always cleverly hidden message in lyrics for audiences so that they permit themselves a modicum of freedom to say what they want without censorship. The coding of language in this way enabled Clarke to create spaces in the music, with his lyrics, for him and various other members of his audience to communicate via Signifyin(g).

An example of the complexity of coding and Signifyin(g), using a socially conscious message, can be found in J. Cole's, "January 28th" (2014). J. Cole was not a participant in my study but I was a participant in the audience of the concert in which he signifyied:

Just got paid what Cochran got paid to free OJ
Just to share my life on the stage in front of strangers
Who know a nigga far too well, and that's the danger
Don't give 'em too much you
Don't let 'em take control
This one thing you do
Don't let 'em taint your soul
What's the price for a black man life?
I check the toe tag, not one zero in sight
I turn the TV on, not one hero in sight

Unless he dribble or he fiddle with mics

In these lyrics, Cole takes a conversation that he started with himself and allowed his soliloquy to play out on stage in New Orleans. His coded operated on multiple levels conveying different messages to different audience members depending on the listeners’ abilities to understand the context and diction of the song. Cathartically, J. Cole spoke to me and for me, as Clarke did for his audiences at his shows.

Throng of other concert attendees who came to the venue, in overwhelming numbers, to participate in the concert experience, heard another song from J. Cole. Unaware or perhaps apathetic to the ironic meaning or tone of the song, the others sang along, in campfire-like exuberance, to a song dissing them. As J. Cole bounced around energetically on stage, I sat in the audience, unable to participate because I didn't know every single word to every song, like his fans did, and I wanted to actually watch and see if the white participants would recite the lyrics and signify themselves as Cole simultaneously signified on them on stage. They did, and he did.

J. Cole was paid a large sum of money (as he opined in his allusion: “Just got paid what Cochran got paid to free OJ”) to signify on his audience. I am unsure if the signifying registered with his audience. Were the signified complicit or were they performing acts of contrition? Serving as willing participants in J. Cole’s theater of the absurd. For a moment during the performance, I was unsure of exactly who was signifying whom. I wasn’t sure who was in control, the speaker or the audience, the signifier or the signified? Did the audience’s awareness matter? I do know. The message, however, was clearly received, by those to whom it was sent.

**Technology: Sampling and Signifyin(g).** Clarke has created five studio albums, each with its own unique style. EP1 focuses on drug culture and trap life. It is a trap album. His lyrics
are heavily vernacularized. Structurally, trap music is a mixture of Hip-Hop, club, and dub music. Sonically, this sound includes brass, triangle, triplet hi-hats, a very heavy influence of the low-end Roland 808 drum machine, and snappy, crisp snare drums. Several of Clarke's songs depict narratives alluding to the rapper's set (group or posse) and loyalty. He frequently espouses credos, like "money, power, respect" (S6EP1). There are many allusions to drug dealers, fast cars, and making moves to increase his status in the drug world: "Wake up every day and try to do the right sit so we don't have to ask what the price is" (S10EP1).

Clarke's second EP, EP2, focuses more traditionally on Hip-Hop, remixing it with the African-American oral tradition and technology. I identified Clarke's use of Signifyin(g) through beat sampling in 28% of his songs. Clarke skillfully demonstrated what Bettina Love called “black genius” when he signified and remixed the pimp persona as a theme for EP2. In this intertextuality, Clarke borrowed from the African-American literary and oral traditions and used them as vehicles to transmit his contemporary message, his new narrative. The pimp persona, a popular voice from the African-American oral tradition, is a remix of Esu, the Signifying Monkey / the trickster character. Clarke evoked Esu in EP2 by first, titling his album after a famous pimp character from the Blaxploitation film The Mack (1973) and second by opening S1EP2 with the archetypical pimp, Dolemite, reciting "The Signifying Monkey" from his movie Dolemite (1975). The pimp as trickster persona was a very popular character used in texts by rappers. Rappers who made allusions to pimps and pimp culture included: Snoop Dogg, Big Daddy Kane, Ice T, Slick Rick, Too Short, 50 Cent, Nelly, 2 Live Crew, Ghetto Boys, and Three 6 Mafia.

Continuing the theme of duality and double voiced-ness in the African-American oral tradition and the legacy of coded language, Clarke used remixed, historical trickster personas to
tell his narratives. Like the tropes of the speakerly text or the talking book, his songs in S1EP2, signified and pay homage to a past and a tradition by recreating it. It sustained the resilience of African American and Hip-Hop cultures. In Clarke's narrative, listeners were introduced or reintroduced to Dolemite and EP2, voices from the past that are a part of African-American oral tradition.

In this song Clarke signified bluesman, historical characters like Huddie Ledbetter (more famously known as “Lead Belly”), Robert Johnson, Willie Dixon, and B. B. King, singing about how women and life have done them wrong and now they are telling their stories of heartbreak and survival. The bluesman here, signify African-American Everymen, symbolically, going about daily their daily lives, "trapping" and stacking (selling drugs and making money). The next level of coding signified on The Signifying Monkey and Dolemite. Clarke also remixed the Goldie character and assumed that persona on the EP jacket cover. The EP is a tribute to hustlers as models for African-American survival. Clarke remixed it all, life, culture, and misogyny.

The third layer of the coding was the remixing of the toast tradition. Clarke's audiences can be introduced or reintroduced to elements of the African-American toast as an art form. Clarke's narratives were skillfully woven through sampling and he grabbed his audience, informed them, and carried his coded messages: he looped Goldie saying: "Play on playa," repeating the protagonist's catch phrase from The Mack. In this opening song, Clarke remixed himself as a new Mack: a cool, smart, trickster, who was a master of manipulative language, who could persuade people to do whatever he wanted them to do, by seducing them with his sweet voice and magic words.

Clarke continued his creative signifying in S2EP2 by signifying the Fugees's (1996) sample / cover of Roberta Flack's (1973) "Killing Me Softly." Most people, familiar with Flack’s
version of the song assume she is the author. She is not; Flack, signified Lori Liberman (1971) who first performed the song. Interestingly, Clarke did not title his song, "Killing Me Softly" Clarke titled his song S2EP2, and not "Killing Me Softly" because “Killing Me Softly” was a speakerly text that has been sampled by various rappers, including Fabolous (2015). Even though it was Lauryn Hill's voice and some Fugees lyrics and beats that were sampled for his song, it was Fabolous's remix and title Clarke used in S2EP2, as he shouted Fabolous out in the song.

There are many moving parts in this complex amalgamation of culture, tradition, and technology, which displayed an impressive level of research and sophistication to not only find the right music but also to manipulate it to fit the artist’s content. Clarke’s music showed a dedication to his craft and a respect for the legacy of Hip-Hop and the African-American oral tradition as it was intertextually linked with multiple texts spanning multiple genres of African-American music.

**Misogyny.** One of the most frequent codes in Clarke’s music was the prevalence of misogynistic lyrics. My analysis detected its use in 39% (see Figure 4.3) of his songs. Bawdy lyrics are part of rap music, the African-American oral tradition, and the English literary tradition. 2 Live Crew's music was part of sexist and misogynistic lyrical tradition of Signifyin(g) that goes back to "Shine and the Titanic" and "The Signifying Monkey" toasts. Clarke's use of Dolemite certified his connection to the black toast tradition. Bawdy, vernacularized art is as old as "Chaucer and Shakespeare" (Gates, 2014, p. xxix). Signifyin(g) and the dozens are both traditionally sexually explicit, offensive, and rude; the goal of the speaker is also an attempt at humor. The speaker seeks to not only impress the audience with clever usage of wit but also humor. To not laugh at the art form is to miss one of its main points; Signifyin(g) is an element of African-American humor.
Gender in Hip-Hop has a long, complex, and ambiguous history. Gender plays an important role in my analysis of how and why Clarke became a rapper because his mother played a critical role in his becoming a rapper. She was a central figure in the development of his literacy. Because Hop-Hop is a male dominated culture and men control most of the positions of power and make up the majority of the rappers, the perceptions of women in rap are frequently inaccurate and often offensive. Rap is overwhelmed with negative images of women who are dominated, exploited, sexualized, trivialized, and disrespected in rap lyrics, videos and album/EP/CD covers. In Clarke’s music, women played various roles and are at times referred to as “bitches” (S7EP1, S5EP1, S3EP1) “hoes,” “tricks” (S3EP2), and “woadies” (S2EP1) and at other times compared to Cleopatra (S5EP2, S8EP3), queens (S5EP2), and goddesses (S8EP3). The dilemma created by Clarke’s misogynistic lyrics was that the lyrics were not consistent with the message that he conveyed in his interview about wanting to present positive messages in his music.

Again we revisit intersectionality. Clarke did not view his misogynistic lyrics as problematic. He presented his lyrics as his interpretation of his experience in Rap City. The lyrics were his version of his reality. This reality was consistent and normalized in his space. For him, his lyrics were a normal depiction of women in his community. In Clarke’s music, there were very limited frames for women to play positive roles in the community beyond providing sex for men or being supportive partners. There was one song that conveyed a positive message about women (S5EP2), but it did little to disrupt the misogynistic tone of the EP. During the interview, before I heard Clarke’s albums, after hearing him talk about the positive influence his mother had upon his literacy, I thought she would play a greater role, thematically and symbolically in his music. However, she did not appear at all.
Lyrics and the Role of School. When I asked Clarke where his lyrical skills came from—how he learned to write lyrics—or whether his skills were innate, he smiled, and grudgingly admitted: “I learned it. I did.” Following up, I asked him, “how?” He said:

I have to say just really, school. Honestly. Like, I always have been one of those studious students. I just always have tried to apply—well, I didn’t really necessarily apply myself in school, but I excelled.

School played a very interesting role in Clarke’s becoming a rapper. He did not dislike or reject school but he did not like school. In hindsight, Clarke viewed school as a necessary evil. When I asked what subjects he excelled in, he said everything: “Math specifically. English never was a weak point. Really everything. I honestly can’t say that there was something that I had trouble in.” Continuing his growth and development in school, he incorporated his English skills. “I just know for a fact that yeah (my English) it helped because if you don’t know what you’re saying, like if you don’t know the meaning of what you’re saying then how can you say it?” stated Clarke. His mother, who exposed him to her poetry when he was a child, initiated him into the written word. Of his love for words and writing, Clarke recalled: “I’m the type to actually read or search definitions while I’m writing because I want to be able to incorporate words into my next bar. Clarke fashioned himself a wordsmith and a student of his craft:

I never been the one that’s been just content with what they know. I always want to learn more. It’s too much knowledge out here not to want to learn more. So, I feel like my knack for wanting to learn put me in those dictionaries.

Clarke’s success and engagement were intrinsically motivated. His school's atmosphere was conducive to the intellectual, practical, and systematic construction of his experiences, thus allowing him to construct his early rhymes in his Yellow Book. Clarke wrote a lot. The
discipline of the writing process was a very important to his skill development. His exposure to his mother's poetry and her writing process coupled with supportive teachers who kept him focused and supported him enough and did not discourage his Yellow Book were part of the construction of Clarke's rap persona and beginning of his rap catalog.

Clarke is an artist; he saw himself as a poet, a rapper who was able to put his emotion on paper, and this was a skill that was instilled in him by his mother:

Poetry is emotion on paper, man. That may be where a lot of my background came from ‘cause my mom is an avid poet. She has works for days--plenty of them. I use to sit there and not necessarily read through her poetry but get a sense of how much soul and how much outlet that gives a person.

Clarke’s mother taught him how to deal with life’s obstacles and conflicts through his art. Of his mother and her poetry Clarke said:

...it showed me how she was dealing with life. Her outlet instead of anything negative was to put it on paper [sic]. And that’s just the message that it gave me. If you want to get a message across or you just want to reflect, the best way to do it is to put it on paper.

This message was an excellent mantra for Clarke; it prepared him for life in school and for life beyond his community. When Clarke described his connection to poetry, I asked if he made any distinction between the poetry and rap. He explained that it depended on the content of the song:

It really depends on the content. Like, a lot of Hip-Hop songs--I need to put that in quotations--Hip-Hop songs--I honestly do--is just repetitive. It’s not too much emotion or elaboration in the songs. Its repetitive hooks, metaphor, simile, that’s it. But it is still Hip-Hop that’s poetry out there. Because it’s artists with substance that are actually putting their substance in their music and trying to actually get a point across.
Most of Clarke's early music is dominated by his construction of narratives about his community, primarily the trap, his identity, his set (his close friends), and his relationships with women. Even when he was writing in school, "if I was to be writing lyrics in class, it wouldn’t be positive lyrics [laughs]. Just for the simple fact that I wasn’t dealing with nothing positive." Again, here, the conflict between school and community in Clarke's writing. His writing was more motivated by his community and his reality outside of school. Clarke said that teachers tried to redirect his focus:

Clarke put up your lyric book and write this essay [laughing] or watch this movie. It was times when I might break out my book to write. Like, they already know what I’m going to do, once that Yellow Book came out they know what time it was.

I found Clarke’s discussion of his Yellow Book intriguing because it showed evidence of literacy, engagement, and demonstrated that he was diligent and invested in writing. Clarke's connection to his Yellow Book is what teachers are trying to create in their students in schools. In a selfish and self-actualizing way, Clarke privileged his writing above his school work. Clarke’s writing and his Yellow Book were very important to him, more important to him than anything that he was doing or learning in school.

**Findings**

Hip-Hop is Clarke's lens for viewing the world. Through Hip-Hop he uses his experiences to reintroduce old artists, and in doing this he also perpetuates the African-American oral tradition. Hip-Hop has remixed the dozens, boasting, toasts, Signifyin(g), and continues to make blackness not only relevant but cool and topical; this is why Hip-Hop has been around and growing in popularity for more than 40 years.
Hip-Hop provided Clarke intellectual and economic sustenance: it freed his mind and also provided him a career opportunity. The majority of Clarke's income is generated from performances at night clubs and other concert venues. Clarke provides his music for free on internet websites like Soundcloud and YouTube. The idea is to give the music away for free, build a following, then people will come to see him perform.

Clarke was exposed to writing and poetry by his mother, who writes poetry. He has always been exposed to writing. In high school, he kept a notebook—his Yellow Book—around and wrote ideas, hooks, and bars whenever they came to him. I was surprised to find, according to Clarke, mentors did not play a substantive role in his becoming a rapper. There were a few supportive teachers and administrators who looked out for him, but he did not label them as mentors. Clarke did not have a negative experience in high school, but he wasn't engaged. He did, however, credit school and ELA for making him a better writer. His community, though, was more significant in his upbringing, in terms of developing his lyrical content.

Discussion

Initially, I thought Clarke's teachers should have found a way to incorporate his Yellow Book as a gateway into engagement. The book could have been used to learn more about his interests or as a motivational tool or as an incentive to help get him more engaged in other school work. In actuality, it was his gateway, to becoming a rapper. Clarke was a perceptive student, and as he said, he was a good student, but he was not engaged. Clarke did enough work to get by, enough work to keep teachers and his mother from prohibiting him doing things that he found more interesting. He always finished his school work quickly, so he was often bored in school. He said he acted out in school but recalled he acted out because he was bored. The work did not challenge or stimulate him. Clarke remembered his teachers, generally, did not think of
him as intelligent until he tested gifted. Once he became certified and documented--as a gifted student--perceptions and expectations about Clarke changed. That's a problem. All students should be engaged, not just gifted students.

Although certified gifted since kindergarten, Clarke remembered teachers being “surprised by him all throughout school.” Some of the things he remembered their being surprised about was his outspokenness and his reserve. Clarke clarified this dichotomy explaining that he was “the black kid in class with all of the white kids.” Even though he was the only black kid in class, he felt comfortable standing up for himself. Clarke’s interpretation of his experience was that his teachers were not used to black gifted students speaking their minds. He said that he did not remember “too many memories” but that he definitely remembered testing gifted in Rap City and the school district where he moved to and the teachers being “really shocked” and “almost having a heart attack.”

The fact that Clarke has a positive feminine presence in his life and yet has not presented women more positively in his music suggests that there were deep cultural ties influencing his music. Clarke was a product of his community, and the content of Clarke’s music demonstrated that he was focused on telling stories about “trap life” (S3EP1, S4EP1, S6EP1, S8EP1, S9EP1, S11EP1, S12EP1) and using misogynistic and demeaning lyrics to depict women (S3EP1, S5EP1, S6EP1, S7EP1, S9EP1, S3EP2, S1EP3, S2EP3, S3EP3, S4EP3, S5EP3, S7EP3, S9EP3).

The misogyny and trap themes were prevalent and presented in a way that begged the question of how a person who had been subjected to oppression can be insensitive to the oppression that he confers upon others in his community. In our interview Clarke was insightful and exhibited the ability to convey his introspection. His early music, however, lacked this insight, but his newer music is trying to reclaim his vision and stop the “dumbing down” of the
music he is creating for his fans. As a griot he preaches classic African-American themes of survival and self-preservation via the grinding and hustling. He also speaks to the rapper’s responsibility to speak and give voice to the oppressed when he raps “I do this shit to help someone” (S2EP2) and “If you ain’t saying shit in the music, don’t say shit at all” (S2EP2). Clarke recognizes that the “world is messed up” and he seeks to use his music to speak about problems he sees in the world. He needs more songs that speak to the needs of his entire community.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Rappers in this study are an amalgamation of many different factors and forces that span the history of Africans in United States. They use their experiences from their lives to exercise their intellectual ability and creativity to demonstrate how they were able to navigate obstacles and establish successful careers. This study shows that in order for students to be successful, they need to be able to trust teachers and their educational systems and see what is in the learning process for them. Teachers who do not teach students of color in urban and rural school districts may take student-teacher trust for granted. Once trust is established then students can learn and work towards establishing productive goals that lead to meaningful lives.

My participants demonstrated mastery of African-American oral traditions. The rappers have also exemplified the complexity of rap music. They engage audiences with their linguistic talents and storytelling abilities. They have acute business acumen and interpersonal skills and they have developed grit that reinforce their desires for success. Yet, there is still a great need for teachers and mentors to guide students who have been blessed with all of these talents.

Rap City West Rappers Today

In the findings and conclusions of chapters 2, 3, and 4 I discuss what rappers can do to help better engage students and future rappers as a way to improve student experiences in high school and as a way to improve their communities. During the 2018 Black History Month celebration at Rap City High School West, a student and popular rapper performed at the event and was disciplined for his performance by the school’s administration for a "violation of school
policies” (Johnson, 2018). Rap City's Black Student Union sponsor, asked the rapper to perform at the Black History Month celebration. The rapper, a member of the Black Student Union, was asked by the group sponsor to exclude specific lyrics from his songs that used the word nigger or lyrics that made derogatory remarks about President Trump. The rapper agreed to the terms discussed with the sponsor but in his performance did all of the things that he promised not to do. The student rapper said, “I chose this song because I felt like it was my time to voice to the students and teachers that us as a youth are very aware” (2018). The discipline the student received was a couple of hours of in-school suspension.

The creation of socially conscious rappers is a goal of my study. Students who are engaged and socially active in their schools and in their communities is a very good thing. Rappers talking about issues of social justice is progress in student engagement. In addition, graduation rates have steadily climbed in Rap City High School West, since Clarke and Sebastian attended (see Figures 5:1 and 5:2). It may be argued that increases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>80.6 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>79.4 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>79.0 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>72.6 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>71.8 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>69.7 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5:1 Rap City Graduation Rate Percentages (2012-1017)²⁵

²⁵ Georgia Department of Education Statistics  
in graduation rates, as seen in tables above, demonstrate growth. The statistics, however, do not address student engagement. Even though test scores are up, the student protest suggests that problems that existed for African-American students at Rap City West two decades ago persist. The rapper was trying to express his views, tell his narrative, and he took a political stand. His interpretation of the club sponsor's perspective was that she was attempting to censor him. The rapper explained during an interview that administrators and teachers were "trying to shut me up" when they told him he couldn't talk about the president. "I felt like they were trying to make me sellout," said the rapper (Callahan, 2018).

The rapper said after he got out of in-school suspension, students were protesting, and they were chanting his name. Two hundred students out of class, protesting (Callahan, 2018). This event was the result of a teacher and student not being able to develop a healthy, learning relationship. It appears that a mentor role was in place, an organization to serve the students was also in place, but there was a disconnect between the organization, its purpose, the sponsor, and the student. This event was a missed learning opportunity.

Maulana Karenga (2012) argues that student academic and social concerns are essential to student well-being in academic institutions. Just as rappers need the past in their music to make sense of their music in the present, students today need to make sense of their African-

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26 Georgia Department of Education Statistics
American past socially and academically. The rapper wanted to be heard, like his predecessors Clarke and Sebastian. This, conflict at Rap City West was a teaching moment. Instead, mistrust and division arose where there might have been unity and growth. Teachers have to recognize teachable moments and students have to learn how to recognize opportunities to learn. Some teachers at Rap City West used the event as a teachable moment (Ragsdale, 2018), reading about the Civil Rights Movement, The Montgomery Bus Boycott, W. E. B. Du Bois and *The Souls of Black Folk*, Langston Hughes and the "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Some students used the event as a learning moment as well, but a lot of students just wanted to get out of class (Rhym, 2018).

The participants’ communities were able to teach them how to rap, provide them with content for their lyrics, and the knowledge of the oral tradition to deliver content; their schools introduced them to literary devices to supplement their content and expand their audiences. The fact that both of my male participants signified and paid homage to pimp / trickster characters and culture says a great deal about intertextuality, intersectionality, and the African-American oral tradition. Each are threads woven into these communities.

In addition to the February 2018 incident at Rap City West, my son, Miles, who graduated from Rap City three years ago, didn’t come to grips with these social conflicts until he had platforms to explore his double consciousness during his freshman year at Morehouse, in Atlanta. Morehouse was able to provide a safe space, with teachers who understood the culture of their students. That is what high schools need, a community in which the institutions understand the needs of their students and strive to fulfill those needs.

Clarke was also conflicted morally and ethically in deciding whether to value identity, culture, or money. In students’ communities, sacred and secular institutions should be helping
them identify and confront these issues. There are many examples of literary and informational texts with these themes that students can read, analyze, discuss in class to help them learn and develop intellectually and socially. Raps City schools need to play a role in helping students to identify, analyze, connect with and respond to the social, political, and economic conflicts that they are exposed to in their own communities. Occasionally, Clarke’s and Sebastian's music addressed some of these critical issues but it wasn’t their music’s purpose. Melody’s content, however, is more socially conscious. She has experienced sexism. She also grew up in a different region of the country and traveled internationally. Her outlook on the world is very different. These experiences may have influenced her ELA experiences in high school as well.

In our interview when Clarke had his epiphany and realized his music “hadn’t really been talking about anything as of late,” he realized his work needed more of a purpose. His mother’s work was purposed, he said, and he wanted his work to be purposed, but very few of his songs are socially conscious (S1EP5).

The Importance of Mentors

At the beginning of this study, I believed that mentors would play a more critical role in the development of the rappers. None of my participants attributed their development as rappers or their success in the industry to mentors. They did not have mentors in the community or in school. All of them, however, did have idols and artists that they looked up to and were influenced by, but not people that they worked closely with who took them under their wings and showed them the ins and outs of the industry.

The Role of School

Prior to my interviews, I expected my participants to be engaged and thriving in school. Clarke was the only participant who journaled in school. Melody and Sebastian did not keep
journals or writing notebooks like Clarke did. My participants each had very different experiences in high school. Sebastian hated school and had serious attendance issues early in his academic career. Clarke tolerated it; he understood its value but was not engaged. He did enough to stay under the radar and not get in trouble for not completing his assignments. Melody thrived in school. She used school as a tool during high school as a tool to improve her writing skills. At school, Melody felt like she had a purpose. Her memories were of fitting in. She never felt like an outsider. She felt a part of her learning process, particularly in the theatre portion of her education that seemed to be product driven. It was performance based and provided Melody an opportunity to perform and remix texts as she did when she was learning to write lyrics. Interestingly, theater played a key role in Sebastian's engagement as well. Even though he became engaged in a college drama class and not a high school class, drama classes provided important learning opportunities for Sebastian and Melody.

Melody remembered writing poetry in school, but she never had an opportunity to write rap lyrics as part of a writing assignment or to analyze rap lyrics as a text. I don't think it is a coincidence that Melody's music is the more traditional of the three artists. She is from New York and it makes sense that the New York influence would present itself in her music. Also, the effort and dedication that she put into writing during her ELA classes can be seen in the clarity and the sophistication of her rhymes, as well as her use of rhetorical devices, that is more complex and insightful than what appears in Sebastian's or Clarke's works. The fact that she honed her writing skills in a more formal and technical manner than they did is evident.

Melody’s pride in her diction is another teaching moment. Diction is a political tool; students who can master ELA standards can manipulate language and get privileged treatment. Diction also has consequences. Double consciousness pressures Melody to be bilingual and bi-
cultural. Some African-American students choose not to speak school English; some choose not to speak the black vernacular. Some, like Melody, choose to speak both. The critical role that teachers can play in a student’s linguistic choice in this situation is to help the student make an informed choice. Many African-American students have to live in two cultures, a black one and a white one. In school, school English is the privileged, default language that all students in the United States must learn. Unfortunately, some teachers put pressure on students to conform by coercing them to reject their home languages and master school English, which students may associate with oppression in their communities. It is important for teachers to be culturally cognizant of the incredibly complex social, cultural, and political history of oppressed student populations in the United States. Glorifying one vernacular over another can cause self-esteem issues.

Clarke's interest in writing in his Yellow Book suggested that journaling might be a good strategy to engage some students and give them access to their funds of knowledge. Journaling is a good supplement to development writing. I’ve tried journaling with students in several capacities, with limited success. The students who enjoyed journaling the most were students who also liked to rap or write rhymes.

School as a Tool. When I asked Clarke what subjects he excelled in, he said, "Everything.” Clarke identified the importance of language mastery for effective communication in his reflection. I attributed Clarke's success in ELA to his mother, who exposed him to her poetry when he was a child and initiated him into the worlds literacy and writing. Of his love for words and writing, Clarke recalled: “I’m the type to actually read or search definitions while I’m writing because I want to be able to incorporate words into my next bar. Melody likewise was adamant about her mastery of diction and how important clarity was for her narratives. She said
during our interview that one of the biggest knocks that people have about rap is that audiences can't understand what rappers are saying; this can be especially true during live performances. Even for Sebastian, who did not like school and was frequently truant in his early high school career, school was where he had his epiphany that lead to his rap career. The opportunity to share his rhymes about his stories on stage engaged him. He didn't discover this until college, but the discovery transformed the once voiceless truant into a professional rapper. He demonstrated that learning and academic prowess is not limited to institutional classrooms and formal education. Each of the rappers demonstrated mastery of literacy and communicative skills through their writing.
REFERENCES


L.L. Cool J. "I'm Bad." *Bigger and deffer*. Def Jam.


Strauss, V. (2017, April 20). Study: Black students from poor families are more likely to graduate from high school if they have at least one black teacher. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/04/09/study-black-students-from-poor-families-are-more-likely-to-graduate-high-school-if-they-have-at-least-one-black-teacher/?utm_term=.db8e03e0731e


APPENDIX A

BLAXPLOITATION

Blaxploitation and Hip-Hop

Rappers whose names are based upon Blaxploitation Films.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rapper</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Source / Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foxy Brown</td>
<td>Foxy Brown</td>
<td>Name based on lead character from 1974 film <em>Foxy Brown</em>, starring Pam Grier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggie Smalls</td>
<td>Biggie Smalls</td>
<td>Name based on character from 1975 film <em>Let's Do It Again</em>, starring Bill Cosby and Sidney Poitier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common</td>
<td></td>
<td>Record label name “Madame Zenobia” based on character from 1974 film <em>Uptown Saturday Night</em>, starring Bill Cosby and Sidney Poitier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Bee</td>
<td>aka Lil’ Kim</td>
<td>Name based on character from 1975 film <em>Dolemite</em>, starring Rudy Ray Moore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Blaxploitation connection: Rappers influenced by Blaxploitation films

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rapper</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snoop Dogg</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The Mack’ (1973 film starring Max Julien as an Oakland pimp named Goldie) is one of my favorite movies. I look at (Julien) as my godfather. Something about that movie, his rise, his struggle, the things he put his family through — I was always infatuated with Goldie. I wanted to be slick and charming to the woman and have the right thing to say.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— Snoop Dogg

"I watched blaxploitation movies and all my heroes like Jim Brown and Fred “The Hammer” Williamson and that’s what made me want to be a part of it. I’m down with “The Hammer” because he’s a genius. A lot of people don’t know that but he is. When we were on the set of “Starksy and Hutch,” he told me three facts about his movie career that he always stood by.

27 The tables in this appendix are from the Museum of Uncut Funk:
He always wins his fights, never dies and gets the girl at the end if he wants her.

That’s a helluva code to live by because I’ve died in nearly all the movies that I’ve been in. And so I’m like damn, if he can pull that off in the ’70s, I should be able to do it in 2004. It made me check myself and say hey, I’m not dying anymore in the movies, I’m going to get a pretty girl and I sure am going to win all my fights."

It’s A Pimp Thang…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Use of Pimp persona in lyrics that were popularized by the films Superfly, The Mack, and Willie Dynamite, as inspiration for their own works.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Daddy Kane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slick Rick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too $hort)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Cent</td>
<td>Paid tribute to pimping within lyrics and has openly embraced the pimp image in his music videos, by including entourages of scantily-clad women, flashy jewelry (known as “bling-bling”), and luxury Cadillacs (referred to as “pimpmobiles”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>“Pimp Juice”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marketed an energy drink with same name.

Blaxploitation Soundtracks and Hip Hop Sampling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Sampler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Across 110th Street</em></td>
<td>J.J. Johnson, United Artists, 1972</td>
<td>Threat, Boss and Tim Dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacula</td>
<td>Gene Page, RCA, 1972</td>
<td>KRS-One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Wash</td>
<td>Norman Whitfield, MCA, 1976</td>
<td>Ice Cube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra Jones</td>
<td>J.J. Johnson, Warner Brothers, 1973</td>
<td>Compton’s Most Wanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffy</td>
<td>Roy Ayers, Polydor, 1973</td>
<td>Redman; Foxy Brown; Casual; Barber Shop Emcees; Nas &amp; DMX; K-Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Producer(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come Back Charleston Blue</td>
<td>Quincy Jones, Atco, 1972</td>
<td>Dr. Dre; Little Indian; Rap City; Wu-Tang Clan; Notorious BIG &amp; Pudgee; Lord Tariq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornbread, Earl and Me</td>
<td>The Blackbyrds, Fantasy, 1975</td>
<td>Compton’s Most Wanted; RBX; The Roots; Gangstarr; Ghostface Killah, Hard 2 Obtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton Comes to Harlem</td>
<td>Galt McDermot, United Artists, 1970</td>
<td>Diamond Shell; Masta Ace; Quasimoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dynamite Brothers</td>
<td>Charles Earland, Prestige, 1973</td>
<td>Kool Keith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter the Dragon</td>
<td>Lalo Schifrin, Warner Brothers, 1973</td>
<td>Herbaliser; De La Soul; Alkaholiks; Busta Rhymes &amp; Q-Tip; Scarface &amp; Too Short / Ice Cube / Dr Dre, Ill Al Skratch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hell Up in Harlem</td>
<td>Edwin Starr, Motown, 1973</td>
<td>Ice T; Tone Loc; Dilated Peoples; Digable Planets; DMX; Get Low Playaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mack</td>
<td>Willie Hutch, Motown, 1973</td>
<td>Biggie Smalls; Chemical Brothers; Canibus; LL Cool J; Lil’ Kim; Dr. Dre, Public Enemy; Cam’Ron &amp; Brotha; Tupac; Featured in movie Hustle and Flow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Sweetback’s Baadassss Song</td>
<td>Melvin Van Peebles, Stax, 1971</td>
<td>Main Source; MF Doom; KMD; Quasimoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together Brothers</td>
<td>Barry White, Pye International, 1974</td>
<td>OC; Jeru; Luke &amp; Verb; Trick Daddy; Quad City DJs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble Man</td>
<td>Marvin Gaye, Tamla, 1972</td>
<td>Gangstarr; Brand Nubian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ice Cube; Rae &amp; Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everlast; Powerule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KAM; Queen Mother Rage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DJ Jazzy Jeff &amp; Fresh; Prince; DJ Magic Mike;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cenubite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck Turner</td>
<td>Isaac Hayes, Enterprise, 1974</td>
<td>Ice Cube; Compton’s Most Wanted; Spice 1; DJ Magic Mike; King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sun; Gangstarr; LL Cool J; Stetsasonic; Ant Banks; Insane Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uptight</strong></td>
<td><strong>Booker T. &amp; The MGs, Stax, 1968</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lo-Fidelity Allstars; Raekwon</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PTM EP: 2015

PTM EP: Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1PTM</td>
<td>Scene from Dolemite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consumerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2PTM</td>
<td>Opening: &quot;Difference between me and y'all niggas, I do this shit for my fams; I do this shit because I need it; I want it; y'all tryin' to press these hos on this internet shit; get off yo' mother fucking ass nigga&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Doing it” for himself, not for anyone else. Independent; not succumbing to peer pressure, industry pressure, or pressure from women. [narrative independency]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Designer all my features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You can have your bitch back...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Designer all my features / Jordan Ones my sneakers&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shouts out Athens (Rap City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big paper I'm gon' spend it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do it for these thots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gotta go get this dough up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fly boy watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thotty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;All I do is fuck 'em, we don't even feed 'em&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunday school no Usher (allusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mind on money, go get it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fly shit, no Frisbee / Bruce Lee watch me kick it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3PTM</td>
<td>Plays on disrespect Sebastian gets from people (mainly artists) in the industry. &quot;It's plenty bitches in here&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4PTM</td>
<td>An anthem for women who work as strippers and dance in strip/night clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chorus: Let me see dat ass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Twerk: scrub the ground / scrub the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Twerk song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objectification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5PTM</td>
<td>Partying. Going out to party. Dance music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Friday night and you just got paid&quot; (Allusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTM</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| S6PTM | Masculine, hypersexual, misogynistic sexual situations that seem to be based upon male fantasy.  
"I beat it" (the pussy)  
"When I eat that pussy, she like..."  
When I  
"I Mayweather that pussy"  
Drug usage  
"When I pull her hair, she like"  
"When I beat it up, she like"  
Pimp song / Boast |
| S7PTM | Rapping about acts that strippers / women do for men in clubs; going to the club and wil’in out. |
| S8PTM | Stay in his own lane. Tough, but smart, doesn’t mess with everybody.  
Boast song: "Stack, stack, stack, spend my own change"  
"I don't fuck with niggas but their hos love me"  
I got hos, I don't trust them either  
Doesn't trust anybody  
Chorus: "Hustle, hustle, hustle, so I guess I'll grind my life away" |
| S9PTM | Hustle, hustle, hustle, make money, grind.  
Money's on my mind, I got's to have it, that's all I got to say  
I just bought your ho, there's a pink slip on your bitch  
[diss] you gotta bad bitch? I got three of those  
[diss] that's a G-Shock, I buy my niece those (watch?)  
[diss] what's that a couple bands, I spent that on designer clothes  
"I grind hard and stack it up so you know I flaunt it"  
"Get rich or die trying" Motto (50 Cent, biopic) Get Rich or Die Tryin (2003)  
"See I'm worrying about money, they worry about follows"  
"While you was chasing some pussy, see I was out on my grind" |
| S10PTM | Grinding, making money.  
"Go hard or go home"  
Let me stunt  
Let me shine  
Got two Audemars, it's my time  
Rolex |
| S11PTM | “All about my checks”  
What you want: that money  
What you need: that money  
I get it, I get it, I get it...  
Trap house trapping  
You sitting on your ass you can't be getting no cake  
"Hate is out there watching" [code]  
Big bucks no whammies (signifying)  
Cake / cheese |
| S12PTM | Having people around whom you can trust  
When the money gone, you know them bitches gone  
Chorus: |
"Now the money low, tell me who gonna rock with ya?"
"When yo' lights dim, tell me who gone shine with ya?"
I done been broke before...
When money gone niggas disappear.
Fair weather friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S13PTM</th>
<th>A tribute to what he considers his ideal “chick” and what he has to do to get her.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretty with expensive tastes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I love it when you brag on me and throw it in a hatters face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;got your own plastic&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boss chick status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S14PTM</th>
<th>“Fuck the streets, I’m really trying to chill...she got me…”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song to his girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girl you the true one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;A beast in the bed and a chef in the kitchen&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S15PTM</th>
<th>Song for people who have screwed up with a former partner; how to try and get him or her back.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apology song: I'm sorry, give me one more chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeah I messed up, he done lucked up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S16PTM</th>
<th>Struggle song.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother stayed in the pen; daddy in and out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Had a rough life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Auntsies and uncles took care of the kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I know I'm not the only one that has a story to tell; I just got this chance to tell it right now&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chilling like an orphan, bouncing from house to house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always had hopes but never had dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y'all access has officially been granted to my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd verse dedicated to his aunt who left him 2 stacks when she passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Took care our his grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stays humble and prayed up (religious allusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dedication to family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|        | 3rd verse                                                                        |
|        | Crabs in a barrel (idiom)                                                         |
|        | Diss verse                                                                       |
|        | Everyone's had a homeboy / homegirl shit on 'em                                    |
|        | Snakes in the grass, even when the grass cut, they still out to get you.          |
|        | If anyone is catching feelings, fuck ya                                            |
PTM EP: Misogyny

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Misogyny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2PTM</td>
<td>Bitch, Thot, hos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3PTM</td>
<td>Bitches, hos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4PTM</td>
<td>Twerk, Scrub the ground; sexual connotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6PTM</td>
<td>Rough sex: “I beat it”; and other sexual acts. “When I beat it up, she like…” is the hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7PTM</td>
<td>“bust it and drop it for me” is the hook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8PTM</td>
<td>Hos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9PTM</td>
<td>Ho, bad bitch, designer hos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11PTM</td>
<td>Hos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12PTM</td>
<td>Hos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S13PTM</td>
<td>Chick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14PTM</td>
<td>Chick, hos, bitches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S16PTM</td>
<td>Hos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H EP: Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1H</td>
<td>Nicki Minaj speaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2H</td>
<td>[diss song] You talk shit and I live it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Took dudes chick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3H</td>
<td>[diss song] I am the new shit, you are the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fronter: Talking about shit you never had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fronting about shit you never done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fuck who you are, fuck what you had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4H</td>
<td>I'm everywhere that a dollar be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I be in the trap where the money b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5H</td>
<td>Fucking with me, I'm fucking with you (chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fronting on me on stunting on you (chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know, know, know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6H</td>
<td>Sample [?] [diss song] Grind with a purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|       | "Had faith, lost hope, sold weed, pushed coke, / Had cash, went broke, fell off, bounced back through / bossed up, now back at it, showed niggas, now they mad at me."
| S7H  | Sample Relationship song  
I'ma keep it gangsta with you and show you how I eat it  
Show you how I beat it  
His and her Rolexes, now they know the time  
Put that pride to the side |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S8H  | Come and get this money  
Stripper song.  
"Call me Mandingo, I'm all in your kidneys, I'm all with the one night stand, but please catch no feelings" |
| S10H | Bitches ain't shit yeah  
Political overtones  
[Boast] man in my city  
For the struggle  
Climbed at the gutter  
Did it for the streets, yeah, them my people year  
Did it for the struggle yeah, plus I hustle yeah  
Did it for the jail, yeah, free my people yeah |
| S11H | Diss song / boast song  
Chorus:  
I gotta some sucka niggas out here trying to fuck up my day  
I gotta few bad bitches trying to come out and play  
Better pipe down homes always got something to say. |
| S12H | I got the game from the streets  
I got the game from the G's and the tweakers.  
"Teacher was the streets, motherfuck a classroom"  
Skip school, serve js in the bathroom  
Shut out from the streets, I ain't get it from no teacher"  
Where he got his knowledge from: |
| S14H | Trap song  
I'm doing big numbers in the...  
Three stash pots in the  
[diss song] |
| S15H | Sample (allusion)  
Bobby Womack's "Woman Gotta Have It"  
Allusion: quotes Biggie: "On the road to riches and diamond rings, real niggas do real things"  
Street life |
### APPENDIX C

#### MELODY LYRICAL ANALYSIS

**EP1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Song 1 (S1EP1) | Identity  
|             | Love  
|             | Relationships  
|             | Femcee  
|             | Strong black woman  
|             | Imagery | |
| Song 2 (S2EP1) | Love  
|             | Relationships  
|             | Boast | |
| Song 3 (S3EP1) | I’m not perfect  
|             | I’m just out here trying to get my mind right (chorus)  
|             | I got some ways about me that ain’t always honest | |
| Song 4 (S4EP1) | Love  
|             | Relationship  
|             | Sexual situation | |
| Song 5 (S5EP1) | Love  
|             | Sexual situation  
|             | Relationship | |

**MT**

| Song 1 (S1MT) | Mixtape, intro to who she is  
|              | Signifies on “Mr. Sleeper,” with dream motif. | |
| Song 2 (S2MT) | Femcee, put ’em in a frenzy  
| Song 3 (S3MT) | MC Lyte intro  
|             | Battle rap with some other female MC?  
|             | “They can sit and argue about who’s cutter / But they turn their sound off when they play you on the computer”  
|             | Classic boast rap  
|             | Traditional diss song | |
| Song 5 (S5MT) | Identity  
|              | “Tonight I will be magnificent” | |
Imagery
Talks about the heart of a “true”
I will amaze me, true to myself, they can’t change me
I will be magnificent”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 (S6MT)</td>
<td>Signifying of “I’m Bad” by Michael Jackson&lt;br&gt;Signifies Run DMC, “Not bad meaning bad, but bad meaning good”&lt;br&gt;Boasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (S7MT)</td>
<td>Hook up song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (S8MT)</td>
<td>Hook up song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (S9MT)</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (S10MT)</td>
<td>Allusion to Mos Def&lt;br&gt;Metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (S11MT)</td>
<td>“Little brown girl from Queens with big dreams”&lt;br&gt;Making it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (S12MT)</td>
<td>Rippin flows&lt;br&gt;“Killing ‘em when we rip”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (S13MT)</td>
<td>Repin’ Tampa and Queens&lt;br&gt;Dissing / Broads / Rappers&lt;br&gt;Reppin that Q-Borough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (S14MT)</td>
<td>Diss record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (S15MT)</td>
<td>Queen&lt;br&gt;I’m that chick&lt;br&gt;Move at my own pace&lt;br&gt;Identity&lt;br&gt;People comparing her to Lauryn (Hill)&lt;br&gt;Remix / talking book / rewriting of KRS-One’s keep pushing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EP3

<p>| Song 1 (S1EP3) | “Work with me a minute, I’m fixing to poor out my heart”&lt;br&gt;Went to school “copt” a couple of degrees, a few life lessons had me feeling really smart until she realized that she didn’t know anything about life.&lt;br&gt;Everything is connected&lt;br&gt;“Everything is connected and I’m living a la cart”&lt;br&gt;Everything I say is my life&lt;br&gt;Been listening to Chance (the rapper) who showed her that she could be dope, real raw, shut it down if she ever got a chance to.&lt;br&gt;Asks herself how she got comfortable not doing her thing&lt;br&gt;Very self-reflective song&lt;br&gt;I’m just over here growing&lt;br&gt;Let me be great&lt;br&gt;They gonna talk, let ‘em talk, you just walk it out / you know what it’s all about&lt;br&gt;People get envious don’t look within&lt;br&gt;Majestic and royal they call me the queen |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Lyrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Song 2 (S2EP3)</td>
<td>Tribute album</td>
<td>No arrogance, I just know I’m supreme. “Seems like every time I turn around, somebody else gone” Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs Protect your beam from the ones who scheme Had some different cards but I played ‘em right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 3 (S3EP3)</td>
<td>Gospel theme / flow</td>
<td>I know who I am, I’m celestial Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs Protect your beam from the ones who scheme Had some different cards but I played ‘em right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 4 (S4EP3)</td>
<td>This (song) is for the liars and the fronters… Diss song? If you got something real you better act right You should have known better (chorus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 5 (S5EP3)</td>
<td>Song about loyalty</td>
<td>I know who I am, I’m celestial Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs Protect your beam from the ones who scheme Had some different cards but I played ‘em right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 6 (S6EP3)</td>
<td>I was sitting here overwhelmed with sadness Mad cause I connected myself with average Feeling as if I had given away my magic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 7 (S7EP3)</td>
<td>I am; Dy’s niece</td>
<td>I know who I am, I’m celestial Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs Protect your beam from the ones who scheme Had some different cards but I played ‘em right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 8 (S8EP3)</td>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>I know who I am, I’m celestial Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs Protect your beam from the ones who scheme Had some different cards but I played ‘em right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 9 (S9EP3)</td>
<td>Been rapping since 12 years old I can never be a fake broad / I can only be me, that’s real and authentic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 10 (S10EP3)</td>
<td>Dream motif</td>
<td>I know who I am, I’m celestial Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs Protect your beam from the ones who scheme Had some different cards but I played ‘em right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That’s what it means to be a dreampusher. keep calling you / that other thing keep boring you / Let it go man
Don’t let nobody tell you what you can’t do, your only competition is you. So keep pushin’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song 11 (S11EP3)</th>
<th>Let me introduce you to this pretty, brown, brown, long legs have you seen her / Dudes wanna smash and broads wanna be her</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EP4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song 1 (S1EP4)</strong> Still believe in romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will stop the neck rolling and finger snapping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song 2 (S2EP4)</strong> Love song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song 3 (S3EP4)</strong> Classical sound, orchestral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can we go there, place of love?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of people say they deep but they simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody try and tell you they hurt and you miss it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming from the soul is the way to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let me take you to a place where somebody cares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t live in a place without love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you’re living without love you’re going nowhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song 4 (S4EP4)</strong> “Forgive” won’t play[?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song 5 (S5EP4)</strong> “Make It Last.” Love story / remembering a relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signifying of song “Make it last forever,” Keith Sweat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And “forever, forever-ever,” Outkast, “I’m sorry Ms. Jackson”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song 6 (S6EP4)</strong> “Forever,” Boast song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O she think she bad cause she got the new Lexus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will be forever relevant, nobody in my place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After I’m in my grave they will cherish my words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clarke Lyrical Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>(S1EP1), (S2EP1), (S1EP2), (S2EP2), (S3EP2) (S5EP2), (S6EP2), (S7EP2), (S11EP2) (S13EP2), (S15EP2), (S1EP3), (S8EP3), (S9EP3), (S10EP3), (S11EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>(S1EP1), (S2EP1), (S3EP1), (S4EP1), (S1EP2), (S5EP2), (S15EP2), (S1EP3), (S2EP3), (S3EP3), (S4EP3), (S8EP3), (S10EP3), (S9EP3), (S3EP4), (S6EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissing</td>
<td>(S1EP1), (S2EP2), (S3EP2), (S9EP3), (S6EP4), (S12EP2), (S13EP2), (S14EP2), (S8EP3), (S6EP4), (S6EP4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream motif</td>
<td>(S1EP1), (S4EP1), (S1EP2), (S11EP2), (S8EP3), (S10EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love / Relationships</td>
<td>(S1EP1), (S2EP1), (S3EP1), (S4EP1), All EP 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

African-American Oral Tradition: Boasting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>“I’m the dopest thing to walk in the room,” “open (S1EP1) “I ain’t saying I’m perfect, I’m saying I’m worth it,” “reflection” (S2EP1) “I was the best” “Queen Melody” “Intro” (S1EP2) “My name is Melody, tellin’ me I’m the best, not just of the broads,” “Femcee” (S2EP2) “There’s nothing feminine about killing and MC” “Femcee” (S2EP2) “I’m so mean on the mic I harass it” (S2EP2) “I am a black star like Mos and Talib (S2EP2) “In a class by myself so I write alone” (S3EP2) Not a Jeep but I’m a lyrical shooter, I’m a F-150, you a lil’ Mini Cooper” (S3EP2) “Line ‘em up, your girl Melody will hurt ‘em all” (S3EP2) “Bet I have ‘em yelling encore at the curtain call” (S3EP2) “You don’t want to show up if your girl is in the cypher” (S3EP2) “My chick bad, my chick good, my chick do stuff that your chick wish she could (S6EP2) “I’m bad” “I Will Be Magnificent” (S5EP2) “When I come through the hattin’ broads get mad” (S6EP2) I’m badder than any chick you ever had (S6EP2) “Those other girls are freezer burn, I’m the freshness” (S7EP2) “I was always destined to be one of the illest (S11EP2) “Killing ‘em when we rip…” (S12EP2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You know we get down! (S12EP2)
“\(I\) win \(w\)ars, you can \(k\)ee \(p\) your little battle raps” (S13EP2)
“\(I\) win \(w\)ars, you can \(k\)ee \(p\) your little battle raps” (S13EP2)
“\(C\)all you my baby, every time I son you” (S14EP2)
“\(W\)ork for my dinner if you weak, I’m\(a\) hunt you” (S14EP2)
“You don’t want it with me, you never win that” (S14EP2)
“What I \(s\)pit will make \(b\)rothers fi\(e\)n” (S15EP2)
“Queen” (S15EP2)
“When I rock, I transform, kind of the like the morn, when the sun brings light to the night, call me dawn” (S15EP2)
“I’m nasty with mine, I’m small but I’m a beast” (S15EP2)
“The words that I spit is the best for the week” (S15EP2)
Majestic and royal they call me the queen (S1EP3)
No arrogance, I just know I’m supreme. (S1EP3)
“I know I’m the truth, Make them respect the goddess” (S2EP3)
I’m the illest thing out. (S6EP3)
I’m fifty-eleven feet tall! (S8EP3)
I’m dope (S8EP3)
Little brown girl from Queens is now that great, black hope / And I rock for generations who ride the tails of my coat / A hundred years from now they’ll be reciting what I wrote (S8EP3)
Come for me but you can never catch me because I’m prayed up (S8EP3)
Who you know kill a dude on his own track (S9EP3)
A hunnid Grand say I’m better than you (S9EP3)
You see me man, you know that I be shining / When I be coming through I be killing it with perfect timing. (S6EP4)
I’m on a mission, changing the game, restore it to a good condition (S6EP4)
All of these disillusioned rappers, no told them, they wack (S6EP4)
I eat ‘em for breakfast
O she think she bad cause she got the new Lexus / See me in my Mustang baby I’m the freshest (S6EP4)
You can run and tell it, Forever I be yelling from the top of the building (S6EP4)
I’m eternal (S6EP4)
I will be forever relevant, nobody in my place (S6EP4)

African-American Oral Tradition: The Dozens / Dissing

Dissing

“\(T\)hese suckas love wasting my time, you got a whole twenty-four, why you messing with mine.” Open (S1EP1)
“I know who I am, I just need a little push / I am truth personified, the opposite of Bush” (S2EP2)
“You never say nothing dope on a microphone / Dudes listen cause they hopin’ they might can bone” (S3EP2)
“I’m a F-150 you a lil’ Mini-Cooper” (S3EP2)
“I’m original, yo’ style is Remi” (S3EP2)
“They can sit and argue about who’s cuter / But they turn their sound off when they play you on the computer” (S3EP2)

“Heard yo’ style, we don’t want it no more” (S3EP2)

“You don’t ever want to fix your face to try to sun us / Foreclose on your flow like Suntrust” / Gotta predatory flow on that microphone” (S3EP2)

“They all say that they so street / Then come in peace like vegans / Y’all don’t want no beef” (S3EP2)

“Rhymes blazing at Jamaica station where I ate the illest MCs, I got sick tastes” (S12EP2)

“Don’t like it hardcore, go on and be a singer then” (S1EEP2)

“These little boys spit like they got a handicap” (S12EP2)

“Get my light on to all these broads, that they paper thin (S13EP2)

“I win wars, you can keep your little battle raps” (S13EP2)

“Call you my baby, every time I son you” (S14EP2)

“Work for my dinner if you weak, I’ma hunt you” (S14EP2)

“Little brother get back!” (S14EP2)

Who you know kill a dude on his own track (S8EP3)

You think you killing it / your arrogance don’t match your grinding (S6EP4)

Talking about what you got, ain’t got a pot to piss in (S6EP4)

I don’t hardly see you anywhere, only in one spot (S6EP4)

Identity Motif

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>“Queen Melody,” “Intro” (S1EP2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Let me introduce you to a little brown girl from Queens with big dreams” (S11EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m in the Bay but you know I grew up where the bricks lay / dollar vans, African nose, and mixtapes” (S12EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“From my locks to the souls of my feet, I’m authentic” (S13EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pushing until the air is no longer in my lungs (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When I rock, I transform” (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It ain’t what you got, it’s what you do that defines you” (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A Queen from Queens that rocks beats” (S15EP2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Everything I say is my life” (S2EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Majestic and royal they call me the queen (S2EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No arrogance, I just know I’m supreme. (S2EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here today but I don’t know for how long / That’s why I put my everything in all of these songs (S2EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I know I’m the truth, make them respect the goddess (S2EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Had some different cards but I played ‘em right (S2EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I found God in myself and I loved her (S3EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Love is my religion, this music thing is my pulpit (S3EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queens-bred goddess (S3EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I know who I am, I’m celestial (S3EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good friend but I make a bad enemy (S4EP3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magic (S6EP3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I can never be a fake broad / I can only be me, that’s real and authentic (S9EP3)
Coming from the soul is the way to go (S3EP4)
Never got into this to be an idol (S3EP4)
So gritty, they hear me and wonder if I’m pretty / Wonder what I look like, if I got
a booty like Nikki but I don’t and that is alright / Because when they see me on
the stage I kill it all night (S6EP4)

Grit / Grind Motif Lyrics

Grit
“I’m about that grind” (S6EP2)
“...and I always gave a hundred and ten” (S11EP2)
“Pushing until the air is no longer in my lungs” (S15EP2)
“Through it all I’m staying steadfast to my spot” (S15EP2)
The one who keeps it moving is the one who overcomes” (S15EP2)
I’m steady on my grind (S3EP4)
So gritty, they hear me and wonder if I’m pretty (S6EP4)

Theme Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Melody score</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>16/37 = 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>17/37 = 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissing</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>11/37 = 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream motif</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6/37 = 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>16/37 = 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX D

## CLARK LYRICAL ANALYSIS

### NEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Album / EP</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1NEP</td>
<td>Male / Female relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signification of R&amp;B classic 80s song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t want nobody but you” = chorus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allusion: catfish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ball like Stoyakovitch (simile)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signifying: sampled R&amp;B song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signifying Labelle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aaliyah: “Are You That Somebody?” No; the title is nobody…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is it this deep or no?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2NEP</td>
<td>Soundcloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I had a hard time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doper than an 80s baby (boast)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I come from the school of the hard knock / whole lot of blessin’ what the Lord brought / whole lot of lesson, what the Lord taught / Pain and disappointment what my heart got.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Made it out the mud / Played with lots of drugs”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use to hang with them thugs…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Had to disassociate himself with negative people in his life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EP1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1EP1</td>
<td>Trap song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What the fuck, what the fuck, what the fuck / I done got it up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaning for days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting laid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drum machine, layered tracks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boast 40 Acres they know the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2EP1</td>
<td>References Glock 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drugs / money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signifying 80s rap (“huh”), Master P?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sampling Labelle again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smoking broccoli (marijuana)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woady: Origins unknown but Urban dictionary defines the term as one used in the south, where black men refer to white a white woman as a woady. This term is used by Biggie in one of his songs to describe a white girl. Example, woady be lookin’ fine as hell. Point Clarke was making about not making significant music. Popular music, trap music.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| S3EP1 | Diss  
Narrative  
Trap life  
Storytelling  
Story about a Drug raid  
Twelve came in through the front / my nigga ran out the back door…  
‘Yellow bitch beside me…  
She gave us some good pussy with the head to match.  
Misogyny |
| S4EP1 | Grit  
Gotta go hard…  
Trap door still swinging, ain’t no knob…  
“So hard”  
I’m not taking no losses.  
Cash only nigga, no card |
| S5EP1 | “Nigga summa cum laude” [Boast]  
Watch a nigga do the mula dance  
Chorus: repetitive “bankroll”  
Boast song  
Heavily coded / vernacularized song  
I been grinding my  
“Street nigga, street nigga, gotta lot of knowledge about the street nigga / Dill pickles, sweet nickles, watch your back and always keep the heat with you”  
“Beat nigga, weak nigga, we was taught to never take defeat nigga / if you bring a bankroll to the table then nigga I’ll eat with you”  
Ran off with a nigga bitch wetter than the Yucatan (misogyny)  
Cream = money  
Allusion: Diamond Dash |
| S6EP1 | Money, respect, power  
Newer whip  
Newer bitch  
Gotta level up: gangsta life  
All of my niggas are real ones, all of your niggas are cowards  
Turn the band into a mil (drug dealing)  
whole lot of ammunition, whole lot of guns  
Trap stories  
Authenticity |
| S7EP1 | Sampling  
Misogyny  
Sex acts |
I smash it WCW, like WCW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S8EP1</th>
<th>10 band, 20 band, 50 band, 100 band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drug culture / trap culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drug narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanna sign me come and get me / Went hard this summer / I was hard I was hungry (grit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allusion: running man; Diamond Dash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I swear that everything kosher”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S9EP1</th>
<th>Grinding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to meet the quota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make her act right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drug life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big chill,, big trip,..., that’s all a nigga want</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drugs topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S10EP1</th>
<th>Somebody called a punk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Something about a snitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Wake up everyday and try to do the right shit so we don’t have to ask what the price is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movin’ = moving weight / selling drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology / voice altering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big shipment flew in got the whole world tuned in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voice alteration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grind / hustle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S11EP1</th>
<th>I gotta get it, that’s a 10-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chilling in the trap house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I hustle daily cause I been broke…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your favorite rapper is trash (diss)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S12EP1</th>
<th>FIU = fuck it up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trap life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drug dealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My nigga really go hard (grit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freestyle?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EP2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Song</strong></th>
<th><strong>Content</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1EP2</td>
<td>Intro Dolemite (like Sebastian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signifying Pimps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syncopation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We were pimping hoes in every county we went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bitch I need my money on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goldie = character?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pooty Tang (allusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hot damn! Where my money bitch.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Complexity (Signifying “Big Pimping”  
“Play on” title, signifying “play on playa”  
Signifies Nas’s (2006) title “Play on Playa”  
Song = tribute to pimps and players.  
Young nigger feeling like Dolemite  
We were pimping’ hoes…  
“When I dip  
Diamond in back…” (Allusion to Curtis Mayfield)  
Tribute song pimps and pimp lik  
Allusion (Sanford and Son)  
Speakerly Text  |
|---|
| S2EP2 Signifying Lauryn Hill in the fugees: “Killing Me Softly”  
She covers Roberta Flack’s  
Original song: “Killing Me Softly with His Song,” by Lori Lieberman (1971)  
Talking book / speakerly texts Lauryn Hill signifies that song in her album  
“If you ain’t saying shit in the music don’t say shit at all, nigga” [diss]  
Diss song  
“Hot damn!” vernacularism  
“They ain’t got a pot to piss in” AFAM idiom; Melody uses this as well.  
Boast  
I’m Kobe in the clutch (Allusion)  
Metaphor: thunder and lightning to hit  
Better get your intellect up  |
| S3EP2 Signifies / samples Floetry, “Say Yes”  
Song for a Betty Shawty / Trick  
She make me so in love.  
Talks about digging her out  |
| S4EP2 Signifies / samples (don’t recognize song)  
“Most of these niggas don’t speak what they feel” [inauthentic?]  |
| S5EP2 Signifies / India Arie song “Video” about fame and being yourself  
Tribute song to black women  
Melinon  
Let a king keep you safe and sound  
Allusion to Cleopatra  
This is a song uplifting women (calls her perfect) but this is not consistent with they way women are treat  
“Queen you dead fine and I’m glad you mine”  
I swear that you’re loyal, I swear that you’re royal |
Earth Wind and Fire let’s build an empire (allusion)
Let’s build a kingdom and reign forever.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S6EP2</td>
<td>Smith &amp; Wesson references</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| S7EP2  | Signifies / samples “Girlfriend” by Pebbles 
Re-mix: “there are other fish in the sea” 
Relationship song 
Relationship gone wrong 
Fish: “I know there’s other fish in the sea” 
Rangol on the brim 
Real cheese sandwich fresh off a cast-iron skillet. 
Thought you would be the one a nigga would have a child with. 
“You lied your last lie…” remixing Pebbles. |
| S8EP2  | Bitch I made it 
Boast 
I grind for it. 
Fuck a label 
Black Einstein in the trap. 
Women as freaks. |

EP 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Song sampled in at least 22 other songs 
Boasting: sexual bravado 
Sexual situations |
| S2EP3    | A girl that’s “down” 
Behind every strong man is a woman like me the female accompaniment sings 
At the end of the day you need someone to come home to 
I’m not any chick, I’m the real chick 
I can be a down chick you just gotta let me in |
| S3EP3    | I’m just trying to get some act right (chorus) 
“...can you handle it, I dismantle it [vagina]” 
“You can have it all if you play it right” (chorus) 
“The way you moving you gotta nigga wanna stay the night and lay the pipe” (chorus) 
“Getta a room and make it do what it does” [idiom] |
| S4EP3    | “Love the way those jeans fit around yo ass” 
Gotta love it, gotta love the way she look and carry herself; 
Tribute to his woman |
| S5EP3    | Grab a bitch and… 
To my music your bitch approve it 
Drop down and give me 50, the way that she twerkin I know your momma with me 
(chorus) 
I’m putta couple dollars near your titty. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Song Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S6EP3</td>
<td>Shawty what’s up? Make the most of it tonight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7EP3</td>
<td>Stripper Song Song about stripper’s buttocks? Saw you twerk The way she walk out on that stage I can tell that she know somethin’ We gonna pull off in the Regal or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8EP3</td>
<td>She got the body of a goddess Woman as cleopatra / goddess positive portrayal of women contradictory to all the other negative images in the album She knows It’s impressive the way she sits on her throne She’s royalty Partying with the masses she just wants a king by her side She says beauty is in the eye of the beholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9EP3</td>
<td>Shawty let me talk to you Hey shawty, what we waiting on? (chorus) Speaker wants the have sex with his female that he’s dating. Wants to know what they are waiting on. I know we ain’t been dating long but…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10EP3</td>
<td>Idiom From film (1997) In love with a girl My niggas say she got my head gone A new definition of love jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12EP3</td>
<td>Disloyal Done him wrong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EP5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1EP5</td>
<td>Revolutionary message Public service announcement “There’s war going on, and sadly, it’s within” “My people are still blinded” Self-hatred” “Break the mold, go be great / Pay yo’ toll, hold yo’ weight Hard to win when we really set up for failure These chains still bind us “Niggers in prison wondering why they in that cell they in / ‘Cause ain’t nothin’ fuckin’ with melanin” Allusions to Malcolm and Martin, Huey P. Newton,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not on the slave and master shit
The illusion of inclusion
“'I never really felt the shit that the pastor spit / I fell asleep in the pew /
This song is his negro spiritual
Political theme

S2EP5  Diss

Clarke Theme Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td>6/36</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>S2T4; S1EP1; S2EP1; S5EP1; S8EP2; S1EP3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signifying</td>
<td>10/36</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>S1T4; S2EP1; S7EP1; S1EP2; S2EP2; S3EP2;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4EP2; S5EP2; S7EP2; S1EP3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissing</td>
<td>4/36</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>S3EP1; S12EP1; S2EP2; S2EP5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit / Grinding</td>
<td>5/36</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>S4EP1; S9EP1; S11EP1; S12EP1; S8EP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug culture / Trap</td>
<td>11/36</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>S2T4; S1EP1; S2EP1; S3EP1; S4EP1; S6EP1;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S8EP1; S9EP1; S10EP1; S11EP1; S12EP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misogyny</td>
<td>14/36</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>S7EP1; S2EP1; S6EP1; S3EP1; S5EP1; S1EP2;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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