'Oh, They're Sending a Bad Message'

Black Males Resisting & Challenging Eurocentric Notions of Blackness Within Hip Hop & the Mass Media Through Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

The ethnographic study that forms the basis of this article investigated the ways in which three Black males, Darrell (15), Reggie (15), and Dave (16), negotiated the messages of rap and the mass media to form their own counter-narratives of Blackness. The article aims to: (1) demonstrate how Black males are deconstructing rap to expose racial stereotyping within society and the media; (2) explore how Black males are debunking monolithic notions of Black masculinity; and (3) investigate youths' knowledge-making processes outside the walls of their schools.

Many of Hip Hop's strongest critics stress that Hip Hop is "holding Blacks back" intellectually, financially, and socially (McWhorter, 2003). In 2007, cultural critic Michelle Malkin denounced Hip Hop music and culture as "cultural pollution" (*New York Post*). What these critics ignore is that these mainstream and popular diatribes surrounding Hip Hop are constructed around a Eurocentric psyche and imagination of Black masculinity (West, 2001). Archetypes of Black males as hypersexual, violent, misogynistic, and materialistic inform Hip Hop's construction of Black masculinity. However, popular treatments of Hip Hop consistently fail to interrogate the commodification and exploitation of Hip

Hop, while youth of color are labeled nihilistic and destructive (Kilson, 2003; McWhorter, 2003). Thus, there is much debate surrounding Hip Hop as a cultural and musical art form, which is why many educators ignore Hip Hop as an empowering pedagogical tool (Petchauer, 2009). Much of Hip Hop is (mis) represented by corporate America as dangerous popular Black expression that is inconstant with American values (Rose, 1991). Although Hip Hop music and culture is emblazoned by pillorying images and rhetoric of social pathology (Mahiri & Conner, 2003), Neal (2005) reminds us, "just because black men are under siege in White America, it doesn't mean that they don't exhibit behaviors that do real damage to others, particularly within black communities" (p. 152). Neal's position is critical to understanding the plight of Black males because it takes in to account how the media creates and maintains Hip Hop for the White imagination and the real life implications of Hip Hop's co-opted narratives of glamorized violence, crime, and sex. However, the ways in which Hip Hop influences youth, especially Black males, needs to be unpacked: the standard tropes of Black males as rebellious and hypersexual persist, even as Hip Hop scholarship illuminates the prophetic educational potential of Hip Hop as a form of critical pedagogy (Ginwright, 2004; Hill, 2009; Love, 2012). Thus, to state simply that Black males are learning how to cope with society's injustices by listening to explicit rap lyrics and mimicking the attitudes and aggressive posture of male rappers is misleading and irresponsible. In opposition to that theory, the purpose of this article is to demystify Black males as "cultural dopes" (Hall, 1981, p. 59) and illustrate that Black males are resisting and challenging Eurocentric, hegemonic notions of Blackness found in Hip Hop and the mass media through critical pedagogy outside of the normal school walls. The article aims to: (1) demonstrate how Black males are deconstructing rap to expose racial stereotyping within society and the media; (2) explore how Black males are debunking monolithic notions of Black masculinity; and (3) investigate youths' knowledge-making processes outside the walls of their schools.

POWER: HIP HOP CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN & OUT OF SCHOOLS

There is a burgeoning body of Hip Hop scholarship centered on Hip Hop music and culture that can be divided into three strands: (1) Hip Hop critical pedagogy that positions Hip Hop to the center of formal and informal school curricula; (2) the meaning making processes and fluid identity work of Hip Hop; and (3) the historical, textual, and social commentary of Hip Hop (Petchauer, 2009). No matter the strand, Hip Hop scholarship is a direct derivative of Hip Hop itself--rebellious, bold, and resilient, while challenging education's dominant middle-class, Eurocentric discourse (Williams, 2009). Hip Hop critical pedagogy

is rooted in the principles of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994), critical pedagogical frameworks (Freire, 2000; Kincheloe, 2008; Shor, 1987), and cultural modeling methods (Lee, 1995) because Hip Hop critical pedagogy positions the culture, social context, learning styles, and experiences of students' to the center of the curricula (Petchauer, 2009). Hip Hop critical pedagogy encourages youth to engage in thoughtful discourse and meaningful classroom work that critiques society and its fixed representations of what is considered normal and what is deemed "the other."

A popular stand of Hip Hop critical pedagogy is Hip Hop critical literacy. The crux of Hip Hop critical literacy emphasizes the notion that students engage in literacy practices beyond school walls or normal school settings (community centers, night schools, after school enrichment programs) and that literacy incorporates students ways of "behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing" (Gee, 1996, p. vii). Hip Hop critical literacy researchers and practitioners draw on the critical literacy work of Freire and Macedo (1987) to empower individuals to read the word and the world. Freire and Macedo (1987) contend,

> Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. Reading the word is not merely preceded by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. Words should be laden with the meaning of the people's existential experience, and not the teacher's experience (p. 36).

Hip Hop critical literacy scholarship (Alim, 2004; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Ginwright, 2004; Hill, 2006, 2009, Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002) rests on "problem-posing" (Freire, 2000) student-teacher dialogue in order to deconstruct dominant narratives, which can lead students to resist Hip Hop's more pugnacious messages, create counter-narratives, and take social action. According to Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) it is imperative that young people "understand the difference between reality and the media's various representations of reality" (p. 2). The work of Hill (2006) who taught a Hip Hop Literature class to a group of high school students attending an evening education program in Philadelphia illuminates how students interpret Hip Hop, media, and society in response to their daily lives. Hill describes his Hip Hop Lit class as a Hip Hop centered English literature course. The course was designed not only to teach students literary interpretations, creative writing, rhyme scheme, and personification, but also to create a space where "the literacy practices of the hip hop community are moved from the margins to the center of the curriculum" (Hill, 2006, p. 24). For one particular class lesson, Hill chose Jay-Z's song "A Ballad for the Fallen Soldier" to help the students reflect on the complicated issues of post

9/11 race relations in the U.S. After reading "Ballad" many of the students compared Al Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Center to the civic terror that plagues neighborhoods of people of color before and after 9/11. Students expressed a keen insight to the moral and ethical contradictions of U.S. policy towards people of color and public outcry for solidarity post 9/11. Jay-Z's words, "Crack was Anthrax back then, back when Police was Al Qaeda to Black men," inspired students to interrogate America's treatment of people of color and how Blacks have felt "unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hatred" (West, 2004, p. 20) for centuries as Africans and African Americans. The most salient illumination gained from this one particular lesson, even though there are many, for the current research is that African American students in Hill's class through Hip Hop pedagogy started to unpack how people of color have been mistreated and labeled criminals, when in reality Blacks have been the victims of police brutality, racial profiling, and racist mandatory drug sentencing laws. Hill's lesson is one way that Hip Hop critical literacy can engage students in critical analysis that challenges reproductive cycles of oppression by fostering a classroom discussion that is grounded in students' lived culture. According to Williams (2009), "Hip Hop culture is the lens through which many students today seek meaning, acceptance, and belonging, which in turn, posits Hip Hop as one of the most important, but underutilized cultural lenses that teachers can employ for the development of critical consciousness" (p. 2). Hip Hop critical pedagogy, at its core, is a vehicle for teaching not only critical consciousness, but also a social justice agenda centered on democratic education aimed at helping students of color multidimensionally conceptualize oppression in an effort to gain political and social equality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

Studies similar to Hill's are emerging at a brisk rate. These studies are all aimed at dismantling Hip Hop's mainstream persona as too provocative for classrooms and introducing Hip Hop as an educational tool for analysis and the development of counter-narratives (Alim, 2004; Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Low, 2011; Williams, 2009). The aforementioned scholarship rests on the work of Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002), who outlined a framework for teaching media and culture studies to urban youth in ways that promoted academic and critical literacies. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's Hip-Hop project, structured by the tenets of "problem-posing" and "culturally affirming pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1994), empowered youth by examining the media's contrived depiction of urban youth. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade contended that many rappers see themselves as educators with a message that critically examines their community. The researchers argued that Hip Hop could serve as a "bridge between the streets and the classroom to promote empowerment and activism within in the students social and communal spaces" (p. 92).

Another strand of Hip Hop scholarship that grounds this work are studies that focus on how youth understand, read, and interrupt the text of Hip Hop to form identities (Dimitriadis, 2001; Clay, 2003; Love, 2011, 2012; Richardson, 2006, 2007). An exemplary example of how Black males make meaning of Hip Hop music and culture to inform their lives is the work of Dimitriadis (2001, 2003). Researching youth and Hip Hop through anthropological perspectives that recognize the ways in which youth construct meaning in their communities, Dimitriadis (2003) examined how Black males in urban America used popular texts to "construct, sustain, and maintain notions of self, history, and community through popular culture" (p. 6). To contextualize urban youth and how they construct meaning of their complex lives, Dimitriadis invites his readers in to the lives of two best friends, Tony (17) and Rufus (18), to explore how Black males consume Hip Hop and form kinship roots. Tony and Rufus' family roots, entrenched in Southern traditions, became a primary tool in the way they constructed meaning of Hip Hop and popular texts. Hip Hop nurtured Tony and Rufus' sense of community and family. Tony and Rufus bonded to their families and their neighborhood through the rap lyrics of Southern rappers because they felt out of place at times as Southerners living in the Midwest. The work of Dimitriadis affirms how two Black males read rap; however, youth's interpretations of Hip Hop, regardless of race, are unpredictable because of youths' personal, educational, and communal differences. Simply put, youth's reading of rap is unique and individualized, but there are some evident commonalties.

The ways is which youth read Hip Hop while reading the world is complex, especially for youth hailing from marginalized backgrounds, but a fundamental aspect of interacting with popular culture is critiquing it and at times resisting its messages. Therefore, youth, regardless of social constructs, intuitively resist aspects of popular culture that exploit and degrade them. A fundamental part of consuming popular culture is resisting popular culture. However, this space of critique is complex, as youth contest, confer and simultaneously yield to popular culture. For instance, Richardson (2007) explored the ways in which Black women negotiated stereotypical images located in rap videos. She found that young Black women resisted, negotiated and succumbed to the racist stereotypes embedded in rap music and culture. Through her research, Richardson discovered that African American females have complex and fluid "language, literacy and knowledge-making capacity" as they participate in Hip Hop music and culture and read the world in which they live (p. 789). Richardson (2007) also expanded the definition of Hip Hop literacies to refer to "ways in which people who are socialized into hip hop discourse manipulate as well as read language, gestures, images, material possessions, and people to position themselves against or within discourse in order to advance and protect themselves" (p. 792). This study attempts to embody Richardson's inclusive definition of Hip Hop literacies by analyzing how three

African American males read Hip Hop and the racist messages embedded within popular culture. These three young men, all from working class homes, have a unique cultural background as Southerners living in a city with a distinctive racial and sociopolitical history, newly dubbed as the colloquial " home of Hip Hop."

THE DIRTY SOUTH

Atlanta, Georgia is what many refer to as a "chocolate city," where Black folks outnumber the White population. However, racism and inequity are prevalent in Atlanta. This paradoxical dynamic is not surprising in a city heavily populated by Black folks with Black leadership, but based on a provocative past of segregation, forced desegregation, and the permanence of racism. But in the face of racism and color lines of elitism, Atlanta has held on to what Sarig (2007) calls the "genesis of rap": Southern-flavored Hip Hop deeply rooted in Black Southern traditions. Sarig (2007) argues that rap music was born in the South because Atlanta's special marque of Southern rap style is grounded in the sounds that came before rap: West African storytellers (griots), spoken word, slave songs coded in metaphors and euphemisms, spirituals, the African drum, bebop, call and response, blues, jazz, funk, rhythm and blues, soul, rock and roll, and Civil Rights freedom songs all inform Southern rap (Sarig, 2007). Thus, Atlanta's fusion of Southern-flavored Hip Hop is a melodic improvisation of various types of African and African American inspired music mixed with ubiquitous experiences of being young, urban, and Black. However, instead of Black youth in Atlanta, primarily Black males, being celebrated for their ingenuity and resourcefulness because they created an ingenious billion dollar sound, they are socially constructed as anti-intellectual, hyper-sexual, nihilistic, and violent. Atlanta's officials in 2007 considered banning baggy pants; Atlanta public schools have a zero-tolerance policy that leads to the "increasing confinement and incarceration of youthful offenders" (Polakow, 2000, p. 1). Recent dominant discourse surrounding youth, especially Blacks males of color in Atlanta, criminalize Black males as perpetrators of violent acts influenced by the same Hip Hop music and culture that has made corporate America billions in yearly revenue. By utilizing a Hip Hop literacy framework, rooted in critical pedagogy, this study seeks to understand Black males' knowledge-making abilities and everyday commonsense interpretations at a local community center in Atlanta, GA. The three males that comprise this study attended the center's afterschool program.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT & METHODS

Hope Community Center (HCC) is a non-profit organization whose mission was to build a sense of community within a neighborhood that was undergoing

extreme levels of gentrification. It was evident by the center's population makeup that many of the students who were attending HCC where the last faces of color within the neighborhood. The cornerstone of HCC was the after-school program, which provided academic and social enrichment programs for school-age children at no cost. The youth examined within this study were among those enrolled in this after-school program. During the school year, the participating students attended the center daily, where they received homework assistance, one-on-one tutoring and monthly field trips intended to broaden their exposure to higher education, the arts and sports. I limit the information that I disclose about HCC because I am revealing the city and state of my research site. While disclosing the location of my research is uncommon in qualitative research and is risky, the location is important to understanding the lived experiences of the young men in the study.

The methodological framework that informed the research project was ethnography. Ethnography focuses on how people make meaning of their culture and beliefs in their everyday lives. Furthermore, ethnography does not place limitations on the boundaries of data collection, time at the research site, or the scope of questioning. In order to understand the complexity of HCC youth as they engaged with rap music, I spent 16 months at HCC researching the ways in which youth read and understood rap music. By the end of study, I had spent a year and a half at the community center as a researcher. Data collection started in November 2006 and ended March 2008. I visited the site every week, two to three times a week, for roughly 3 hours per day, not including weekend programs.

The findings presented within this article are part of my dissertation. Many of the individual interviews lasted 30-40 minutes. Group interviews were much longer in time, lasting an hour or more, depending on the group dynamics. I interviewed the students from August 2007 until March 2008. I chose to interview the youth during this time because of their availability. During the summer, the students participated in various field-trips and sport camps, which made it difficult to interview the youth on a consistent basis. Therefore, I decided that when school started in August 2007, and the students had a defined routine and schedule, I then would begin interviews. For the first 8 months at the center, I merely observed the youth and conducted informal interviews. The entire study is comprised of nine students: six young ladies and three young men. However, for the purpose of this article, I will only report the findings from the three males. Although there were over 40 students who attended HCC regularly, a number of those students were in elementary school. The nine Black students that comprised this research study were the older students of the center, ages 13-17 years old. At that particular time in my research trajectory, I was particularly interested in understanding how middle and high school students consume and construct identities as they engage with Hip Hop music and culture.

NEGOTIATING ACCESS AND THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE

In the summer of 2005, before I even began the research project at HCC, I was a summer camp counselor and girls' basketball coach at the community center. Still in my second year as a doctoral student, I was thinking about investigating alternative spaces of learning and how youth understand and construct identities through rap music. However, I was apprehensive about conducting my dissertation research at HCC because I was grappling with issues of objectivity (at this time in my life I thought being objective was possible), my ethical responsibility to the center and the youth, and, more generally, positions of power. After the summer camp ended, the director of the center asked me to work at HCC full-time during the school year. Once I had the chance to get to know the students and hear their thoughts on Hip Hop, race, issues of class, sexism and schooling, I knew that I had found my research site. At the end of the school year of 2006, I resigned. I began my work at the center as a researcher five months later in November of 2006. My resignation allowed me a few months to think through my new role at the center as a researcher "working the hyphen" Fine (1994). She defines "working the hyphen" as a way in which "researchers probe how we are in relation with the context we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations . . . to see how these 'relations between' get us 'better' data" (p. 72). My multiple roles – staff member, volunteer, tutor, and researcher – shaped my research as I entered HCC as an "embodied knowledge-producing agent" (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 578) with insider and outsider status. Furthermore, throughout the research process I was constantly negotiating my multiple roles, identities and power positions at the center with youth, parents and former coworkers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

The study's main inquiry focused on how youth at HCC construct identities through rap music in their everyday lives. The following additional questions also guided my research:

1. How do youth understand the images presented in rap music and rap videos?

2. How do rap's messages contribute to youth's construction of race and gender identities?

3. How does rap music shape youth's lived experiences?

Interviews were the primary source of data. The interviews consisted of semi-structured and unstructured open-ended questions. I constructed many of the interview questions on an ongoing basis because they pertained to each student's experiences with rap music. I also conducted group interviews, which I found to be quite helpful as the participants spoke candidly with their peers about issues and experiences. In all, I conducted 8 individual interviews and 3 group interviews with both Reggie and Dave, and 4 individual interviews and 2 group interviews with Darrell. After the interview process, I utilized the "open coding" method to analyze my data. While coding, I wrote countless memos reflecting on the substantive issues and summarizing my observer comments. These memos served as the analysis foundation as I began to ask myself analytic questions to create themes grounded first in my codes and then in the literature.

Darrell, Dave & Reggie

Darrell was a young man who exuded personality. Darrell stood about 6 feet tall, wore thick glasses that were often crooked on his face and was a self-proclaimed ladies man. Darrell spoke with a charming Southern drawl. Darrell was a breath of fresh air. He was always smiling and talking to anybody who would listen. When I asked Darrell if he would like to participate he said, "Ya, I know a lot about the rap and street game." I then asked him what he knew. He replied, "I will tell you a thing or two" as he smiled and laughed. I instantly handed Darrell two permission forms, one for his parents and one for him. The next day I asked Darrell about the permission slips. He said, **"**Ya, I have it, it's in my pocket . . . you want it . . . you thought I was going to forget, huh." He was right; I did think he was going to forget. Actually, he was the only teen to bring the form back the next day. I did not meet Darrell's parents, but I learned through conversation that Darrell lived with his mother.

Dave was the highest achieving male at the center academically. Dave excelled in school with a grade point average of 3.6. Dave was tall and slim and had a smile that lit up a room. Dave was always smiling. He had a comedic sensibility and was always doing something to get a laugh. The timing of his jokes were thought out and delivered in a manner that made everyone around him laugh. He was a likeable young man. Dave lived with his mother, stepfather, younger sister, and brother.

Reggie was the athlete out of the boys that attended the center. He was tall with broad shoulders and a face that could sell any sports drink. Reggie received all the attention from the girls at the center; nevertheless, he was humble and had a boyish charm about him. His sport of choice was football, and he idolized Peyton Manning. Reggie wanted to be a quarterback in the National Football League (NFL). Reggie lived with his mother, father, and his younger siblings.

FINDINGS

Not All Black People…

Through critical dialogue aimed at discovering how they made meaning of Hip Hop and popular culture's embedded racism, the youth insightfully recognized and articulated, without hesitation, the racial issues surrounding rap music that connected to broader issues facing the Black urban community. For instance, when the young men were asked how they thought the media represented people of color they responded with keen criticism:

> They try to say all black people eat chicken, and macaroni and cheese, cornbread. Talk about collard greens, all black people eat collard greens. That's what people think. They think just cause a lot of us do it, that all of us do it. That's what I'm trying to say. (Dave, Interview, 12/07)

> Oh, they're sending a bad message to kids and about Blacks. (Reggie, Interview, 11/07)

Both young men understood that the media is a contrived space built on the stereotypes of Blacks. Dave was alerted to the racial trope that Blacks are monolithic and all eat the same food. Dave was deconstructing elements of what Hill Collins (2004) calls the "new racism," which is the mass media heavily relying on racial tropes to justify racism. Darrell added, "They see us people on TV, that all the black people be doing is fighting" (Darrell, Interview, 10/07). Reggie echoed Darrell's images of violent behavior by Blacks on television: "Like they think whatever you show them. If you show them violence, they gonna think you're violent" (Reggie, Interview, 10/07). Here Reggie is speaking of how negative stereotypes impact his daily life as a young Black man. Reggie feels he is labeled violent by society because of how Black males are portrayed in the media. There exists a substantial amount of research that examines the disparities in how the media depicts both Whites and Blacks that validates the teens' statements (Oliver & Shapiro, 1997). Watkins (2006) argued that "blacks are underrepresented in many areas of the mass media [and] they are overrepresented in television sports broadcasts and crime and violence portrayals" (p. 2). As I engaged with these three males individually through interviews focused on how race was constructed and represented within Hip Hop music and culture, and the media in general, the issue of class became apparent as well.

> Like you know in Africa is right now, they got TVs and stuff. They show you like old movies of Africa, so you're gonna think that they don't have anything. I used to think that, too. (Dave, Interview, 1/08)

> If you look on TV, all white people are rich. (Reggie, Interview, 10/07)

Dave's insightful statement illuminates how the media repackages and obscures representations of Africa to African American youth. The teens' remarks about the racism embedded in mass media are the teens' reality and experiences as they watch television with a critical eye. It is important to keep in mind that youth construct identities at the intersections of school and society. Therefore, what society tells them about their race and class is a site of education, which they are verbally resisting through their attempt to debunk racist stereotypes of Black males. Dave and Reggie frequently discussed techniques they used so they would not be labeled "bad," violent, or unintelligent. In a group interview with Dave and Reggie, they explained how individuals stereotyped them, and how they codeswitched to counter negative assumptions. Dave stated, "You come from Atlanta, like Bankhead [urban neighborhood in Atlanta], or something, they think you act crazy. That represents only one person…Like when I tell them we're from Bankhead you can tell them [White people], but show your good side" (Dave, Interview, 10/07). Dave was also a high achieving student who was motivated by racism and the stereotype that Atlanta Blacks are "crazy." (Dave, 10/07). Reggie's sentiments echoed Dave's when he stated, "They think we crazy, but I know how to act when I am around them [White people]." Richardson (2002) suggested, "Codeswitching is also a valuable resource since each language represents a way of knowing and expressing the world. Style/ codeswitching allows Black people to move between worldviews" (p. 691). Reggie and Dave rejected the notion that they had to perform a particular way because they are Black youth. When faced with racism they debunked monolithic notions of Blackness and dispelled myths about being young, Black, male and urban.

Real Talk

During the study, the police arrested Atlanta-based rapper T.I. (Clifford Joseph Harris, Jr.) on federal gun charges, and the courts sentenced him to house arrest until his court date. Many of the students referred to T.I. as an example of poor decision-making and a negative role model for youth. Prior to his arrest, T.I. was a local hero. However, the teens expressed disappointment in T.I. and his gangster image.

> That's not the only way they gone get their money but that's how they want to make themselves be a gangster, you know, and their self be hard Like T.I, I don't like him no more cause you know he made himself as a gangster. (Reggie, Interview, 1/08)

> Nothing wrong with being, I mean yeah, ain't nothing wrong with being soft. T.I. has to be hard. (Reggie, Interview, 1/08)

T.I. is just one example of a large group of rappers who dramatize and romanticize selling drugs and being a gangster. Reggie understood T.I.'s rapper image as a façade and a means to sell records in his above recorded statement. Reggie implied that T.I.'s gangster image is a ploy to sell records. Reggie questioned the authenticity of T.I.'s pugnacious image. The fact that many of the teens questioned T.I.'s image and reasons for making records showed they were aware of and concerned with the messages of his music. Reggie did not applaud T.I.'s fall from greatness through criminal activity. Reggie also thought rappers were "stupid" because they do not understand their racial, social, and economic position, which makes them a target for racial profiling. Reggie questioned whether rappers understand their visibility to the police. He stated,

> They [rappers] stupid, you know, the police gonna be looking at you like yeah, he might do it for real because he rap, so they're going to be doing background checks and all that junk up on you trying to catch you and put you in jail. (Reggie, Interview, 10/07)

Reggie's comments make it apparent that the youth have the ability to negotiate not only rap, but also social issues around the music and urban life. Reggie claimed that police purposefully target rappers for incarceration, which indicated that he was aware of racial profiling and the xenophobic ideology of the criminal justice system (Wacquant, 2005). Wacquant argued that society has "a generalized fear of blacks in public space" (p. 21). The teens without hesitation challenged dominant public discourse surrounding youth of color as they consumed Hip Hop and popular culture without adopting the messages and values of the music in their everyday lives. As I will discuss next, the male teens' semi-transitive consciousness allowed them to resist some of rap's more negative message on a personal cognitive level, but the hegemonic ideologies that they felt assiduously worked to prevent a shift in dominant public discourse impeded them from taking action. These youth were well-mannered, intelligent and respectful young men, who consumed rap and mass media for pleasure, yet they struggled to take action and reach Freire's highest level of consciousness because they conceptualized racism within Hip Hop and mass media as permanent.

That's Just How It Is: Semi-transitive & Critical Consciousness

Although the young men displayed intellectual rigor when analyzing issues of racism and classism in Hip Hop and the media, as well as critiquing rappers' authenticity because of their inherent connection to capitalism, they did not feel as though they could change and challenge the narrative surrounding people of color. These young men were striving to be critically conscious individuals who recognized that there is a problem embedded within society that needs to be addressed to create a more just and equitable world (Kincheloe, 2008; Shor &

Freire, 1987). However, the idea of possessing what Freire (2000) calls *conscienti-zation,* or critical consciousness, cannot manifest without critical dialogue, which in turn can lead to action, as individuals are empowered to challenge marginaliz-ing social contexts, ideologies, organizations, experiences, policies, and discourses (Williams, 2009). Yet, there are tensions and levels of resistance as individuals strive for critical consciousness. For instance, hegemony can stifle critical con-sciousness through systemic strategies to keep consciousness underdeveloped. McLaren (1994) defined hegemony as "a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed…Within the hegemonic process, established meanings are often laundered of contradiction, contestation, and ambiguity" (p. 183). The space of popular culture is ripe for the complex layered manipulation of hegemony because, according to Hall (1981), "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against culture of the powerful is engaged…It is an arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured" (p. 65). Hill Collins (2004) argues that popular culture correspond-ing with mass media and global technologies provides a cunning mechanism for disseminating hegemonic ideologies. As argued by Richardson (2007),

> Commercial rap videos provide a hefty dissemination of hegemonic images of black youth culture throughout the world. These images are decontextualized from their roots in slavery and its legacy of racial rule, and are repackaged by mass media and popular culture, helping to reproduce the hegemonic ideologies and replicate social inequality (p. 791).

This is why Freire (2000) argues that there are three levels of consciousness: intransitive, semi-transitive, and critical. Boyles (2005) explained that intransitive "means noncritical (in)action" (p. 220). Semi-transitive consciousness beings are "individuals who see the world as changeable (Boyles, p. 220), but they are reluc-tant to do anything about it. The last form of consciousness is critical conscious-ness. Critically conscious individuals recognize that there is a problem embedded within society that needs to be addressed through dialogue and action and at-tempt to rectify societal inadequacies.

In the case of Darrell, Dave and Reggie, these teens managed to resist some of rap and popular culture's explicit racist representations of people of color. Howev-er, they believed these same messages within rap and the media were permanent; thus, they felt defeated by just the mere thought of taking action and challenging dominant discourse. For example, the teens thought resisting rap in the form of action was pointless, they understood that something needed to be done, but were reluctant to do so. All three males told me that there was nothing that they could do to change the music or mass media because racism was an unyielding element of the music and television shows they consumed. When I asked Dave why he thought television show creators depicted Blacks as criminals or all of Africa as

an exotic and primal continent he told me in a matter of fact manner, "that's just how it is" (10/07). I was taken aback by his response because typically Dave is outspoken with sharp critiques of racial inequalities. When I asked Dave what he meant by his latter statement he said, "Man, they do what they do." When I asked Dave who the "they" were he said, "I don't know." When I asked Darrell the same question he stated, "That's just how is it, Coach T" (10/07). Both young men framed the stereotypes of Black identity disseminated by the mass media and Hip Hop as core narratives of the media's discourse at-large. Dave and Darrell are utilizing a critical race theory (CRT) lens to examine Hip Hop and mass media. Bell perceived America's racial legacy as "permanent and indestructible" (Bell, 1992, p. x). CRT scholars view race and racism as vital parts of American society deeply embedded within America's ethos (Bell, 1992). These young men do as well. All three of these young men possessed the ability and knowledge making skills to achieve Freire's highest level of critical consciousness, but were stifled at semi-transitive consciousness because they viewed racism as a fixed aspect of their daily lives as young Black men.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The findings of this study call for action: critical dialogues aimed at fostering critical consciousness so that it becomes a fundamental aspect of all students' educational experience. Classrooms are needed where students learn and develop theoretical or pedagogical frameworks that challenge the status quo within the media and society at-large. One example of a pedagogical lens that could assist students in reaching Freire's highest level of critical consciousness is critical media literacy. Kellner and Share (2006) argued that implementing critical media literacy is not an option in today's multimedia world and an educational system driven by standardized high stakes testing. The implementation of critical media literacy is necessary to empower students "to create their own messages that can challenge media texts and narratives" (p. 60). Lewis and Jhally (1998) stated that, "the goal of media literacy is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers" (p. 109). Lewis and Jhally's definition of media literacy moves individuals to a greater sense of democracy as people challenge "scripted and defined" (p. 109) narratives about all groups of people. Going one-step further, critical media literacy is a "multiperspectival approach addressing issues of gender, race, class, and power" (Kellner & Share, p. 59). One of the primary goals of critical media literacy is to create counter representations or alternative perspectives of the media (Love, 2011). Critical media literacy provides students, particularly Black males with a framework and space to challenge, debunk and find ways to take action against the media's attack on Black masculinity. According to Collins (2005), Black masculinity is pitted in narrow terms, in that, "manhood matches

up to the White normality/Black deviancy framework that accompanies racism" (p. 187). However, Black males need a space to speak back to debasing narratives within the media and create new narratives that represent their experiences. Dave, Reggie and Darrell needed a framework to interrogate rap and feel empowered doing so. They also needed a safe space where both teachers and students could openly critique rap and still locate the beauty, joy and artistic genius that is Hip Hop. These three young men were engaging in critical dialogues that could have been the spark to action, but without community programs and schools aimed at promoting world views that ask students to think in critically consciousness ways, they are left to imagine a world where racism is constant and change is elusive.

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