Complex Personhood of Hip Hop & the Sensibilities of the Culture that Fosters Knowledge of Self & Self-Determination

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ABSTRACT

Hip hop music and culture have a complex identity in that hip hop is based in self-determination, resistance, and the long enduring fight for Black freedom, but was also created alongside the seductiveness of the material and psychological conditions of capitalism, sexism, and patriarchy. Hip hop pedagogy (HHP) as a pedagogical framework is birthed out of that intricate balance in hip hop. Given those basic contradictions, I explore the complex personhood of hip hop and its relationship to HHP, which generates humanizing, critical, and creative pedagogical (re)interventions and sensibilities that foster self-determination, self-knowledge, and acts of resistance with young people. I do this by examining hip hop educational spaces that nurture the ways of doing and knowing youth who are deeply informed by hip hop.

According to Avery Gordon (1997), the concept of "complex personhood" means "that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward" (p. 4). Hip hop music and culture personifies a cultural phenomenon birthed out of the multiple contradictions of a complex personhood. Arguably, Black popular culture, of which hip hop is a part, can be thought of as complex personhood because it is a commodified space built simultaneously on stereotypes and the realities of urban youth (Hall, 1983) through stories, factual and imagined, of the conditions of Black and Brown youth living in destitute poverty just a short train ride away from obscene wealth in New York City in the early 1970s (Sajnani, 2015).

Young Black and Brown youth of the South Bronx, the birthplace of hip hop and still one of the poorest districts in the United States today, beautifully blended the ideas of the American dream (i.e., meritocracy, upward social mobility, and equal opportunity) with Afrodiasporic forms and traditions undergirded by the philosophies of Black liberation theory and Black nationalism. Thus, for many urban, young, Black and Brown youth, including myself, hip hop was one of the first cultural sites "where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time" (Hall, 1983, p. 470). The pedagogical site (Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000) of hip hop for youth is emancipatory and produces cultural modes of expression (i.e., b-girling, emceeing, and graffiti) that function as spaces of healing for youth, but these spaces also are subjugated to the binaries of Black popular culture. Hall writes that "[B]lack popular culture … can never be simplified or explained in terms of the simple binary oppositions that are still habitually used to map out: high and low; resistance versus incorporation; authentic versus unauthentic; experiential versus formal; opposition versus homogenization" (p. 472). These binaries are the crux of hip hop's complex personhood.

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In this article, I discuss the complex personhood of hip hop as a culture rooted in the ideas of determination, resistance, and the long enduring fight for Black freedom, but existing alongside the seductiveness of the material and psychological conditions of capitalism, sexism, and patriarchy. Hip hop pedagogy (HHP) as a pedagogical framework, is birthed out of that intricate balance in hip hop. Hall (2011) defines HHP as "the use of texts, voices, and lived experiences of the Hip-Hop generation to dialogue about an inclusive social justice agenda" (p. 72). Given those basic contradictions, I explore the complex personhood of hip hop and its relationship to HHP, which generates humanizing, critical, and creative pedagogical (re)interventions and sensibilities that foster self-determination, self-knowledge, and acts of resistance with young people. I do this by examining hip hop educational spaces that nurture the ways of doing and knowing youth who are deeply informed by hip hop.

Bambaataa, violence, and binaries

To illustrate my point of hip hop's complex and, at times, ugly identity formations, I turn to one of the founding fathers of hip hop music and culture, Afrika Bambaataa. Bambaataa used his reputation as an innovative DJ and his position as the warlord of the street gang the Black Spades to form Universal Zulu Nation, the first hip hop institution devoted to raising the consciousness of the hip hop community (Chang, 2005). Bambaataa is credited for creating the fifth element of hip hop, knowledge of self; the four other elements being b-girling, emceeing, graffiti, and DJing. Knowledge of self is defined as "the study of Hip Hop culture, music, and elements, alongside an examination of issues within one's surroundings to create positive change in one's community" (Love, 2013, p. 8). According to hip hop historian Jeff Chang (2005), Bambaataa created the fifth element because he felt hip hop had lost its way. But Bambaataa ultimately lost his, too.

In the spring of 2016, allegations surfaced that Bambaataa was a child sexual predator. In May of 2016, three men spoke in detail concerning how Bambaataa sexually molested them when they were young boys. Bambaataa denied the claims; however, long time members of the Universal Zulu Nation confirmed the accusations. Shamsideen Shariyf Ali Bey, Bambaataa's bodyguard for over ten years, stated in an interview on the radio show Shot97, that he informed the leadership of Universal Zulu Nation that Bambaataa was a child molester in 2007 (Shot97, 2016).

During the early years of the Universal Zulu Nation, Bambaataa was among the first prominent figures to explain to the world that hip hop represents "peace, unity, love, and having fun." According to Sajnani (2015), the "peace, unity, love, and having fun" of hip hop, conceptualized by colonized people on colonized land, decolonizes hip hop because it aims to "subvert and destroy the culture of the culture of the colonizer" (para. 5). Although I agree with the fundamental claim of Sajnani's assertion, hip hop's identity is not detached from, and is in fact at times trapped in, the constructed, grotesque imagination of patriarchy, misogyny, and violence—all products of America's deeply-rooted and morally bankrupt investments in coloniality. The binaries of authentic versus unauthentic, righteous versus ratchet, tough versus weak, queer versus straight, and able-bodied versus disabled suffocate hip hop's ability to be an inclusive culture that is nonviolent in all respects—physical, mental, sexual, and spiritual.

However, hip hop's foundation of love and peace rests in the shadow of an alleged sexual child predator. Furthermore, hip hop's Black nationalist roots are deeply entrenched in misogyny, homophobia, antifeminism, and conceptions of Du Bois's 'talented tenth' (Du Bois, 1903), which dismisses people with disabilities and women for an investment in elite successful Black men (Neal, 2006). Hip hop's narrow lens "replicates violence and violation" (Lindsey, 2015, p. 71), while maintaining the ability to aid in how Black folks rebel and obtain knowledge of self to navigate and resist oppression. Scholar Mark Anthony Neal (1999) writes that his book, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture*, is "largely about communities, communities under siege and in crisis, but also communities engaged in various modes of resistance, critique, institution building, or simply taking time to get their 'swerve on.'" (Neal, 1999, p. x). He adds that the work of Black popular music can be described as "power, politics, and pleasures." Hip hop is complex and contradictory and it is this paradoxical space that informs HHP, which is celebrated as a culturally relevant, counterhegemonic teaching (re)intervention because it is rooted in the power, politics, and pleasures of hip hop music and culture. It is why Bambaataa's alleged
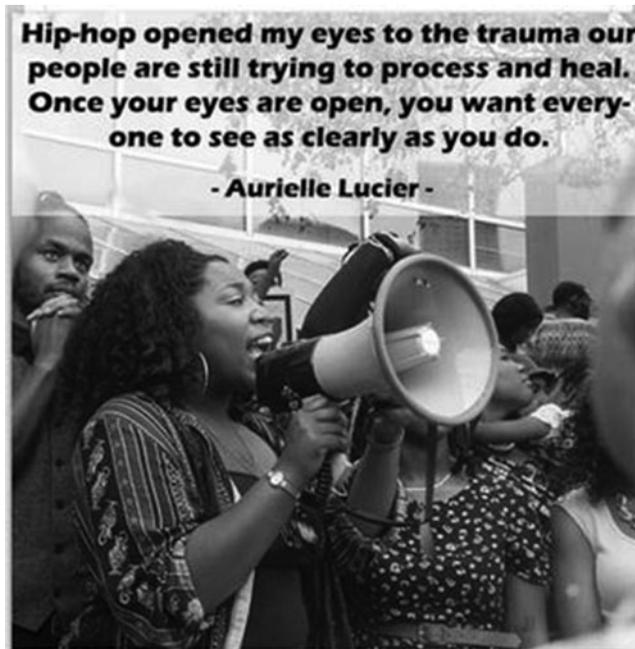
Figure 1. Activist Aurielle Lucier leading a rally in Atlanta, GA. © Daniel Agnew. Reprinted by permission of Daniel Agnew. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

veil of transgressions and hip hop's investment in devaluating women, girls, and the differently abled does not define hip hop. Hip hop represents the people, all the people. Hip hop's complex personhood does not negate its collective Black identity politics. Hip hop feminist pioneer Joan Morgan (2000) writes,

> White girls don't call their men "brothers" and that made their struggle enviably simpler than mine. Racism and the will to survive it create a sense of intra-racial loyalty that makes it impossible for black women to turn our backs on black men—even in the ugliest and most sexist moments. (p. 34)

A discussion on hip hop is incomplete without including an in-depth analysis of poverty, gentrification, racism, sexism, colonization, meritocracy, repression, and the political struggle of hip hoppers because the unrelenting quest for liberation is hip hop's lynchpin, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and class (Asante, 2008). Asante (2008) writes in his book, *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip Hop Generation*, that "Putting hip hop in its proper context means understanding the inextricable link between Black music and the politics of Black life" (p. 4). The genealogy of hip hop mixed with personal stories on Black and Brown youth reflects "collective identity politics" (Collins, 2006, p. 159) that matter. HHP that centers on the fifth element, knowledge of self, is central to generating learning experiences that teach youth it is "not enough to simply appreciate the history of African American aesthetic culture," young people also need the skill set to "bring interdisciplinary and intersectional critique to bear" (Rabaka, 2011, p. xii). This challenges hip hop's binaries, making HHP vital to the field of education, not just hip hop education.

Sensibilities of the culture to learning

According to Mercadal-Sabbagh (2004), HHP "allows the engagement with, and discussion about, artificially transforming Hip-Hop music as opposed to that which may seem commodified, or to engage in critical analyses exploring the tensions between the negative and positive aspects of the genre" (p. 3). HHP is grounded in the innovative cultural elements of hip hop culture; however, the cultivated sensibilities that spring from that culture are typically left out of the discussion, despite their implicit link to creativity, critical thinking, and communication. Petchauer (2015) writes that the aesthetics of hip hop—the "ways of doing and being" (p. 80)—manifest hip hop sensibilities of "habits of body and habits of mind"

(Petchauer, 2012, p. 2) that are "specific visual, sonic, linguistic, and kinesthetic ways, and applying them in equally specific ways to education" (p. 101). He continues that, "samples, layers, flows, ruptures, percussiveness, and hip-hop aesthetic forms might help us learn and do much more with hip-hop education and research" (p. 101). In that way, HHP that draws on the sensibilities and mindsets of hip hop culture is devoted to teaching resistance, knowledge of self, and self-determination because those principals are part of the collective identity of the politics of Black life. The foundation of hip hop culture rests on excavating knowledge to produce new ways of being and knowing—critical consciousness tied to communal sensibilities. Peterson (2013) articulates this perspective:

> Although there is a direct educational capacity in the literal elements of Hip Hop, less attention has been paid to how education is implicitly framed through Hip Hop culture, or what I call the educational elements of Hip Hop. These four educational elements consist of the following: 1) knowledge, (2) consciousness, 3) search and discovery, and 4) participation. Together with the foundational elements of Hip Hop, the educational elements underwrite many initiatives that bring Hip Hop culture into classrooms at different levels of schooling and across various disciplines. Importantly, these educational elements are not disconnected from the traditional four elements of Hip Hop. Rather, the educational elements derive from the sensibilities, mindsets, and approaches embedded in the four main expressive Hip Hop elements. (p. 48)

Peterson emphasizes the educational elements of HHP as springing from knowledge, consciousness, search and discovery, and participation. These elements are at the core of promoting self-determination and knowledge because much of HHP scholarship rests on the notion that traditional and non-traditional educational spaces that are "youth driven cultural products" can be places "that embody a critique of oppression, a desire for social change, and ultimately lay the foundations for community empowerment and social change" (Akom, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2008, p. 4).

However, much of the research that demonstrates how hip hop can be used in the classroom is done under the umbrella phrase of hip hop-based education (HHBE), coined by Marc Lamont Hill (2009b). He defined HHBE as a way to collectively group "educational research using the elements of Hip Hop culture (i.e., rap, turntableism, break dancing, graffiti, knowledge of self, fashion, language), which inform pedagogy in formal and non-formal school spaces" (Love, 2015, p. 108). Thus, HHBE does not explicitly center on critical analyses, self-determination, and knowledge of self. Much of HHBE research centers on using the element of rap music and lyrics in the classroom for teaching academics and critical literacy skills (Alim, 2007; Cooks, 2004; Craig, 2013; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Emdin, 2010, 2013c; Ginwright, 2004; Hill, 2006, 2009a; Morrell, 2004; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004). HHBE units have been developed to teach students literacy concepts (Alexander-Smith, 2004) and citation skills (Wakefield, 2006). Additional research has found that HHP can improve student-teacher relationships, improve school climate, and promote literacy (Campbell, 2005; Ginwright, 2004; Hill, 2009a; Kelly, 2013; Low, 2011). The studies above resulted in the production of dynamic learning outcomes while developing youths' ideas concerning self-determination and knowledge about one's community and self through expressive elements of hip hop culture. However, despite their significant contribution, these works often failed to explicitly address or center the most important element of hip hop, knowledge of self.

Afrika Bambaataa and the fifth element

As important and essential as the four fundamental elements of hip hop (i.e., b-girling, emceeing, graffiti, and DJing) are to the culture and HHP, it is the fifth element, knowledge of self, that serves as the lynchpin of the sophistication and indigenous communal practices of hip hop that ground the ideas and implementation of self-determination and resistance. In Chang's (2005) groundbreaking, seminal book, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, Bambaataa defines the credo of the Universal Zulu Nation:

> The job of a Zulu is to survive in life. To be open-minded dealing with all walks of life upon this planet Earth and teach [each] other (Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding). To respect those who respect them, to never be the aggressor or oppressor. To be at peace with self and others, but if or when attacked by others who don't wish peace with the Zulu, then the Zulus are ordered in the name of ALLAH, Jehovah to fight those who fight against you. (p. 101)

Thus, the fifth element of hip hop is vital to the production of HHP, which in turn helps Black and Brown youth survive. The great Paul Robeson said, "There can be no greater tragedy than to forget one's origin and finish despised and hated by the people among whom one grew up" (cited in Stuckey, 1976, p. 1). Building on that importance, brilliant scholars Derrick Bell (1992) and Asa Hilliard (1998) boldly stated that the racial oppression toward Black folks in America is fixed, permanent, and fluid; it is engrained within the fabric of this country, but the act of resisting, defining one's self, and fighting for justice creates communal and empowering experiences, which are necessary for the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual well-being of people of color. It is in the fight and in knowledge of self that freedom is found.

Despite its vital importance, the fifth element is implied but rarely explicitly addressed within HHP. I contend that in order for HHP to become one of the premier pedagogies for self-determination and resistance—particularly at this moment in time when high levels of state violence and domestic terrorism towards people of color has birthed the banner axiom that Black Lives Matter—knowledge of self must move to the center of HHP and create new frameworks. I aim to highlight examples of how the sensibilities and approaches of hip hop influence HHP, with a heavy focus on how knowledge of self, self-determination, and resistance can function in formal and non-formal school settings for youth of color.

Theoretical framework

The present work is framed by the tenets of critical race theory (CRT). CRT originated from the field of Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CLS scholars argued that dominant groups deeply invested in preserving and maintaining power and the status quo used the legal system to do so. CRT drew from CLS to develop a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal standpoint. Two of the first educational scholars to ground the field of education within CRT were Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate. In 1995, their article, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," "theorized race and use[d] it as an analytic tool for understand school inequity" (p. 48) and understanding race as property.

Although CRT is concerned about social constructions of race and racism, its major principles aligned with the culture and music of hip hop. For example, both CRT and hip hop view storytelling and counter-storytelling as a way to recognize and legitimate the experiential knowledge of people of color to understand, analyze, and teach about systemic racism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT and hip hop argue that storytelling allows one to name, own, and tell his or her reality. It is a space of voice for people of color who have been ignored. Another precept of CRT is criticism of oppressive conditions (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Hip hop is shaped by the fixed, fluid, and shapeshifting terrain of racism, economic oppression, strict racial housing segregation, and technological advances. The context in which hip hop was created drew on "the long history of black cultural subversion and social critiques in music and performance" to "bring together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary American society" (Rose, 1994, p. 6). CRT provides a unique and powerful framework to illustrate hip hop's inseparable relationship to racism and race. In particular, the fifth element of hip hop emphasizes understanding and developing the skills and sensibilities needed for determining how racial inequity functions in youths' communities, nationally, and globally.

Methods of exemplary examples

The methodology used for this study was collective case study. According to Yin (2003), a case study approach is utilized when a researcher proposes to interrogate the contextual conditions he or she believes are relevant to the phenomenon under study. A collective case study investigates a number of cases in order to understand a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995) by providing a description of each case and thematic analysis (Yin, 2003). I selected three HHP (re)intervention programs that centered the fifth element of hip hop and are run by elite individuals in the field. Marshall and Rossman's (2006) concept of elite is determined by selecting participants that are "influential, prominent, and/or well-informed in an organization or community … based on their expertise in areas relevant to the research" (p. 105).

Instead of examining people, the present work examines three pedagogical sites that meet the criteria for elite HHP (re)interventions established by the work of Marcella Runell Hall (2011). Hall describes HHP "elites or experts as educators who are widely regarded in the field, model reciprocal empowerment with youth, and pioneered much of the original scholarship on harnessing the power of Hip-Hop for education" (pp. 129–130). For the present study, I added to Hall's criteria to include:

1. The (re)interventions must be run by a prominent scholar in the field of hip hop, or the site must be run by youth who are considered leaders in their community with deep knowledge of hip hop culture. All must be invested in the healing for Black bodies and minds.
2. The site must embody inclusiveness and unity.
3. The site must promote knowledge of self to nurture self-determination and resistance.

For data, I collected books, research and newspaper articles, videos, and documentaries of each site, depending on what was available. After data collection, I applied the qualitative research technique of content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) write that content analysis allows the "systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). Through content analysis, I was able to code for themes and patterns in order to understand how each site fostered self-determination and knowledge of self and find the commonalities of each location. Three themes emerged that highlighted how these spaces nurtured and cultivated youths' understanding of the fifth element: (1) space without surveillance; (2) positive adult or peer influencers; and (3) the underground.

Pedagogical sites

(Re)membering through dance (Rize)

In the groundbreaking film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), written and directed by Julia Dash, the character of Nana Peazant speaks these weighty words to her grandson: "I am trying to teach you how to touch your own spirit, Eli." Nana, the matriarch of the family, is helping Eli, her grandson, reconcile his two souls: African and African American, a concept Du Bois (1903) called "double consciousness" (p. 3). Nana explains to Eli, whose ancestors were enslaved from West Africa, that their cultural wisdom, memories, and creativity thrive inside him, regardless of his seemingly hopeless modern reality. Nana's plea is particularly significant because she knows, like Dillard (2012), that (re)membering is an act of decolonization. Dillard states,

> Thus (re)membering becomes a radical response to our individual and collective fragmentation at the cultural, spiritual, and material levels, a response to the false divisions created between mind, body, and spirit. It is also a response to our on-going experiences and understanding of difference and identity, the sticky, sometimes uncharted, spaces both within a collective African heritage and across our multiple identity differences. (p. 17)

Though remembering is healing, forgetting is seductive in a capitalistic world built on material consumption (Dillard, 2012). But when people of color do remember, they learn that remembering is not "a static but rather a dynamic activity. It is voluntary, active, creative, kinesthetic, circular, and vital to a positive vision of African personhood. It's a process that allows each part of the body to become infused with consciousness" (Dillard, 2012, p. 26).

(Re)membering as an act of decolonization is evident within the culture and music of hip hop. Hip hop's sensibilities, mindsets, and elements are birthed from its African roots. For example, Smitherman (1997) argued that rappers are modern day griots. Griots are West African storytellers, historians, poets, and musicians who passed on knowledge, news, and political commentary. These men and women, through verbal arts, preserved the past to inform the future. Hip hop music and culture is grounded in the rituals and customs of the griots. Fixed elements of hip hop like call and response, improvisation, repetition, and audience participation, derive directly from the griot traditions.

Furthermore, if (re)membering is a voluntary, active, creative, kinesthetic, and circular act necessary for decolonization, then the hip hop dance known as Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise, also called Krumping, is the quintessential illustration. The documentary film *Rize* (2005), directed by David LaChapelle, exposes its audience to the hip hop dance styles of Krumping and Clowning, its less intense

and lesser-known predecessor. Created by South Central Los Angeles youth, these forms of dance originated in one of America's cradles for contemporary state violence toward Black and Brown bodies. After all, South Central is the home of the 1965 Watts and 1992 Rodney King uprisings following state violence against people of color. In 2008, UCLA School of Public Affairs published a report entitled *The State of South LA*. The report examined five key areas of South Los Angeles: demographics, public safety, education, housing, and employment (Ong, Firestine, Pfeiffer, Poon, & Tran, 2008). According to the report's findings, the low educational attainment and lack of job opportunities in the area prevented full and meaningful employment. Additionally, a high proportion of residents earned less than a shockingly low $10,000 a year.

In search of an emotional, physical, social, and spiritual outlet, the youth of South Central (re)membered. Their cultural memory was awakened by the sensibilities of hip hop, which gets its swag from confronting systems of oppression. Dillard (2012) argues that one possibility for resistance is through culture memories that act as a guide to examine one's foundation of self and recall memories for political consciousness. The high-powered, fast paced, expressive, aggressive, and improvisational dance maneuvers of Krumping were created by youth in South Central as a way to non-violently release their frustrations with their current condition. Krumping is a way of survival as it provides unity and belongingness (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). The Association of Dance of the African Diaspora states that, "Krumping isn't just a dance style, it's a state of mind."

At first glance, the dance forms of Krumping draw on the moves and communal practices of hip hop (i.e., dance battles, body popping, and sessions), but the genius of Krumping is rooted in African dance and culture. According to Monteiro and Wall (2011):

> Dance, especially as used in rituals, has also played a role in the spiritual and social development of many communities throughout the world, particularly in African cultures. Through its many functions, dance is not only a form of healing, but also represents a symbol of the personal, communal and social narrative of these societies. (p. 237)

Monteiro and Wall go on to write that Krumping stresses holistic healing and builds self-esteem, empathy, and development of one's identity. What is astonishing about Krumping is how much it mimics aspects of some traditional African dances. Dragon, a dancer in the film, explains that connection brilliantly: "This is not just a bunch of people acting wild. It's as valid as your ballet, as your waltz, as tap dance, but we didn't have to go to school for this because it was implanted in us from birth." Dragon's comment illuminates how, "descendants of the African Diaspora have carried with them deeply-rooted cultural inclinations and unconscious memory of their ancestral traditions. And, in very practical ways, the manifestations of these institutions show up in day-to-day life throughout the Diaspora" (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 249). By all means, Krumping is a vessel for cultural transmission, self-healing, and a site of resistance.

The cathartic dance moves of Krumping illustrate the ingenuity of oppressed people to create elements of hope and resistance in the midst of destruction. Youth draw on their individual and collective cultural memories through the element of hip hop dance, as informed by the fifth element, to touch their own spirits. Krumping is now a global dance form. Youth all over the world Krump not just as a dance craze, but as a hip hop state of mind for healing and resistance.

Hip hop feminist pedagogy

In 1999, Morgan wrote the groundbreaking book, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks it Down. Chickenheads* represents an intervention that poignantly and unapologetically places the lived experiences of Black women, feminist politics, and the macho, misogynist culture of hip hop in conversation with each other. Morgan (1999) marshaled in a feminist perspective, "that samples and layers many voices, injects its sensibilities into the old and flips it into something new, provocative, and powerful" (p. 418). Hip hop feminism brought to bear herstories of women who love, embrace, and are hip hop. For too long, women and girls were viewed as consumers and spectators of the culture—sidepieces. As male-dominated spaces, hip hop and hip hop studies marginalized and disregarded women's contributions to the culture from its conception. Morgan and others that followed (e.g.,

Brown, 2009, 2013; Brown & Kwakye, 2012; Gaunt, 2006; Love, 2012; Pough, 2004; Pough, Richardson, Raimist, & Durham, 2007; Richardson, 2007, 2009; Sharpley-Whiting, 2008) shifted the narrative within hip hop studies and HHBE to include and make central the lives of Black and Brown girls and their literacies practices. Thus, hip hop feminism birthed hip hop feminist pedagogy (HHFP).

HHFP focuses on representing counter-narratives and highlighting the lived experiences of "Black and Brown folks, while asking questions that challenge unpacked discrepancies and contradictions that exist in the lives of young Black girls" (Brown & Kwakye, 2012, p. xi). Through HHFP, Black and Brown girls can question, create, discuss, dance, perform, grapple with, and negotiate identity politics (Brown, 2009, 2013; Brown & Kwakye, 2012; Love, 2012). HHFP also is grounded in the production of knowledge located in the examination of one's self and community (Brown, 2009).

As a teaching framework, Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truth (SOLHOT) is an exemplary model of HHFP for young girls. Based in Champaign-Urbana, IL, the organization, led and founded by Ruth Nicole Brown, celebrates the memories, lived experiences, and creativity of Black and Brown girls through performance-based modes of expression driven by hip hop. Brown (2009) writes that the concept of SOLHOT, "was born out of the disturbing research that reported that girls, particularly adolescents, were at-risk and suffering from societal pressures instrumental in the development of low self-esteem, loss of voice, and self-inflicted harmful behaviors" (Brown, 2009, p. xiv). In short, HHFP in practice is "a political act of resistance that values Black girls' ways of being" (Brown, 2009, p. 4).

As acts of resistance and knowledge-building, Brown has birthed a substantive body of scholarship, performances, and exhibits that work to "accurately describe what it means to work with Black girls in a way that is not controlling their bodies and/or producing white, middle-class girl subjectivities" (Brown, 2009, p. xvi). In 2010, SOLHOT participants performed *Revolutionary Acts: A Poetic Performance of Possibility*, inspired by the work of Ntozake Shange. In addition, *Necessary Truths: Reflections of African American Girlhood* was a photography exhibit curated by Claudine Taaffe, Brown, Dominique Hill and Black middle school girls in SOLHOT at the Krannert Art Museum in Champaign, IL. Further, two theatrical performances in 2011, *A Black Girl's Song* and *Black Gurls Hold it Down*, were created, written, and performed by SOLHOT middle and high school participants. These performances and exhibits represent how hip hop feminists live and practice feminism as a site of political intervention (Durham, 2007, p. 306).

Brown's (2013) book, *Hear Our Truth: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*, is a theory-based example of how Black feminism and hip hop inform and stimulate the creative genius of Black girls. *Wish to Live: The Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy Reader*, edited by Brown and Kwakye (2012), is a collection of essays informed by hip hop feminism and HHFP that documents how the arts can be the spark for education vested in community activism. Furthermore, Brown has and is continuing to cultivate young PhDs that are pushing the boundaries of traditional scholarship within hip hop studies and HHP by combining queer theory, hip hop feminism, performance-based ethnography, and the role of embodiment. Brown's visionary work illustrates the power of this burgeoning field of hip hop culture tied to feminist theory and praxis for resistance and the production of knowledge to uplifts one's self and community.

Science Genius

At first glance, Black and Brown urban youth rapping seems commonplace. But when youth of color, who were failing science, begin to see themselves as scientists and have the ability to create complex and intricate rhymes about difficult scientific concepts, it is HHP at its finest. Christopher Emdin, the creator of Science Genius, is utilizing the elements and mindsets of hip hop to create a pedagogical space for youth of color in formal school settings that draw on their hip hop sensibilities to reimagine academic success.

In 2012, Emdin, along with Wu-Tang Clan member and science enthusiast, GZA, launched a pilot project with ten New York City public schools to use hip hop to teach science. Emdin articulates that the skills needed to be knowledgeable in science, such as "curiosity, keen observation, an ability to use metaphor and draw connections" (Leland, 2012, para. 6) are the skillsets of talented rappers. Emdin also understands the dire need for urban youth, especially Black and Brown youth, to become science-minded

and academically sound in the content area. Emdin (2013c) argues that STEM education (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math) has been white-washed. He writes,

> For a large number of minority youth and women, STEM has been what I'd describe as "Eminem-ed." Basically, a white male face represents STEM, and the inherent patriarchy and bias perpetuated by gatekeepers in STEM goes unchallenged. This occurs in a way that is analogous to how the rapper Eminem is considered to be the face of a certain brand of popular rap, while the messages in his content are often troubling and yet not often questioned. (para. 3)

Science Genius provides a space for students of color to explore science with the understanding that their cultural sensibilities, vested in hip hop, are aligned with the culture of science through an authentic lens. Emdin (2013a) adds that the traits of the four pillars (i.e., rapping, deejays, graffiti, and b-boying) of hip hop are the same traits found in the most prolific scientists. For example, in order to be science-minded, one needs to "embrace making keen observations, asking deep questions, using analytical skills, exhibiting curiosity, and providing evidence (which are the components of sciencemindedness)" (Emdin, 2013b, p. 84). These traits go hand-and-hand with hip hop culture. Similar to Peterson (2013), as quoted earlier, Emdin (2013b) links the educational capacity that is cultivated within a "Hip Hop community of practice" (see Love, 2015; Wilson, 2007) with the elements and sensibilities of hip hop. Simply said, the skills and attributes associated with traditional scientific research are the same talents needed to be a rapper, a b-boy, a DJ, or graffiti artist. Youth who participate in Science Genius learn that hip hop is both culturally and academically brilliant. To that end, youth view hip hop as a highly intellectual space based in their culture.

Science Genius also represents a space where youth reclaim hip hop from the mainstream, co-opted landmine of popular music. Youth who participate in the science-based rap battles are connecting science topics to ideas of empowerment, liberation, and self-determination. For example, in his captivating rap, the inaugural winner of Science Genius, Jabari Johnson of Urban Assembly for the Preforming Arts High School in Harlem, New York, applied the concept of kinetic energy to his ability to overcome adversity. In his song, "Quest for Joulelry," Jabari rhymed:

> The equation for survival/Your only rival is frication don't get caught up in the drag/So you better prepare cuz obstacles fight back/When you get knocked down though please don't cry/Just get up and apply more force next time/One day I was dreaming with a really strong hope/That I'll make it but to make it takes more than just believing/These resistance slash demons were kinda holding me back/And I let 'em but the simple way to get back on track was force times displace, is work no debate/I'll take that concept apply it to my mistakes/And now I'm progressing a natural Rap Genius/And I'ma get an "A" if I see this in the regents.

In short, "Quest for Joulelry" is a song that links the ideas of self-determination to kinetic energy.

Currently, Science Genius is running in high schools across the U.S. Emdin pairs science teachers with local rappers to create classrooms where science content and hip hop culture are equal, which builds a relationship between students and teachers that affirms students' culture and intellectual abilities. However, for me, the power of Science Genius is that it underscores Lisa Delpit's (1988) idea of the power and pedagogy. Delpit argues that it is not enough for students to be taught from a pedagogical perspective that recognizes their culture if students do not learn that there is a culture of power within society and the classroom. Science Genius teaches urban students of color the codes and language of science in meaningful and communicative ways, which are necessary skills to participate fully in the mainstream of American life. Youth of color learning that the "rules of power" found in science are the foundation of hip hop is knowledge of self, and another example of HHP for resistance and self-determination.

Findings

Space and influencers

Ruth Nicole Brown, Christopher Emdin, and the youth of *Rize* all employ the fifth element of hip hop to give youth the opportunity to use their knowledge of hip hop by producing cultural artifacts that draw on their sensibilities to foster self-determination, self-knowledge, and acts of resistance. For example,

each site stressed youth engaging in an element of hip hop, or multiple elements, as acts of resistance. Across sites youth found adults or peers that believed in them and had the ability and insight to create social change.

In both *Rize* and Science Genius a persistent focus on skills, competition, and an unrelenting system of peer and self-evaluation was present. Marcyliena Morgan's (2009) seven year ethnographic study, *The Real HipHop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground*, examines the rich underground traditions of hip hop culture in Leimert Park in Los Angeles, California. Morgan's (2009) findings suggest that for youth to engage with hip hop music and culture that moves them beyond the binaries of hip hop into the complexities of Black life, a safe and creative space must be accessible to youth. All three sites discussed in Morgan enhanced sensibilities of youth that were already present. Each site represented truth and knowledge to youth in the classrooms or a basketball court in Watts, LA. Youth were not under surveillance and criminalized for being Black, they were given the space to create. Moreover, the space was filled with adults or youth leaders who were selected by the community, instead of politicians, who recognized that young people had the sensibilities, performance acumen, and power to "represent, recognize, come correct, and build, maintain, respect" (Morgan, 2009, pp. 15–16), which are the foundational origins of hip hop.

Underground

Each site functioned as an underground space of hip hop free of the binaries that come with commercial hip hop fixed to Black popular culture. Morgan (2009) suggests that the term underground "is in reference to many symbols, all which coalesce around flight, fight, and freedom" (p. 16). For the Black community, underground is synonymous with the Underground Railroad and stories of hope, risk, and Black ingenuity (Morgan, 2009). The underground signifies a collective space of creativity. Moreover, underground hip hop is constructed as an authentic subculture free of commercial hip hop's market forces (Peterson, 2015). More importantly, Morgan's (2009) findings suggest that underground hip hop operates as an activist and organizing site for youth with adults who believe in their potential to have a positive impact on their community and world. *The Hip Hop Underground and African American Culture: Beneath the Surface* by James Braxton Peterson (2015) argues that the roots/routes of African American culture travel through the underground with an "extraordinary valence with politics, genealogy, history, language, and most especially, hip-hop culture" (p. 1). All three sites functioned in the creative space of underground hip hop, free from binaries that box Black bodies in and free from educational spaces that block creativity. Moreover, in all of the (re)interventions, young girls were equal partners in the creation of the space.

Historically, underground hip hop has been a place where women shine for two reasons: Either they are co-creators of the space along with male counterparts, or creators of the space and free from the narrow constrictions of femininity in the male gaze within popular culture. For example, girls are at the center of Brown's work. Although I did not see examples of queer youth and youth with disabilities in the data, the model of underground approach provides the space to do so. These (re)interventions of HHP are just a few examples of how hip hop educators are using the culture and music of hip hop, particularly the fifth element, to recognize, affirm, and cultivate youth's sensibilities of self-determination and self-knowledge. The problem is not that youth do not have the tools. They need to sharpen those tools in a space that loves and cares for them, while challenging hip hop's complex personhood.

Real recognizes real

In 2012, Gosa and Fields asked a critical question of hip hop educators: "Is hip-hop education just another hustle?" (p. 195). The question is an important one because, as Asante (2008) reminds us, "even in the face of relative progress made in electoral politics and education, African-Americans have made hardly any progress on the critical front of representation in the media" (p. 17). Given that notion, the overall hip hop educational movement is robust with educational products (e.g., *Drumming Up Character: A Hip Hop Music Approach to Character Education*, by Rust & Campbell, 2008), websites (e.g., Flocabulary),

and curriculum course packets all advertised to improve standardized testing skills and built on the desires, fantasies, and messages of hip hop from a deficit approach, another example of hip hop's complex personhood. With this intention, what is explicit but never said about hip hop education is that most of the commercial, prepackaged, and rote memorization educational products put on the market as hip hop education are for low-achieving urban students of color deemed deficient.

Prepackaged hip hop education products remove and dismiss the culture, history, elements, sensibilities, and the ideas that students can critically examine hip hop culture's violent, homophobic, and sexist messages to form new knowledge and imagine new possibilities for justice in exchange for a reduced singular definition of hip hop. Through this lens, hip hop is not seen as a culture with a rich history that should be shared with all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and class through hip hop education, but instead as a teaching framework for students of color labeled as academically and culturally deficit. Thus, much of the hip hop educational products are constructed through the colonizing enterprise of educational research (Patel, 2014). Patel argues that coloniality within education relies on the pathologization and essentialization of people of color, thus "obscuring information that may not fit the justificatory frame of at-riskness" (p. 365). Patel's framing of educational research is at the crux of one of the biggest limitations of hip hop education. Anything created in conjunction with American values of capitalism, patriarchy, and misogyny will naturally be co-opted and watered-down to appeal to the economically privileged White population, even though it is suggested as an intervention for urban youth of color and, on the surface, represents their way of life. As hip hop education promotes the concepts of resistance and self-determination, some educators are still handicapped by its dependency on coloniality, capitalism, and "patriarchal mainstream masculinity" (Rose, 2008, p. 118). In that way, commercial hip hop education fails to address sexism, homophobia, feminism, and disturbing definitions concerning Black masculinity in order to cultivate equality and consciousness.

The binary space of hip hop has polluted hip hop education where its complexity is viewed as a flaw—too complicated for students and too radical to appease the enterprise of educational research. Hip hop education devoted to resistance and self-determination must challenge homophobia and anti-feminism. Hip hop educators, myself included, must use the binary space of hip hop and what it represents to imagine what is lost and what never really existed as we create hip hop education alongside youth that push us to resist formulaic materials and narratives for resistance and self-determination. This feat cannot be accomplished without challenging the binaries of hip hop's complex personhood that is the foundation of the field of hip hop education.

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