SUDDRETH, COURTNEY B., M.S. Hip-Hop Dress and Identity: A Qualitative Study of Music, Materialism, and Meaning. (2009)
Directed by Dr. Nancy Nelson Hodges. 136 pp.

Throughout the 20th and early 21st century, music and culture have had tremendous influence on fashion. One style in particular, known as "hip-hop" has become synonymous with sound, subculture, and style. Hip-hop music, also referred to as rap or rap music, is a style of popular music which came into existence in the United States during the late 1970s, only to become a large part of modern popular culture by the 1980s. Today hip-hop has become mainstreamed, and embraced the consumption of luxury goods and status symbols as emblems of success. Materialism is now a fundamental message within hip-hop, but this factor has received little attention in extant research. The purpose of this study is to explore its influence on hip-hop style and the significance of the messages it conveys for those involved with it.

Two qualitative methods, the in-depth interview and photo-elicitation, were the primary techniques used to collect data. Combined, these two methods provided the means to reveal and explore the experiences of 12 African-American males relative to hip-hop culture. A thematic interpretation of the responses revealed a spectrum of perceptions and opinions about the significance of dress and other material objects within hip-hop, along with different degrees of internalization of hip-hop influence.

Responses point to a general consensus that hip-hop has become mainstreamed today and that consequently, the messages it communicates through lyrics, videos, and other media are significantly different than those of "old school" hip-hop during its early days. While all participants indicated a long-time presence of the use of dress and other

material objects to communicate status and identity within hip-hop, many felt that this presence has become amplified over the years to the point where the music is now more about image than substance. According to the participants, conspicuous consumption in the form of excessive amounts of jewelry, luxury brand apparel, and expensive cars have replaced a focus on community togetherness, action, and social justice.

Results of this study highlight the experiences of an understudied population—African-American males—and provides an understanding of the personal and social impact of hip-hop from their point of view. Much more research is needed to illuminate the experiences of African-American males in general, and particularly as consumers of dress.

HIP-HOP DRESS AND IDENTITY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MUSIC,
MATERIALISM, AND MEANING.

By

Courtney B. Suddreth

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
In Partial Fulfillment
of Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

Greensboro
2009

Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The
Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

_____
Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Nancy Nelson Hodges, for all the many hours she spent advising and directing me through my thesis. I am most thankful for her constant encouragement and support at all times.

I would also like to thank my committee, Dr. Gwendolyn O'Neal and Dr. Tu Watchravesringkan, for their expert advice and guidance that was needed during the most important stages of my research.

I would like to extend a thank you to all the participants who took time out of their busy schedules to assist me with this study.

I am especially grateful to my friends and family who supported me throughout my graduate journey.

Finally, I am most grateful to my mother, who always supported me every step of the way and encouraged me to continually work to the best of my potential.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20th and early 21st century, music and culture have had

tremendous influence on fashion. One style in particular, known as, "hip-hop" has

become synonymous with sound, subculture, and style. Hip-hop music, also referred to as

rap or rap music, is a style of popular music which came into existence in the United

States during the mid-1970s, only to become a large part of modern pop culture by the

1980s.

As a musical genre, hip-hop consists of four main components: (a) rapping

(MCing), which has become the most prominent aspect to emerge in hip-hop; (b) graffiti,

a social movement that first began in New York during the late 1960s (Dyson, 2007),

including spray painted murals, as well as identity "tags" such as names and symbols to

claim territories; (c) DJing (audio mixing and scratching), which was the central element

of early hip-hop; and (d) breakdancing, which consists of numerous types of dance moves

including popping, locking, and up-rocking (www.zulunation.com). Hip-hop has grown

to have a significant influence on music, dance, and art. But hip-hop, from the first, has

also been a social movement, and is often considered to be a counterculture (Benstock &

Ferris, 1994; Ross, 1994). Emerging in the Bronx as an alternative to gang culture, hip-

hop's popularity is due to its dual function as socio-political critique and consumer

product (Benstock & Ferris, 1994).

Although hip-hop has ultimately become mainstreamed in many ways, there is a noticeable gap in knowledge regarding the influence this genre continues to have on mainstream U.S. society. This study therefore sets out to explore the development of hip-hop from a musical style to a lifestyle and investigate the significance of the movement for meanings of dress in contemporary U.S. culture. In this chapter, a brief history of the movement is provided which is then followed by an overview of current definitions of dress and identity, a discussion of African-American dress and identity, and then an overview of dress as nonverbal communication and its link to subcultural style. The purpose, objectives and significance of the study are then outlined, followed by definitions of key terms.

A Brief History of Hip-Hop

The creation of rap is often attributed to the Sugarhill Gang, a music group of the 1970s who used a pre-recorded rhythm, but instead of singing over it, they spoke an endless stream of rhymes (see figure 1). They were signed to an independent label created by a music entrepreneur named Sylvia Robinson, and released their first single "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 (Rose, 1994). "Rapper's Delight" sold over two million copies and was Number 1 on the Billboard R&B charts (Light, 1999, p. 13). It was also the world's first introduction to hip-hop (Light, 1999). In time this "fad" called rap would break out of the underground and become a multi-million dollar industry, as well as one of the most influential and popular musical phenomena of the times (Light, 1999). Although the Sugarhill Gang and their single "Rapper's Delight" was a catalyst, there is a history and culture that laid the foundation for rap's success. In other words, rap was not

created out of vacuum, rather it stems from an oral tradition that spans generations, musical styles, as well as cultural traditions.

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 1. Sugarhill Gang, 1979 – 1980
(Source: www.olivelela.vox.com)

The 1960s and 1970s is known as the era of Old School (Light, 1999). Before the term "hip-hop" was used to describe the rap movement, there were "old school" outdoor parties in urban public parks. A DJ would connect his sound system directly into the power box of a streetlight and play records as people gathered around to dance, rhyme over the beats or write graffiti (Light, 1999). One man, Clive Campbell (a.k.a. Kool Herc) deserves much of the credit for propelling these parties into a musical style. Campbell was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in a ghetto called Trenchtown. Clive earned the nickname "Hercules," which was later shortened to "Herc," for his athletic ability. Herc, now known as Kool Herc (see figure 2), debuted as a DJ in 1973 at his sister's birthday party held in the recreation room of their housing project in the West Bronx. After that, he was

booked at parks, block parties, and community centers. This helped Herc to slowly build

his reputation as a DJ.

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 2. DJ Kool Herc, 1980s
(Source: www.zulunation.com)

As Herc's influenced changed during the early 1970s, his style became legendary

among the area's underprivileged youth. One such youth was Afrika Bamaataa, a student

at Adlai Stevenson High School and a resident of the Bronx River Projects. The South

Bronx was an area characterized by burned-out buildings, street gangs, as well as drugs

and poverty. As the leader of one of the city's biggest and most notorious street gangs,

the Black Spades, Bamaataa had the respect of his peers and shared his vision of what

fellow blacks and Hispanics could accomplish if they worked toward a common cause

(Light, 1999). Even as a Spade, he held the drug dealers in his area at bay and formed the

"Organization," several different housing projects that were against the threat of violence and drugs (see figure 3).

By the late 1970s as the street gangs were significantly increasing due to violence, drugs, and police crackdowns, Bamaataa's attention turned to holding parties --- first at his own housing projects, then at high schools and PAL (Police Athletic League) parties before taking his troupe of DJs, breakdancers, MCs, and graffiti artists out of the ghetto (Light, 1999). This initial community activism was the beginning of Bam's Zulu Nation, today known as the Universal Zulu Nation, an international hip-hop movement that upholds such principles as knowledge, wisdom, understanding, freedom, justice, equality, peace, unity, love, and respect in its manifesto (Light, 1999).

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 3. Afrika Bambaata, 1987
(Source: www.zulunation.com)

The 1980s brought about diversification in rap, which developed into a more complex form of expression known as "hip-hop." The simple tales of 1970s emcees were replaced by highly metaphoric lyrics rapped over complex, multi-layered beats. The techniques used in rap also diversified during the 1980s. Most influential were those of DJs such as Grandmaster Flash, known for his pioneering use of scratching. Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five released a rap song called "The Message" in 1982 (see figure 4). This was one of the earliest examples of recorded hip-hop with a socially aware tone. The 1980s also gave way to rock and hip-hop fusion with the collaboration of Run D.M.C. and Aerosmith and the development of the first commercially recognized black all-female rap group, Salt-N-Pepa.

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 4. Grandmaster Flash (center front) and The Furious Five, 1980s
(Source: www.jayquan.com)

The late 1980s also fostered the growth of rappers whose musical style expressed a more militant and confrontational tone. The first of these groups was Public Enemy,

who released their debut album *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* on Def Jam Records in 1987 and

then later released *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* in 1988, which was a

commercial success despite its political perspective (see figure 5). Rapper Carlton

Ridenhour (Chuck D) officially formed Public Enemy in 1982 while studying at Adelphi

University with producer Hank Shocklee and publicist Bill Stepheny (www.arted.osu.edu,

2007). The group later signed a recording contract with Def Jam Records and was joined

by Richard Griff (Professor Griff), Norman Lee Rogers (D.J. Terminator) and William

Drayton (Flavor Flav) (www.arted.osu.edu, 2007). Their first album was considered

revolutionary in rap because it exposed the social concerns facing the African-American

community and encouraged social activism.

      Although Public Enemy received negative publicity from the media they

continued to produce top selling albums (www.arted.osu.edu, 2007). In 1990 they

released their fourth album, *Fear of a Black Planet*, which reached the top ten on the pop

charts. The next year, the group released the album *Apocalypse 91…The Enemy Strikes

Back* which rose to Number 4 on the pop charts (www.arted.osu.edu, 2007). Public

Enemy continued to make albums throughout the 1990s but was met with declining

interest and negative reviews.

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 5. Public Enemy, 1980s
(Source: www.arted.osu.edu)

Another like-minded group known as Boogie Down Productions followed with the release of their 1988 album *By All Means Necessary.* But by 1988 and 1989 some commercially successful hip-hop had a more optimistic, positive tone to the lyrics. Such albums were being released by groups like De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest and The Jungle Brothers, collectively called the Native Tongues. Their music contained jazz-based samples and insightful lyrics that covered a diverse range of topics. This time period was marked by a blossoming creativity and is now considered to be the "golden age of hip-hop" (Light, 1999). Women rappers also surfaced in the 1980s.

In spite of the fact that there are significantly fewer female rappers than males, they have a prominent role in rap and have an ample following. By the late 1980s, hip-hop was considered to be a male dominated genre, which made Cheryl James and Sandy Denton's (better known as the first female rap duo Salt N' Pepa) emergence into hip-hop so significant (www.reference.com). It is difficult to overlook the tremendous growth in

record deals for women rappers following Salt 'N' Pepa's 1986 debut album *Hot, Cool, and Vicious* which sold 2 million copies (Rose, 1994). Album sales of this volume, even for male rap artists, were virtually unheard of in 1986. In the early stages of rap, women's participation was deterred by gender-related opinions (Rose, 1994). The single "Expressions," from Salt 'N' Pepa's album *Black's Magic*, went gold during its first week and remained at the Number 1 position on Billboard's Rap Chart for over eight weeks (Rose, 1994). The majority of their songs address African-American women's refusal to submit to African-American male domination, a declaration of new rules for heterosexual courtship, and the essentiality of black women's voices.

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Figure 6: Salt 'N' Pepa, 1980s
(Source: www.rocklibrary.com)

Another popular female rapper that made her debut into hip-hop was Lana Michele Moorer better know as MC Lyte (www.reference.com). She is considered to be one of the first female rap artists to shed light on the sexism and misogynistic practices that often dominated the lyrics in hip-hop (Light, 1999). *Lyte as a Rock*, MC Lyte's full-

length debut album was released in 1988 (www.starpulse.com). Her lyrics often challenged these sexist ideas and helped pave the way for future female artists like Queen Latifah.

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 7: MC Lyte, 1980s
(Source: www.starpulse.com)

Dana Elaine Owens, better known by her stage name, Queen Latifah (see figures 6 and 7), is another successful female rapper that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ruth, 2000). She often rapped about the empowerment of women and picked up where MC Lyte and Salt N' Pepa's lyrics left off, addressing some of the issues faced by all women, not just those in the African-American community. She was well-known for her singles "Ladies First" from her 1989 debut *All Hail the Queen* and "U.N.I.T.Y." from her most popular album *Black Reign* in 1993.

Images not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 8: Queen Latifah, late 1980s   Figure 9: Queen Latifah, 2007
(Source: www.starpulse.com)   (Source: www.sptimes.com)

Latifah soon made her way into other media outlets, taking on roles in television as well as movies. In 1993 she crossed into the mainstream market starring in her own television show *Living Single*, which was cancelled in 1997 and is now in syndication (www.imdb.com). Also during that time she co-starred with Jada Pinkett Smith in the 1996 film *Set It Off*. She then had starring roles in the movies *Beauty Shop* and *Last Holiday*. She is now a widely known celebrity and is the spokesperson for her own line of cosmetics by Cover Girl (www.starpulse.com). She has also released a jazz album *The Dana Owens Album* in September 2004, which has helped her gain recognition and accolades as a jazz singer.

Women rappers questioned the representation of women as gold diggers within many male rap lyrics and addressed the fears women share concerning male deception and infidelity (Rose, 1994). Both Salt 'N' Pepa (figure 6) and MC Lyte (figure 7), had reputations for sharp raps that criticized men who controlled and berated women. They

told the story of men taking advantage of women, by cheating on them and taking their money and then leaving them to conquer more female victims. By contributing a woman's perspective on courtship, their raps provided a new take on the man-woman sexual power relations and portray women as opposing, combative participants (Rose, 1994).

Some of the issues faced by young African-American women that would not normally be expressed publicly are given a voice by African-American female rappers. Many state beliefs relative to the importance of family life and the traditional roles of men as husbands, fathers, and lovers while others' lyrics are more in line with stereotypical messages of sexism and racism found among some male rappers (Rose, 1994). At the same time, it should be noted that there are many male rappers whose lyrics not only punish men for mistreating women but also address male accountability in raising children and emphasize the importance of African-American women within black cultural life (Rose, 1994).

By the 1990s, the focus of hip-hop shifted to gangster rap, as it became more mainstreamed with the release of Dr. Dre's classic album *The Chronic*. This particular album established the West Coast style of rap called G Funk. During this time, G Funk was one of the most popular forms of hip-hop music, but New York's hip-hop scene continued to be an essential part of the industry. Creating a sales divide between major East and West Coast labels, this later turned into a personal rivalry that was continuously fueled by the media. This rivalry resulted in the deaths of well-known hip-hop artists Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. After the hip-hop community suffered such tragedies,

conflicts between rappers still exist today but the focus has shifted from crew rivalries to living a lavish lifestyle.

Today hip-hop is dominated by themes of materialism, wealth, and status symbols. The music itself is being fused with other types of popular music to create new musical styles. One such style is neo-soul, a music genre and an umbrella term for current soul music combining 1970s-influenced soul music with influences from jazz, funk, hip-hop and house music (www.reference.com). Sampling of soul music and other music genres continues to be prevalent in hip-hop and generates high sales for artists and record companies. Styles of dress evolve as new artists gain popularity and recognition within the marketplace.

<center>Defining Dress and Identity</center>

Fashion and clothing are non-verbal forms of communication; they are how one individual sends messages to another or to society at large. The clothes we wear everyday indicate our interests, what mood we are in, our values, hopes, and the beliefs of social groups to which we belong (Davis, 1985). Dress defines social roles, communicates membership, and establishes the identities of individuals (Damhorst, 1999). In regards to identity, people desire to be a part of a group, but at the same time want to be an individual. Clothing is one way people can achieve a balance between the two desires because it can be used to demonstrate membership in a certain group while it defines personal identity (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

In this research, the term "dress" will be used predominantly to refer to "an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body" (Roach-

<center>13</center>

Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p. 7). Joanne Entwistle (2000) defines dress as "an activity of clothing the body with an aesthetic element (as in 'adornment')" and defines fashion as "a specific system of dress" (p. 6). Entwistle (2000) posits that dress is a basic fact of social life found among all known human cultures and all people "dress" the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics or other forms of body decoration. According to Entwistle (2000), dress is both an intimate experience of the body and a public presentation of it. Dress in everyday life is always more than a shell, and is so closely linked to identity that the three elements of dress, the body and the self are not perceived separately but simultaneously, as a totality (Entwistle, 2000). Comprised of material objects, dress is not inherently meaningful, but is instead used as a vehicle to communicate cultural meaning.

Dress is one of the ways, then, by which social order is experienced, explored, communicated, and reproduced (Barnard, 2000; Stone, 1959). Douglas and Isherwood (1979) propose that dress is used to make sense of the world and the things and people in it, and that it is essentially a communicative phenomenon. According to them, a culture enables individuals to construct an identity by this means of communication. Moreover, dress is used as a signifying practice, a way of generating meanings, which produce and reproduce a culture and its groups (Barnard, 2000).

Material culture is conceived as the "things in the world" by being "incorporated into social interaction" and embodying the social structures within which we all live (Dant, 1999, p. 2). Society cannot be understood independently of its material culture, in that "there is a system of relationships between ideas and values, material things (clothes)

and people" (Dant, 1999, p.107). The things we live with, the products and objects, tie us to others in society, "providing a means of sharing values, activities, and styles of life" (Dant, 1999, p. 2). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) further suggest that dress symbolically ties a community together. Social agreement about what will be worn is itself a social bond which in turn reinforces other social bonds (Barnard, 2000). The unifying function of dress serves to nonverbally communicate membership within a cultural group both to those who are members of it and to those who are not.

Dress is generally believed to communicate information about the wearer and to constitute external manifestations of the internal properties of the wearer (Craik, 1996; Davis, 1985; Kaiser, 1990). It is sometimes used to define and redefine the self in attempt to influence, control, manipulate, or shape an interaction or situation (O'Neal, 1997). In this study dress, due to its ability to communicate meaning, is considered an integral part of the hip-hop culture and lifestyle. Although a completely mainstreamed lifestyle today, as discussed earlier, its origins are located squarely within the African-American community.

<center>African-American Dress and Identity</center>

Research on dress and identity has recently begun to acknowledge the diversity among social groups in the development of identity (Winter, 2004). For example, William Cross (1991) described a psychological model of development comprising four transformative stages through which African-American identity evolves. This psychological model allows us to see how the concept of being black is not about what clothes are worn, but how clothes are used to communicate identity.

<center>15</center>

Lewis compared the types of clothing typically worn in each of the four stages of the development of this self-identity (Winter, 2004). Apparel worn in the first stage, called *Pre-encounter/Discovery*, often reflects Hollywood images, such as those of a street hustler or pimp (Winter, 2004). In the second stage, called *Encounter*, individuals, often in their teens, first begin to think of themselves as separate from the mainstream. In this stage, the apparel worn is typically Afrocentric, such as turbans and Kente cloth (Winter, 2004). The clothing is wrapped, rather than sewn and cut. In the third phase, called *Immersion/Emersion*, individuals use fashion to present themselves according to the roles they have as contributing members of society (Winter, 2004). At the fourth stage, *Internalization,* Black identity becomes internalized and accustomed, being Black becomes a "backdrop for life's transitions." The fifth stage, *Internalization/Commitment* is when individuals think of themselves and their place in society in regard to fashion as a much less critical marker of identity. At the fourth and fifth stages, they can wear conservative clothes if they choose, instead of what he calls "brash" fashion (Winter, 2004).

According to O'Neal (1997) members of the African-American community place value on personal expressiveness. Kochman (1981) described this expressiveness as requiring the exertion of energy and emotion. Specifically, African-Americans have often found it necessary to engage in behaviors which redefine the self due to a history of oppression and discrimination (O'Neal, 1997). These behaviors are an effort to control the environment particularly through the execution of an individual's own expressive behavior in relation to his or her life (O'Neal, 1997). According to O'Neal (1997) this is

achieved through creative and expressive uses of clothing, hairstyles, and accessories and in combination with various gestures and body movements.

Style, as it is defined by Semmes (1992), is the "tradition of artfully embellishing movement, speech, and appearance" (p. 131). Attitudes, assumptions, and feelings about the self and others as they are expressed in language, dress, and nonverbal behaviors can also be considered style (Majors & Billson, 1992; Mancini, 1981). Style is individualistic and personal (O'Neal, 1997). In the African-American community it is not considered appropriate to copy another person's style (Hannerz, 1969). In the context of the aesthetics of dress in the African-American community, style is therefore most often simply the display of the unique characteristics of the individual, or according to O'Neal (1997), a "free expression of one's essence" (p. 131). Style is their statement to the world about who they are and how they wish to be seen. The African-American's aesthetic of dress uses style to customize the meanings of dress. By transforming meanings of mass-produced fashion, African-Americans are able to express their cultural heritage (O'Neal, 1997). For O'Neal (1997), style therefore becomes "a way of rejecting dominant myths, controlling the expressive shaping of one's immediate and everyday life, as well as holding on to one's past history" (p. 132). Style for African-Americans may therefore be seen as a form of resistance and this is power (O'Neal, 1997). Within hip-hop, style has become an integral part of expressing the self, whether in terms of lyrics, beats, or through the wearing of certain brand names. Yet little research exists which explores the importance of style and the messages it conveys within the hip-hop movement.

Dress, Culture, and Subculture: Hip-Hop Style

Culture is descriptive of "a particular way of life, which expresses certain messages and values" (Williams, 1961, p. 57). The ideas, beliefs, and values of groups, which sometimes challenge the beliefs, values, ideas and experiences of other groups, may be referred to as "ideologies." In some cases, dress may express the ideologies held by certain social groups which may be opposed to the ideologies of others. A recent example of this is found in hip-hop (Barnard, 2000). Alan Light (1999) suggests that in the early 1990s the group Public Enemy "redefined…the very role pop musicians could play in contemporary culture" (p. 165), articulating "the sociopolitical frustrations of not just ghetto but the black middle class as well" (p. 167). At the same time, young ghetto-based black youth used fashion and music to challenge dominant white, middle-class ideologies (Barnard, 2000). Hip-hop is therefore a pertinent example of how dress and music can evolve into what some would consider a subculture, ultimately representing a system of shared values and beliefs.

Sociological, ethnographic research has focused on the study of subcultures since the 1920s (Holland, 2004). Growing interest in the new concept of the 'teenager' inspired the study of youth and subculture in Britain during the 1950s (Holland, 2004). Textual analysis performed by Hebdige (1979) argues that the media and other forms of business draw subcultures into the mainstream of popular ideas, presenting them as acceptable by denying their original source of resistance and therefore making them no longer a threat. This means subcultural styles are always being reinvented, and new ones

created. As McRobbie (1994) suggests, regardless of a subcultural style's effect on popular culture, "there still remains an ideology of authenticity which provide young people in youth subcultures with a way of achieving social subjectivity and therefore, identity, through the subcultural experience" (p. 168).

Hebdige (1979) suggests subcultures represent "noise" as opposed to sound, opposition to the methodical order which stems from real events and phenomena as depicted in the media. As Mepham writes:

> Distinctions and identities may be so deeply embedded in our discourse and thought about the world whether this be because of their role in our practical lives, or because they are cognitively powerful and are an important aspect of the way in which we appear to make sense of our experience, that the theoretical challenge to them can be quite startling (Mepham, as quoted in Hebdige, pp. 90-91).

The origin of hip-hop as a subculture defined by life in the ghetto and shared experience among African-American youth, combined with its increasingly mainstream popularity, resulted in it being seen largely as a threat to the social order (Light, 1999).

Each new subculture develops trends, creates new looks, and develops new sounds which then cycle back into the mainstream. That is, youth culture styles may start by presenting symbolic challenges, but eventually end with the establishment of new industries or the restoration of old ones (Hebdige, 1979). As Clarke observed:

> The diffusion of youth styles from subcultures to the fashion market is not simply a 'cultural process,' but a real network or infrastructure of new kinds of commercial and economic institutions (As quoted in Hebdige, 1979, p. 95).

The same pattern can be traced throughout the development of hip-hop, leading to the question of what hip-hop means today given its global popularity. That is, can hip-hop be considered a subculture? Hip-hop is still a collective of individuals who identify with similar messages, often tied to the consumption of music and fashion. There are still elements of hip-hop that can be classified as subcultural, but it can no longer be considered as such within the U.S. because it is now being embraced by the mainstream. Moreover, because it has become so mainstreamed it is being imitated and incorporated into numerous cultures around the world. Symbolic meanings within hip-hop are altered when the genre is adapted by another culture. When this occurs, it evolves back into a subculture once more because it has been adopted by a small number of people in the culture and thus is not widely accepted as a normal part of the system of shared beliefs. During the 1980s, cable television played a significant role in the appropriation of the music industry, and specifically of rap music. Warner Communications and the American Express Company launched Music Television (MTV) in August 1981. In the beginning MTV had a rock-based format aimed at white teen audiences and refused to play videos by African-American artists (Rose, 1994). After the network continued to experience pressure because of this refusal, they added Michael Jackson and Prince to their play list. Soon after, the popularity of rap music could not be ignored, thus the network began integrating it into their video play lists (Rose, 1994).

Today, hip-hop has become a multifaceted cultural phenomenon that is demonstrated in its clothing styles (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). Because identities within the hip-hop community are defined by dress, hip-hop artists convey

information on what is 'cool' in fashion across national and international borders, thereby creating a relentless buzz. Rapid transmission of information about trends in fashion, rap poetics, and social activism, downloading music, and the paralanguage of body movement all are now culturally ingrained practices within hip-hop. Old school hip-hop fashion may have stemmed from poverty, but hip-hop styles of today focus on high-end purchases like expensive sneakers, jewelry, vintage clothes, and elaborate, costly hair styles (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005).

<center>Hip-Hop Brands: African-American Culture and Consumption</center>

Hip-hop celebrities keep the focus on consumption by becoming role models, promoting street-inspired style and endorsing designers who create copies of brand names for market distribution to the middle classes and the knock-off industry. During the old school days before hip-hop became a consumer-driven industry, the music held greater significance than the "look." Russell Simmons, owner of Phat Farm, suggests that in pursuit of "class," hip-hop today plays a major role in trendsetting (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). The first major hip-hop brand was Cross Colors and was soon followed by Karl Kani, Mecca, FUBU, Ecko, Sean "Diddy" Combs' Sean John Label and Jay-Z's clothing line Rocawear. Some suggest these hip-hop celebrities are making an attempt to direct urban fashion dollars away from mainstream designers such as Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005).

One of the most high profile of these celebrities is Sean "Diddy" Combs. Sean "Diddy" Combs has created a multimillion dollar business fueled by consumption within the African-American community as well as the mainstream (www.badboyonline.com).

<center>21</center>

His commercially successful career in hip-hop began in the mid-to-late-1990s with his position as CEO of Bad Boy Records in 1994, home to rappers Craig Mack and Notorious B.I.G. and the R&B groups 112 and Total. With the release of Notorious B.I.G.'s album *Ready To Die* the new label made a name for itself in the music industry. During this time, Diddy was known for making "bling-bling" inspired videos featuring large amounts of diamond jewelry (www.badboyonline.com).

Sean Combs is also the creator and owner of the men's urban contemporary fashion label "Sean John," founded in 1998 (www.badboyonline.com). The line consists of Sean John Fine Tailoring which includes suits, ties, and dress shirts; Sean John Footwear, Boy's, Men's, Underwear, Outerwear and Sean John for Women. With the release of his signature cologne "Unforgivable" in 2006, he has also made a name for himself within the men's and women's fragrance industries. Among his accomplishments is being named one of the Top Ten Richest People in Hip-Hop. With a net worth of $315 million, he was also listed as Number 13 in Fortune Magazine's list of the 40 Richest People Under 40 in 2004 (www.fortunemagazine.com, 2004).

Diddy, the perfect example of a "rags-to-riches" story, prides himself on cultivating and maintaining the ultimate in lavish hip-hop style and is well known for hosting some of the most expensive parties in the music industry. He is also considered to be the reason for the surge in popularity of the Bentley (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). Among his staff of employees and entourage, he has a personal barber, personal stylist and personal trainer on call at all times. Other hip-hop fashion brands such as Rocawear, Phat Farm, and Lady Enyce, are in the push to sell luxury goods (Chandler &

Chandler-Smith, 2005). Hip-hop designers' appeal in the luxury market is somewhat

smaller relative to other brands, but they have nonetheless gained a 'lifestyle of the rich

and famous' reputation for precious gems, high-end automobiles and couture clothes that

impress fans and contribute to the opulent image that is so important to the genre today

(Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005).

It is important to note that although hip-hop has its own ideologies, all hip-hop

artists do not necessarily share them. It could be argued that the rising influence of hip-

hop culture in mainstream fashion offers young men and women a wider range of choice

in social roles while still representing a more distinctive quality of blackness than was

available a few years ago (Winter, 2004). Yet there is little extant research that examines

the impact of these choices in the lives of individuals. The present study will therefore

focus on the meanings such choices have for African-American consumers.

<p align="center">Purpose and Objectives</p>

The purpose of this research is to explore how dress is used to communicate

within U.S. hip-hop culture. Although the influence of hip-hop has become mainstreamed

in the U.S. and even gained monumental success on a global scale, there is a paucity of

research on the topic, and particularly its influence within contemporary American

popular culture. Hip-hop culture is more than just about material objects and expensive

videos, it is a phenomenon that encompasses music, clothing, and a way of life. The goal

of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the role of dress and what it

communicates within the hip-hop community, and specifically for African-American

<p align="center">23</p>

males. Four research objectives will be used to address this goal and to examine dress in

the context of hip-hop. These objectives are:

1.   To investigate the role of dress in shaping and expressing identity within
        hip-hop.

2.   To explore the use of material objects, including brand name apparel, as
        status symbols within hip-hop.

3.   To examine the role of consumption-oriented values related to dress within
        hip-hop.

4.   To explore the messages and images used within hip-hop to communicate
        identity, status, and consumption-oriented values through dress.

Significance

The study explores critical aspects of the hip-hop movement to understand its

scope and significance within contemporary American popular culture. Specifically, this

research will examine how hip-hop is understood within the everyday lives of African-

American males. Hip-hop, a marker of identity for many within contemporary U.S.

culture, will be investigated from the perspective of males who have grown up with the

genre. Materialism is a fundamental message within hip-hop, but this factor has received

little attention in extant research. A deeper understanding of the relationship between

personal consumption and symbols of success within hip-hop culture will provide a more

holistic view of what hip-hop means for those who identify with it.

An increased visibility of hip-hop images has led to an increased integration of its

messages into mainstream culture. A clearer understanding of what these messages mean

within the subculture is important before the origins of these meanings are completely

subsumed and thus co-opted within culture at large. As the next chapter will illustrate,

there is very little research on hip-hop or even on African-American consumption,

subcultures or style, pointing to the critical need for research that will fill these gaps in

knowledge and shed light on the uniquely profound cultural phenomenon of hip-hop.

Definition of Key Terms

This section provides definitions of major terms that are used throughout the text.

Afro-nouveau Riche	Newly rich African-American rappers in the mid-to-late 1980s (Oh, 2005).
Bling-Bling	A hip-hop slang term which refers to expensive jewelry and other accoutrements, and also to an entire lifestyle built around excess spending and ostentation (www.wikipedia.org, 2006).
Culture	The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of racial, religious, or social groups (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2004).
DJing	Audio mixing and scratching (www.wikipedia.org, 2006).
Dress	An assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p. 7).
Dukie Ropes	Thick rope chains usually made or worn by rappers that became a staple of early hip-hop fashion in the mid-to-late 1980s (www.wikipedia.org, 2006).
Floss	To flaunt or show off something that is or appears to be of high value (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).

Gangster rap	Media definition of a style of rap music from the West Coast of America in the 1980s with themes such as money, sexual conquest, crime, brotherhood, anger, and life in the slums (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).
Ghetto fabulous	A person with extravagant luxuries that they clearly cannot afford and who lives in the hood or has a hood lifestyle (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).
Grillz (Grills)	Removable cosmetic dental metal featuring silver, gold, or platinum caps jeweled with diamond inlays (usually princess-cut diamonds) to be worn over teeth (www.wikipedia.org, 2006).
Hip-Hop	Also referred to as rap or rap music, is a style of popular music which came into existence in the United States during the mid-1970s, and became a large part of modern pop culture during the 1980s (www.wikipedia.org, 2007).
Hood	Colloquialism for neighborhood or place of residence (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).
Hood Rich	Rap artists who own and/or possess materialistic items such as luxury cars and jewelry but are still living in their original neighborhoods; a person with extravagant luxuries that they clearly cannot afford and who lives in the hood or has a hood lifestyle (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).
Hustle	To make money in a dishonest fashion (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).
Identity	The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group. The

	distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality (www.dictionary.com, 2007).
Materialism	The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Belk, 1985).
MCing	Rapping (www.wikipedia.org, 2007).
Old School	A slang term referring to an older way of thinking or acting and to old objects in general, within the context of newer, more modern times (www.wikipedia.org, 2006).
Rocking	Wearing clothing, jewelry, etc (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).
Style	An expression of culture that is often used as a tool in defining the self, redefining interpersonal relations, and exerting influence in the social situation (www.dictionary.com, 2007).
Subculture	A group within a society that has its own shared set of customs, attitudes, and values, often accompanied by jargon or slang. A subculture can be organized around a common activity, occupation, age, status, ethnic background, race, religion, or any other unifying social condition, but the term is often used to describe deviant groups (www.dictionary.com, 2007).
Tricked-out	Taking an average or below average object and increasing its value by adding premium or above average modifications (www.urbandictionary.com, 2007).

Summary

This chapter provided a background for the research topic. A brief history of hip-hop, discussion of dress and identity as well as overviews of African-American aesthetics of dress and hip-hop style were presented. Research objectives, the overall purpose of the research and the significance of the topic were explained. Definitions of key terms were provided. The next chapter presents a review of the literature pertinent to the research topic.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature pertinent to an exploration of dress within hip-hop. Areas of discussion include: (a) Veblen's Theory of Conspicuous Consumption; (b) the concept of the status symbol (c) materialism as a cultural value prominent within hip-hop, and (d) the globalization of hip-hop music and style.

Conspicuous Consumption

It is commonly agreed upon that a strong and productive economy is necessary in order for fashion to exist (Winter, 2004). Nearly a century ago, the renowned sociologist, Thorstein Veblen, observed that fashion is one of the most tangible and visual outcomes of wealth, despite how people might try to repress its demonstrations (Winter, 2004). Objects are inscribed with references revealing wealth, according to Veblen. Since publication of Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899, little attention has been given to the concept of conspicuous consumption, which he described in detail (Mason, 2001). Yet even today status and prestige considerations continue to play a significant part in shaping consumer preferences for many products, which oftentimes might appear to be purchased for utilitarian purposes but instead serve as a means of displaying wealth and purchasing power (Mason, 2001). To the purely conspicuous consumer, the

satisfaction derived from any particular purchase comes not from its value in use but the product for "consumption." Consequently the cost of purchase --- i.e., product price --- becomes the only factor of any significance to him or her (Mason, 2001).

Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption is based on the evolution of a leisure class whose members are not required to work but appropriate a surplus produced by those who do work: The working class (Trigg, 2001). Once a society produces a surplus, the relationship between private property and status becomes increasingly important, that is, as Veblen writes, "It becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one's good name" (Veblen, [1899] 1994, p. 29). Once this occurs, a hierarchy develops in which some people own property and others do not. To own property is to have status and honor, a position of esteem in the hierarchy. To have no property is to have no status (Trigg, 2001). Status is a product of judgments that other members of society make about an individual's position in society, but in order for this position to be established there must be a display of wealth (Trigg, 2001). Veblen identifies two main ways in which an individual can display wealth: through extensive leisure activities and through lavish expenditure on consumption and services. Waste is the common thread that connects both types of display as, according to Veblen, "In the one case it is a waste of time and effort, in the other it is a waste of goods" (Veblen [1899] 1994, p. 85).

Being able to engage in wasteful activities is the key ways in which members of the leisure class display their wealth and status (Trigg, 2001). In a more modern society, such as the U.S. today, individuals may be less informed about the leisure activities in

which other people engage, and so the display of wealth through consumption of goods becomes more important than the display of leisure (Veblen [1899] 1994). Veblen labels this type of behavior as *conspicuous consumption* (Trigg, 2001).

Conspicuous consumption for Veblen was the most important factor in determining consumption behavior, not just for the rich, but for all social classes (Trigg, 2001). Because a social class seeks to imitate the consumption behavior of the class above it, even the poor face pressures to participate in this behavior. Yet the search for status through consumption is never ending, as what at one time may have conferred status, might later be acquired by all and therefore confer no status (Trigg, 2001). To distinguish themselves from others, social groups intentionally seek to acquire new and different goods, hence the fashion cycle (Solomon, 1983). When Veblen was writing in the 1890s, he viewed this urge for conspicuous consumption as the dominant factor behind the consumerism that was becoming more prominent in the United States (Trigg, 2001).

Opposing viewpoints of Veblen's theory argue that such open disclosures of wealth and status have ended and are now being communicated through brands. According to O'Cass and McEwen (2004), the literature identifies status consumption and conspicuous consumption as being the same concept and are sometimes used interchangeably, but the authors debate that they are in fact two separate constructs, both conceptually and practically. Their findings reveal that status consumption and conspicuous consumption are dependent but are distinct constructs when it comes to the dimensions of the motivational behavior of consumers. Status consumption as defined by

Kilsheimer (1993) is "the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolize status both for the individual and surrounding significant others" (p. 341).

Although conspicuous consumption is an important notion, there is a lack of empirical research and theoretical models to test it (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Previous research has built a foundation of knowledge in understanding the consumer in regard to status consumption and conspicuous consumption but little has been done to explore the relationship between the two concepts. One of the strongest measures of social success and achievement is obtaining material goods, but it has yet to be determined whether consumption is conspicuous in regard to the notion of status possessions (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). The present research will explore both concepts as important to messages conveyed within hip-hop.

Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) argue that Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption is based on the idea that those who freely exhibit their wealth receive selective treatment from their peers. This, in turn, increases the desire to indicate status through product, price, quantity, and quality (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996). Eastman, Goldsmith and Flynn (1999) also argue that conspicuousness of consumption stems from status consumption. The consumption of status goods and status-seeking behavior can heighten the level of perceived status (Eastman et al., 1999). Susceptibility to status consumption leads individuals to become more aware of what observers think of their

possessions and status, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of consumption (Eastman et al., 1999).

The concepts of dress, conspicuous consumption, and status define a large part of hip-hop culture today. Veblen's theory can be applied to this culture and can be used to describe the motivation to obtain wealth by the accumulation of possessions. The hip-hop lifestyle can be considered the new form of conspicuous consumption for the 21st century.

<p style="text-align:center">Status Symbols and Hip-Hop Style</p>

Status symbols are a very prevalent part of hip-hop today and have been since its beginnings. A status symbol is defined as: "something, usually an expensive or rare object that indicates a high social status for its owner" (www.dictionary.com). What is considered a status symbol will differ between countries, based on the states of their economic and technological development, and common status symbols will naturally change over time. Status symbols also reveal the cultural values of a society. For example, in a consumption-driven society, having money or wealth and things that can be bought, such as cars, houses, or fine clothing are considered status symbols. Some examples of status in the past were pearls and jade jewelry, family name, and even books. Today there are many possessions that are perceived as status symbols in Western society. These include the trophy wife or husband, a large expensive house, luxury cars and yachts, fine clothes, excessively expensive accessories, jewelry and the latest technological gadgets.

One of the most popular symbols of the hip-hop lifestyle today are "grillz," which are temporary or permanent jeweled coverings for the teeth (see figure 10). To produce

<p style="text-align:center">33</p>

the fronts, jewelers use a waxy substance to create a dental impression, which is then coated with additional chemical solutions and left for 30 minutes to harden. The metal is then designed to the customer's taste (Stephen, 2006). The "grillz" phenomenon has long been connected to hip-hop history. Once crafted solely for corrective dental procedures such as crowns and fillings, gold-capped teeth, also called "fronts" slowly became chic in the late 1970s (Stephen, 2006). Grills rose to prominence in the 1990s when Dirty South rappers wore them as a symbol of their wealth and success. Since then, grills have emerged as the latest trend among young people across urban America (Stephen, 2006).

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 10. Various types of Grillz, 2005
(www.wikipedia.org)

 Despite their increasing popularity, critics say grills are yet another example of hip-hop's obsession with bling-bling (Stephen, 2006). Birdman, a New Orleans rapper, claims to have an excess of $100,000 worth of platinum and jewels in his mouth alone (see figure 11).

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 11: Rap Artist "Birdman (aka Baby)" wearing platinum jewelry
(Source: www.starpulse.com)

Paul Wall, a Houston-based rapper, who has about $25,000 worth of diamond-and-platinum in his mouth, has created a lucrative business capitalizing on the grills phenomenon. His website, www.grillsbypaulwall.com, makes it possible for just about anyone to attain an expensive smile. Prices on the site range from $65 to $900. Through the store, TV Jewelry, Wall opened with jeweler Johnny Dang, custom-made grills are sold for more than $30,000 each (top and bottom) (Stephen, 2006). Wall currently is in negotiations to create platinum and diamond-encrusted braces for kids. Although this venture has not been successful thus far, it points to how grills could soon become a common occurrence in mainstream society (see figure 12).

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Figure 12: Rapper Paul Wall wearing "grillz"
(Source: www.paulwallworld.com)

In Western societies, people consume more than is necessary for survival and comfort, and one reason for this consumption is the meaning it provides (Richins, 1994b). Richins and Dawson (1992) suggest that people who highly value material needs place possessions and their acquisition at the center of their lives, value possessions as a means of achieving happiness, and use possessions as an indicator of their own and others' success. According to Richins (1994b), such people are likely to have different kinds of experiences and cultivate different types of meanings with respect to their possessions than a person who places a low value on materialism.

Materialists, or those who are interested in materialism, are thought to have an

increased tendency to consume than other people (Richins & Dawson, 1992) and that the

purpose is that of possession (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi &Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Materialism is a term used to describe the effects of equating personal happiness with

buying material possessions. Such desires for acquisition can be traced back to ancient

civilizations (Rigby & Rigby, 1949). Materialism is a concept that is multi-cultural and is

not geographically specific. Belk (1985) defines materialism as:

> The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels
> of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are
> believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. (p. 291)

Consumption is an effective means of forming and communicating identity when

status symbols become markers of that identity (Bonsu & Belk, 2003). Belk (1984)

suggests that what a person does was once a stronger determinant of self-image than it is

today, in that as societies grow larger and become more anonymous, individuals take on

multiple role identities. Materialism is a value that represents the individual's perspective

regarding the role possessions should play in his/her life (Richins, 1994a). Materialistic

individuals are thought to be less content with other areas of their lives than non-

materialistic people (Belk, 1985; Richins, 1987). In spite of the relationship between

materialism and happiness, the role that materialism plays in defining the self is crucial

(Belk, 1985). Materialistic individuals are especially likely to use possessions to signify

characteristics of success to themselves and to others (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Materialism: A Cultural Value

Materialism has become a cultural value in today's society and is a significant element of the hip-hop lifestyle. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) suggest the general perspective of materialism is the value placed upon the acquiring of material objects. The evolution of consumption as a culturally accepted practice for seeking personal success, happiness, and the idea of the "good life" was one of the most prevalent trends of the twentieth century (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). From a broader perspective, materialism can be considered to be the hidden side of consumer behavior (Hirschman & LaBarbera, 1990). This notion is supported by Richins and Dawson (1992) who suggest that individuals whose primary focus is the acquisition of material possessions demonstrate decreased life satisfaction. Belk (1985) argues that these individuals also exhibit decreased levels of happiness, while Kasser and Ryan (1993) found that such consumers experience increased levels of depression.

Materialism appears to be a value that is relative to personal possessions and how an individual uses them as a means of expression (Richins, 1994a). Personal values are often characterized by the objects people consider to be most important (Richins, 1994a). Value is the most evident cultural belief associated with material objects (Prown, 1982). As long as the material object continues to be valuable such value will inhere in the object (Prown, 1982). Scholars believe personal values are essential when it comes to materialism, and if this is true, such values will influence what people consume (Richins, 1994a).

Material values can be translated into personal values (Richins, 1994a). That is,

the literature suggests that an individual's personal identity can be interpreted by

observing his or her possessions (Burroughs, Drews, & Hallman, 1991; Holman, 1981).

This is due to the influence of social stereotypes in correlation with an individual and his

or her possessions (Hyatt, 1992). Possessions are thought to be a part of a culture's

system of communication and are used to communicate aspects of the self (McCracken,

1986; Sirgy, 1982). The role that possessions play in the communication of information

about individuals is emphasized by Douglas and Isherwood (1979). This social

communication system, as they view it, allows consumers to choose and value

possessions for their meaning within the cultural system. A number of scholars including

Belk (1988), Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), and Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) have

described the importance of possessions for both forming and reflecting the self as

well as within the shaping of one's personal identity.

According to Richins (1994b), possessions, or material objects, convey two types

of meaning: private and public. Subjective meanings of possessions that are shared by

society as a whole are public meanings. Public meaning is relevant to a large number of

consumer goods (Hirschman, 1989; Munson & Spivey, 1981). Public meanings often

form as a result of the socialization of individuals and enculturation of experiences,

including exposure to all types of media (Richins, 1994b). In other words, cultural

symbols and their meanings are molded and supported in social systems; individuals with

similar enculturation experiences tend to attach similar meanings to symbols (Richins,

1994b). According to Richins (1994b) public meanings of some goods do not change,

while others do as a reflection of changes in popular culture. Private meanings are developed over time as the individual continues to have frequent contact with the goods or objects (Richins, 1994b).

Materialism and Hip-Hop

Hip-hop style has changed significantly over the years, and today has become a prominent part of popular fashion as a whole across the world and for multiple ethnicities (Mitchell, 2001a). In the beginning, rappers wore gold jewelry, but their lyrics were about talent and their love of hip-hop. Today, skill is no longer emphasized or even necessary to acquire success, and has in some ways been overshadowed by a focus on glitz and glamour. In the early days of hip-hop, the focus was on beats, rhymes and break dancing. Nameplate belts, Sergio Valente jeans and running suits were the distinctive elements of old hip-hop style (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). Many solo rap artists and groups such as Run DMC demonstrated their success with a single, thick gold rope chain and shell toe Adidas sneakers (see figure 13). Other popular items of dress were large glasses, Kangol hats, and multi-finger rings.

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Figure13. Run-D.M.C., 1980s
(Source: www.wikipedia.org)

Hip-hop has typically been about creating a unique "look" or style (Oh, 2005).

Before video and the internet the only way for a rapper to make a name for him or herself

was to wear something different. For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s groups

such as Afrika Bambaataa and Soulsonic Force, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five,

and The Cold Crush Brothers (see figure 14) all relied on unique styles of dress to define

their "musical personalities" (Oh, 2005).

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 14. The Cold Crush Brothers, 1980s
(Source: www.jayquan.com)

By the mid-to-late 1980s, many hip-hop artists and other entertainers began focusing on gold jewelry (Oh, 2005). During this time, the economic situation for those living in the inner-city improved somewhat, and this made it possible for some to buy jewelry to show others status achievement (Oh, 2005). Gold jewelry along with designer outfits, floor-length furs, and expensive cars let everyone know they had achieved success. As a result, the image of the rapper wearing a thick rope chain became a national phenomenon. Although many of the rope chains were hollow and faux gold, they nevertheless became a definitive staple of hip-hop fashion (Oh, 2005). Artists like LL Cool J, Slick Rick, Big Daddy Kane and Eric B & Rakim (see figure 15), wore gold everywhere in the form of necklaces, rings, teeth, pendants, and watches (Oh, 2005).

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Figure 15. "Old school" rapper Slick Rick
(Source: www.starpulse.com)

According to Chandler and Chandler-Smith (2005), the rising popularity of Public

Enemy's Black Nationalism inspired the resurgence of radical dress of the 1960s, to

become another popular hip-hop style in the 1980s. The main elements were T-shirts

bearing messages such as "It's a Black thing, you wouldn't understand," wearing Kente

cloth, Malcolm X baseball caps, African inspired apparel and leather medallions

featuring the revolutionary colors red, black, and green from the radical generation of the

1960s (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005).

By the early 1990s a darker, more developed sound, best exemplified by the

rise of artists such the Wu Tang Clan, Mobb Deep, and Notorious B.IG. began to emerge

in rap (Oh, 2005). The stories told by their lyrics were often disturbing, yet poignant, and

the archetype of drug dealer-turned-rapper they crafted continues to be the formula used

by many of today's rap stars. These MCs openly declared their loyalty to the new style of rap, communicating their image by adopting the style of a "flashy drug dealer" (Oh, 2005). At the same time, entrepreneurs were starting their own labels, creating entourages, and marketing themselves through diamond-encrusted logo pendants, still important to the look of hip-hop and rap today.

By the end of the 1990s, hip-hop began outselling country music for the first time, making it the most popular genre in the US (Oh, 2005). Rappers were becoming well compensated, and benefiting from its rise in popularity, many started their own record label or clothing line, selling products in nationally televised commercials, socializing with high society and being sought out by Hollywood. The money was spent as quickly as it was made, often for purchases of jewelry and other expensive objects. Successful rappers found they could afford to buy as much as they wanted without limit, accelerating the use of status symbols as indicators of success (Oh, 2005).

The late 1990s cemented the popularity of materialism or the "bling-bling" lifestyle in rap music, which can be considered the hip-hop version of conspicuous consumption (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005). The style of legendary performers Fats Domino (see figure 16) and Issac Hayes (see figure 17) is being duplicated in this method of excessive adornment which justifies the use of flashy jewelry for men. Bling-bling erased the notion that wearing jewelry signified femininity or homosexuality and was epitomized in Domino's signature star diamond watch and ring, and later Hayes' famous chain mail upper body suit and designer sunglasses (Chandler & Chandler-Smith, 2005).

Images not included due to copyright reasons

Figure 16: Fats Domino, 1950s   Figure 17: Issac Hayes, 1970s
(Source: www.rockabillyhall.com)   (Source: www.avclub.com)

Although references to wealth have existed since the beginning of hip-hop, the new "bling-bling" culture became a part of hip-hop's commercial success due to the videos of Puff Daddy and Bad Boy Records and Master P's No Limit Records. The term "bling-bling" was first used in 1999 by Cash Money Records artist B.G. on his single "Bling-Bling," and the artists on the Cash Money label were considered the epitome of this materialist lifestyle and attitude.

Although many rappers today pursue and celebrate this excessive lifestyle, and particularly those known as gangster rappers, others, especially those outside of the hip-hop mainstream, have criticized the idealized pursuit of bling-bling as being too materialistic. For example, after platinum replaced gold as the most popular precious

metal in hip-hop fashion, it became commonplace for artists and fans alike to wear platinum or silver jewelry, often embedded with significant amounts of diamonds. Platinum jewelry later became a prominent source of bragging rights for hip-hop performers and audiences. Some have criticized this as setting a bad example for America's youth. Nevertheless, relying on the media, today's new generation of rappers have used these symbols of success to create a lifestyle and image imitated by people all over the world.

During the late 1990s, music videos moved away from a focus on dancing and a single gold chain to a proliferation of materialistic symbols of success. The earliest reference found in a song can be traced to DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince's "Everything That Glitters (Ain't Gold)", which was released in 1989 on the album *And In This Corner*. Mainstream hip-hop music's fixation with bling-bling and other material and luxury goods has led to much criticism and charges that the phenomenon promotes consumerism and materialism. This in turn strengthens racist arguments that young African-American men are incapable of higher or more virtuous spiritual goals than material gain, thereby reinforcing the *hood rich* stereotype (Dyson, 2007).

Images focusing on symbols of wealth and status such as money, jewelry, cars and fashion are still an integral part of hip-hop in the 2000s. Images promoting the accumulation of material objects continue to increase as more rap artists achieve commercial success. Often it appears that the more compensation they receive, the more they focus on maintaining their expensive lifestyle and exhibiting these status symbols through the media.

Materialism and the Media

Music videos play a crucial role in the reception of music and popular culture, especially for rap (Rose, 1994). Rap videos have become a creative outlet for African-American artists that at one time were nonexistent. Primary themes for rap videos are often location and identity, and settings are most commonly subways, buses, abandoned buildings, and street corners in inner-city locations. Music video budgets are normally a portion of the advance that artists receive when they sign their initial contract (Rose, 1994). Many rap videos today feature the most expensive cars available, such as the Rolls Royce Phantom and the Mercedes Maybach (usually props and not always owned by the artist) (see figures 18 and 19). In the beginning, record companies were not too concerned about the creative process of the music video and left that responsibility to artists and directors. But by the early 1990s, their main concern became the commercial appeal of the final product, whether the artist's image is being property represented, and whether the image looks good (Rose, 1994).

Images not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 18. Maybach 57   Figure 19. Rolls Royce Phantom
(Source: www.cartypes.com)   (Source: www.luxurylaunches.com)

Rap videos were virtually nonexistent on television in the U.S. until April

1984 with the debut of "Video Music Box," the first television program to feature hip-

hop videos (www.imdb.com, 2007). The show aired on WNYC-TV in New York City

from 1984 to 1995. "Video Music Box" and the Los Angeles based program "Pump It

Up!" remain in local syndication and continue to play African-American rap videos that

are considered to be too militant for MTV. In August of 1988, MTV created "Yo! MTV

Raps" (www.imdb.com, 2007). Offering a mix of rap videos, interviews with rap stars,

live in-studio performances and comedy, the program initially aired once a week. Other

cable stations created platforms for African-American music such as Black Entertainment

Television's (BET) "Rap City." Premiering in 1989, it is currently the longest running

music video show on cable to feature rap music (www.imdb.com, 2007).

Hip-hop music videos of today emphasize the lavish lifestyles of rap artists with

material wealth as the main focus (Muhammed, 2001). However, it is interesting to note

that, even if someone had never seen a rap video, messages of the lifestyle of the artist are quite clear through lyrics. The lyrics of hip-hop songs illustrate an apparent obsession with how much money, cars, jewelry, guns, technological devices and sparsely dressed women can be accumulated. Here the message is clear: success is more often than not defined by how much an individual can acquire and is measured by the kind of cars that are driven as well as the jewelry and clothing that is worn. One example of how lyrics reinforce the need to create and maintain an excessive lifestyle comes from rap artist Gucci Mane (see figure 20), who found a tremendous amount of commercial success with his song "Icy" in 2005.

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Figure 20: Rap Artist "Gucci Mane"
(Source: www.starpulse.com)

"Icy" is the current hip-hop term that has replaced the term "bling-bling" to refer to

the wearing of platinum and diamond embedded jewelry. Gucci Mane dedicates an entire

song to his love of jewelry and materialism:

> Got a house around my neck, and my wrist on chill
> Any given time, 250 in ya grill (a quarter million?)
> All I do is talk s***, u can even add a couple grand for my outfit
>
> She diggin my fit, she think I'm da s***
> Is this a chain on my neck, or the watch in my wrist
> Maybe the ice in my ear, or my bracelet
>
> Ya gotta be a dime piece, just to look at the rocks in my time piece
>
> I got so many rocks, on my chain and watch
> I know I'm da s***, my chain hang down to my d***
> I know I'm da bomb, just look at my charms
> I know I'm da s***, my chain hang down to my d***
>
> Partial Song Lyrics to "Icy" by Gucci Mane
> Album: *Trap House,* May 24, 2005 Atlantic Records

According to Simmel (1978), possessions are the medium by which a person's

character gains visible reality. Rochberg-Halton (1984) describes possessions as

"representations of the self." There is evidence that others (acting as observers) are

capable of "reading" elements of a person's identity by observing that person's

possessions (Burroughs, Drews, & Hallman, 1991; Holman, 1981). Owning material

goods is a central feature of "success" in this world and provides a degree of access to

social achievement and advancement that may not otherwise be attained. The allure that

hip-hop artists have often revolves around their physical appearance and material

possessions and the connection made between the two (Muhammed, 2001). As Selwyn

Seyfu Hinds (2001), author and hip-hop journalist writes, this is not always a positive thing:

> Most rappers are young men from fairly tough circumstances who dreamed of matching the materialism they saw in captains of industry like Donald Trump. We need to do a better job at promoting what financial empowerment really means. (www.thenewstribune.com/soundlife.com)

Many question why hip-hop has become saturated with violence and sexual themes alongside the focus on materialism. Some argue that hip-hop reflects societal conditions and symbolizes, dramatizes, and articulates what is already going on in everyday life (Muhammed, 2001). A contested issue, what is clear is the level of attention given to images of luxury goods as symbols of success.

Today, most of the imagery conveyed by hip-hop has been created by record labels and other types of media in order to sell records. It is important to note that not all artists fall victim to this, as most seek to remain true to who they are apart from any status symbols (Muhammed, 2001). But for some, talent is eventually tied to material possession of those goods that appeal to the desires and ambitions of the artists as well as consumers and fans.

Periodicals such as "Dub Magazine" and "The Source" help to solidify the importance of materialism in hip-hop culture. "Dub Magazine" is an automobile lifestyle magazine that features the latest trends for vehicles and highlights the newest possessions of well-known rappers and athletes. Types of possessions range anywhere from audio and video technology to designer car interiors and custom wheels. A few of the most popular logos recently featured are Gucci and Louis Vuitton. However, the magazine is best

known for showcasing the coveted twenty inch or larger premium collection wheels (see figure 21).

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Figure 21: 20 Inch Rim "TIS 07" 2007
(Source: www.twentyinchesstrong.com)

"The Source" is a major hip-hop culture magazine with a predominantly African-American teen following that features a variety of articles focusing on everything hip-hop (Rose, 1994). Coverage of hip-hop artist's lives generally includes at least minor references to their most recent jewelry acquisition, or cost of their newest car. Today, many rappers are also known to drop the names of their jewelers and clothing designers in their songs or during their interviews. One such name is Jacob Arabo, better known as Jacob the Jeweler, who creates fine jewelry with rare gems, limited edition yellow and rose gold watches and custom-made jewelry bearing rappers' names or company logos. Couture brands such as Ralph Lauren's Purple Label and Giorgio Armani are similarly dropped in reference to how much money is spent on one ensemble on a given day.

Publications such as "The Source" and "Dub Magazine" repeatedly highlight the

luxurious lifestyles and advertisements being depicted in rap videos. The message is clear:

Happiness is linked to owning such material possessions.

For some this extreme materialism is viewed as a negative aspect of hip-hop

culture. There is concern that young people living in poorer communities will think of

wealth as material objects alone and not of the fleeting happiness or security they provide.

According to Joshua Kondwani Wright (2006), Howard University Ph. D. student and

chair of the university's first hip-hop symposium, the messages conveyed by hip-hop

artists and their record labels often come under fire for what they teach young people

about values:

> Hip-hop is one of the main voices and cultural lifestyle bases for many of today's black children, adolescents, and young adults. Hip-hop has increasing political, economic, spiritual, and cultural influences on youth. Unfortunately, it is currently receiving more attention for its association with violence, materialism, and misogyny. (www.allhiphop.com/hipnews.com, 2006)

The Global Impact of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop music originated in the United States but has since spread throughout the world. It was virtually unknown outside of the United States until the 1980s. During that time, it expanded globally and became a large part of popular music culture in many countries around the world. The four main elements of American hip-hop culture – rapping (MCing), grafitti, breakdancing, and DJing - are still the foundation of local interpretations of the genre. However, hip-hop has become a force for youth associations and is a tool for defining local identity globally (Mitchell, 2001a). As a result, hip-hop can no longer be viewed simply as an expression of African-American culture, as the consumption of rap music within the popular music industry continues to dominate pop culture around the world (Mitchell, 2001a).

Although there are a few studies that examine the presence of hip-hop outside the United States, hip-hop as a local expression has continued to expand (Mitchell, 2001a). This expansion has occurred in countries throughout Europe and Asia, including Korea, France, England, Germany and Italy. As discussed below, in order to create their own musical models and language, youth in these countries have combined American hip-hop with local influences, and African-American influences with regional elements. Foreign developments in hip-hop such as these have not been fully documented, thereby revealing a distinct absence of their interpretations in academic literature.

Hip-hop's relevance as a global movement has its beginning in cultural codes which readily mesh with diverse cultural practices, emphasizing its resiliency and power as a vehicle of integration and empowerment (Mitchell, 2001a). Hip-hop fashion has

become a global African-American platform of this era that, according to Chandler and

Chandler-Smith (2005), has been imitated more than any other fashion trend in history.

Because hip-hop has been become such a dominant factor in apparel styles, it has

positioned American fashion at the center of international fashion (Chandler & Chandler-

Smith, 2005). Hip-hop's practices and style predominantly influence youth cultures,

sending a message of American popular culture around the world.

Hip-Hop in Asia

Second to the U.S., the largest music market in the world is Japan, with the

majority of sales coming from Japanese artists. According to Condry (2001), sales in

1997 totaled 588 billion yen or $6.8 billion USD. Although Western artists are very

popular in Japan, Japanese artists own the market by three to one (Condry, 2001).

Hip-hop first entered Japan in the form of breakdancing in 1983, and then later

through DJing, rap, and graffiti. The U.S. movie *Wild Style*, which was shown in theatres

around Tokyo is thought to be responsible for Japan's initial interest in breakdancing

(Condry, 2001). During the 1980s, "Rapper's Delight" was achieving commercial

acclaim in the U.S. as the first rap song, but was also achieving similar popularity in

Japan (Condry, 2001).

Clubs were the most effective method used by Japanese artists. In 1986, a club

dedicated to hip-hop music, called "Hip Hop," was opened in Tokyo (Condry, 2001). In

1988, the label Major Force, focused on hip-hop and dance music, was started by Takagi

Kan. From 1988 to 1992 many contests for rapping, DJing and breakdancing were also

held at clubs. By the 1990s Japanese rap music had entered into the Japanese mainstream.

Rap, hip-hop and other types of musical styles are popular in Korea, where half the population is under the age of thirty (Morelli, 2001). Shopping districts in Seoul feature the latest rap videos on televisions and rap music can be heard in fast-food restaurants, grocery stores and gas stations. However, according to Morelli (2001), rap music is not a true category in Korea. Korean youth place high value on African-American cultural practices but they do not imitate it, rather they use it to create their own musical styles (Morelli, 2001). They have also adopted clothing and hairstyles from U.S. hip-hop culture to create their own hip-hop style, while African-American phraseology is often used to provide authenticity.

Hip-Hop in Australia

Arthur (2006) explores the globalization of hip-hop within Australia where U.S. hip-hop culture has been transformed to fit local culture. Australian hip-hop shares in the basic activities such as rapping, DJing and modes of self-expression that originated in the South Bronx. Yet through local interpretation of these essential practices, Australian hip-hop has created its own unique identity. For example, when the Australian rap group Hilltop Hoods released their fourth album, *The Hard Road*, it debuted at Number 1 on the Australian music charts. It was the first local album to have such commercial success and helped cement hip-hop's acceptance into Australian popular culture (Arthur, 2006).

Hip-Hop in Canada

The development of rap music in Canada was slow mainly because of the rarity of ghettos in Canada's largest cities, but was gradually introduced by individuals of Caribbean origin living in Halifax, Montreal and Toronto where the emergence of the first rappers took place (Chamberland, 2001). However, in Canada interest in hip-hop quickly moved away from the black communities to become adopted predominantly by white-middle class youth.

The current rap scene in Canada continues to be confined to certain areas and it has experienced a slow progression due to the music industry's lack of belief in the genre's potential (Chamberland, 2001). Although virtually ignored by major record companies, hip-hop has developed a viable subculture throughout Canada. This has led to the formation of various types of media supporting hip-hop, including radio stations and magazines (Chamberland, 2001). Today Vancouver is the primary location for Canadian rap, but Toronto continues to be the center of the distribution of hip-hop music (Chamberland, 2001).

Hip-Hop in Europe

According to Prévos (2001), France is the world's second largest hip-hop market and the fifth largest global music market. Afrika Bambaata is credited with establishing the Zulu Nation in France during the early 1980s (Prévos, 2001). A national television network in France created a weekly program called "Hip-Hop" in 1983 (Mitchell, 2001a). This program assisted in the dissemination of rap music and hip-hop culture to the young people in poor suburban areas of Paris (Prévos, 2001).

By the late 1980s, several rappers began imitating themes found in African-American songs. French rappers talked about the hardships of life in the poorer neighborhoods or ghettos and a resistance to the social, political and economic orders within France (Prévos, 2001). Although the period of adoption of African-American musical styles ended by the early 1990s, they continued to copy U.S. rappers' styles.

In Germany most of the major record labels had two or three officially signed rap groups by the late 1990s (Pennay, 2001). Much of the attraction to rap music was centered around breakdancing and graffiti but it was not equally accepted by East and West Germany (Pennay, 2001). Many East German youths who adopted the practices of hip-hop viewed it as a chance to find true identification and to express themselves. They became a tight knit community that distributed smuggled records from the West, and used toothbrushes to duplicate graffiti art onto t-shirts (Pennay, 2001).

German-language rap entered the mainstream in 1993 without any significant influence from the United States (Pennay, 2001). One of the first rap groups to emerge in Germany was Advanced Chemistry with their first single "Fremd im eigenan Land" ("Foreign in My Own Country"). The video for the song received widespread airplay on MTV Europe and was successful because it confronted the German middle class with the unpleasant reality of life as a minority (Pennay, 2001).

Since 1993, rap has been established as a thriving genre in German music (Pennay, 2001). Many artists continue to make a name for themselves within the market and hip-hop continues to be the theme of local reinterpretation. The reunification of Germany

marked the development of a local music scene in which hip-hop played a significant role (Pennay, 2001).

Together with France and Germany, Holland is one of the largest European markets of U.S. pop music (Wermuth, 2001). An extensive period of time exists between the creation of rap in the U.S. and rap's adaptation by Afro-Caribbean Dutch youth in the early 1980s. In its initial stages a relatively small number of African-American youth living in the inner-city ghettos adopted hip-hop after The Sugar Hill Gang's single "Rapper's Delight" reached Number 1 on the Holland national charts (Wermuth, 2001). Movies such as *Colors*, *Breakdance,* and *Electric Boogaloo* also played significant roles in the growth of rap in Holland during the 1980s (Wermuth, 2001). After the imitation of U.S. hip-hop practices, Dutch rappers began writing lyrics using their own style. Between 1982 and 1988, Dutch rappers began to organize themselves into a stable subculture that followed original hip-hop codes of behavior, dress and musical selections and any rap artists that strayed from these rules of conduct were considered to be sell-outs (Wermuth, 2001).

U.S. rap is still quite influential in Dutch rap today but a local hip-hop culture has developed. Dutch hip-hop fans no longer reference U.S. publications like "The Source" or U.S. television networks like MTV, instead they have created their own sources of information (Wermuth, 2001). Hip-hop magazines such as "Art. 12" and "Magic Sounds"; radio and television shows such as "City FM" and "The Pitch" and independent labels such as Ramp Records allow Dutch rappers to become more visible and gain access to a larger audience (Wermuth, 2001).

As in Holland, the first Italian rap songs were performed in English. By the late 1990s many Italian rappers were using conventional Italian and local dialects (Mitchell, 2001b). By 1999 Italian hip-hop was a blend of African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and traditional Italian styles that became the staple for the country's popular music (Mitchell, 2001b).

Today Italian hip-hop is a combination of many different musical genres, elements, and vocal styles. The subcultural movement that emerged from this blend of musical styles was politically aggressive and spoke about the various social and political problems facing the Italian people including homelessness, political corruption, and the Mafia (Mitchell, 2001b).

Italian rappers often use local dialects and orchestration in their music to stay true to their cultural roots (Mitchell, 2001b). Regional forms of expression and folkloric elements now characterize Italian rap music and separate it from rap music in other Western countries (Mitchell, 2001b). Today, Italian hip-hop is a distinctive historically based sound that incorporates peasant songs and dance structures.

For each of the countries discussed in this section on global hip-hop, movies and television seem to be the primary methods of exposure to U.S. hip-hop. Youth culture in each country developed its own version of hip-hop and exhibited various adaptation rates. Yet the essential elements of hip-hop are still the foundation for defining and redefining the hip-hop subculture around the world to create local interpretations and basic cultural styles. The pressure to remain authentic has always been a topic of importance with hip-hop subculture (Mitchell, 2001a). No matter the country, rappers and

fans alike are expected to wear the appropriate clothing and are often frowned upon if they present the incorrect image of the subculture.

Hip-hop has gained monumental success on a global scale and will likely continue to grow as time passes. In the beginning, hip-hop was considered just a fad by many critics but has proven to have significant staying power. It had humble beginnings with the intention of voicing frustrations of inner city life, but today it is more about material success. Hip-hop is now a cultural movement so powerful that it has begun to shape and influence the perspectives of people on a global scale. The success and power individuals obtain through hip-hop sends a message that with material wealth anybody can become somebody, fueling the enormous and enduring appeal of hip-hop.

Summary

As a framework for understanding the role of dress in hip-hop, this chapter provided an overview of conspicuous consumption, including status symbols. Specific attention was paid to materialism and its relevance to media messages of hip-hop. A review of the global spread of hip-hop was also provided. The next chapter will outline the methodology and data collection procedures used in the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the procedure that was used to collect data for the study. Also included is a description of the interview and photo-elicitation methods. A description of the sample and approach to data analysis are also provided.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore how dress is used to communicate within U.S. hip-hop culture. Although the influence of hip-hop has become mainstreamed in the U.S. and even gained monumental success on a global scale, there is a paucity of research on the topic, and particularly its influence within contemporary American popular culture. Hip-hop culture is more than just about material objects and expensive videos, it is a phenomenon that encompasses music, clothing, and a way of life. The goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the role of dress and what it communicates within the hip-hop community, and specifically for African-American males.

Objectives

Four research objectives are used to address the goal of the study and to examine dress in the context of hip-hop. These objectives are:

1. To investigate the role of dress in shaping and expressing identity within hip-hop.

2. To explore the use of material objects, including brand name apparel, as status symbols within hip-hop.

3. To examine the role of consumption-oriented values related to dress within hip-hop.

4. To explore the messages and images used within hip-hop to communicate identity, status, and consumption-oriented values through dress.

Research Design

The design of the study is qualitative, and the in-depth interview and photo-elicitation are the primary methods of data collection. Combined, these two methods were appropriate as they provide the means to reveal and explore the experiences of African-American males relative to hip-hop culture.

In-Depth Interview

One of the most common and recognized forms of qualitative research methods is the interview (Mason, 2002). This method can take the form of a face-to-face interaction or one via the telephone or internet (Mason, 2002). Kvale (1996) defines qualitative research interviews as "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (p. 230). The goal of the qualitative interview is to uncover both factual and meaning levels, but it is more difficult to interview respondents on a meaning level (Kvale, 1996). Open-ended responses to questions therefore provide the researcher with data that are the foundation of interpretation. Passages from the data can reveal the respondents' level of emotion, the way in which they organize their world, thoughts, experiences and perceptions (Patton, 1987).

In-depth interviewing seeks deeper information and understanding than can be acquired by the survey, focus groups, or observation methods (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Ideally, in-depth interviews develop trust between researcher and participant and are similar to the conversations between close friends. But they differ from the kind of dialogue found between friends, in that the researcher intends to use the information for a specific purpose (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). In-depth interviews gather data about the lived experience of the participant relative to the phenomenon studied. This data can then be used to evaluate and verify theories about participation in a particular cultural environment (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001)

Photo-Elicitation Method

The photo-elicitation method was used along with the interview method to facilitate dialogue with each participant. Photo-elicitation is a qualitative method that provides an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of people, their beliefs, and how they interpret their worlds (Collier, 1957).

According to Prosser (1998), the use of image-based research has been undervalued in the social sciences. Photo-elicitation, as an image-based method, has unlimited potential yet it is currently underutilized (Harper, 1998). Benefits of this method include opening up the communication and creating rapport between the researcher and participant (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), and reducing the awkwardness that is often experienced with conventional interviews (Collier, 1957). A drawback of the method is that the photographs can become the focus of the research interview rather than the participant (Carlsson, 2001; Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). Structure is

provided by using a semistructured interview schedule that incorporates the use of photographs, thereby avoiding undue focus on the photographs themselves.

The photo-elicitation process allows the participant to take the lead role in the interview process (Loeffler, 2004). Harper (2002) supports using photo-elicitation because the images can draw forth more in-depth components of the human consciousness than through the use of words alone. According to Clark-Ibanez (2004) the respondents' memories are roused in different ways when asked to view images as compared to solely verbal interviews, and can be revealed in a manner that is not always anticipated by the researcher, in that photographs "sharpen the memory and are charged with psychological and highly emotional elements and symbols" (p. 108).

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews with 12 African-American males aged 20 to 43. Interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants and lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes (See Appendix A for consent form). Questions asked during the interviews are listed in Appendix B: Interview Schedule. During the interviews, the participants were shown images of current and past hip-hop artists and objects linked to the culture in order to prompt discussion of key ideas as well as delve into meanings participants associate with them. These images are included in Appendix C. During the interviews participants were asked to talk about their memories of and experiences with hip-hop based on the photographs.

Sample Selection

Participants were selected via the snowball sampling method. Most were recruited through personal contacts and campus organizations at UNC-Greensboro. The sample was comprised of African-American males living in Greensboro and Winston-Salem, North Carolina who are aware of hip-hop culture. Interviews took place at a location determined convenient by the participant.

Data Analysis

Analysis of participant responses was completed using an interpretive approach. A thematic analysis of interview data was employed in order to address the objectives of the study as well as understand the meanings of hip-hop as shared among members of this cultural group. Thematic analysis is primarily used to explore and interpret the results of qualitative data (Kvale, 1996). The analysis and interpretation was based on interview transcripts and images used. The interview transcripts were read for the purpose of identifying the emergence of themes within the data. The themes were then used to determine the similarities and differences among the participants' responses and to reveal significant meanings. The interpretation comprises Chapter Four.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used in this study. The overall research design, data collection methods used, and data analysis procedures were discussed. The next chapter provides an interpretation of the interview data to address the purpose and objectives of the study.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this research is to explore how dress is used to communicate within U.S. hip-hop culture. The goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the role of dress and what it communicates within the hip-hop community, and specifically for African-American males.

Participant Demographics

All participants in this study are involved in the hip-hop culture to different degrees. A total of 12 African-American males, aged 20 to 43 were interviewed. All are residents of Greensboro and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Participants' occupations ranged from full-time student to Senior Sourcing Manager to Grocery Store Manager. Table 1 indicates the age and occupation of each participant. Names have been changed for the purposes of confidentiality.

Name	Age	Occupation
Wesley	35	Special Needs Educator/Care-Giver
Brandon	20	Student
Gavin	43	Furniture Technician
Evan	21	Group Home Care-Giver
Julian	39	DJ
Aaron	22	Student
Curtis	24	Accountant
Christian	35	Grocery Store Manager
Derek	20	Student/Retail Sales
James	34	Senior Sourcing Manager
Sean	33	Janitor
Mario	29	Design Contractor

Table 1 - Participant Demographics

Thematic Interpretation

As a result of the exploration of the interview responses, several themes

emerged that highlight participant experiences. These themes illustrate similarities and

differences among participant experiences and comprise five conceptual areas: *Growing*

up with Hip-Hop, Identification Issues, Dressing in Hip-Hop Style, Consumption Factors,

and *The Future of Hip-Hop.* Within each conceptual area, issues that surfaced as

important to understanding the role of dress within hip-hop and within participants' lives

are discussed. Each conceptual area and its respective themes form a part of the complete

interpretation of participants' experiences with hip-hop.

Growing up with Hip-Hop

Two themes form the conceptual area of *Growing up with Hip-Hop*: *My first*

experience and *Feelings of nostalgia*. Both reveal how the participants were influenced in

some way by being a part of the growth of the genre. Interestingly, older participants

(aged 33-43) and younger (aged 20-29) participants' first experiences with hip-hop are quite similar, as are their feelings of nostalgia about this initial exposure.

"My first experience with Hip-hop"

Interviews began with the participants being asked to recall their earliest encounter with hip-hop. Participants remember being exposed to hip-hop at different ages and being impacted by it in different ways. The participants were asked to describe what stood out for them in terms of their initial experiences with hip-hop culture. For some, the first experience was a result of interactions with family members who were involved with it:

> My first experience with hip-hop….my father was one of the owners of a club that was very popular in Greensboro back in the mid to late 80s and I used to go up to the club in the daytime hours…we were allowed to go in….he would allow me to hang around the DJ booth and some of the guys would leave records around from the night before, he would allow me to take home the records that they left behind. (Julian)

Similarly, Brandon's father introduced him to the genre:

> My first experience with hip-hop. Well I remember back when I was…I think I was 5 or 4, I remember hearing my dad listening to his Kool Moe Dee CDs…. then I had early experiences with Jay-Z but from them I really didn't know it was him until I went out and got his CD later on. (Brandon)

Aaron's dad listened to hip-hop in front of him and the interest filtered through:

> My first experience……I would say….wow…just basically listening to my dad's, he used to listen to hip-hop a lot….that old school hip-hop like Run DMC and stuff like that…..just riding in the car with him listening to the tapes. (Aaron)

Others were introduced to it by family members closer to their own age. This was the case for Christian who had a cousin that was into hip-hop and got him interested:

My first experience with hip-hop…I believe my first experience was with my cousin…. me and my cousin grew up together and he's slightly older than me and I looked up to him…. he started playing hip-hop and you know I would over hear it in the other room. We pretty much stayed in the same house growing up and the first taste I had was Planet Rock. (Christian)

For Derek, it was an older sister who introduced him to the genre:

I'd probably say, well my sister was older than me. So she would play a lot of Tupac, a lot of Biggie, she listened to a lot of Bad Boy stuff. That's really my first experience with hip-hop as far as the music. I'd just be riding in the car with her listening to it, so I would say that's my first experience I can remember. (Derek)

Other participants, like Mario, first heard hip-hop music at school and sought it out through radio and TV:

Geez…maybe I was 7 or 8…videos on Yo! MTV Raps or something around that age. Even though I wasn't supposed to listen to the radio, I used to sneak and do it anyway. That would be it. Then there's school, you got people who listened to rap. (Mario)

Feelings of Nostalgia

When participants were shown images of early hip-hop artists, all felt nostalgic in some way. Each image seemed to connect them to a memory of childhood exposure to the genre. For some participants, looking at certain images generated positive feelings about themselves as young men and about hip-hop music in general. As James and Wesley explain,

I think again for me as a young teenager and having these images of very strong black male figures you know really. I remember that sense of pride we had like in

70

the mid 80s about being black and the whole black movement with the medallions you know, everything. You know it made me feel good about myself personally. (James)

Well I can remember as a young man from first hearing the music…it was a feel good music, you know… when I was growing up hip-hop music, it would always make me feel good, make me feel like dancing, make me feel like having, having a good time which just makes me feel calm….you know…so it's….to me those were the initial feelings I had listening to hip-hop music when I was growing up it was, it was very positive you know. (Wesley)

For other participants, the images reminded them of how they sought to emulate

the style of a certain artist or to embrace a trend back in the early days. Both Sean and

Mario identified with the images in this way.

(In reference to image of Big Daddy Kane) I probably know his first tape word for word. I mean with the flat top, we all had that. I had the part yes in middle school, that's what's funny. But, I loved his style, he had so much charisma. Yeah I liked Big Daddy Kane a lot. (Sean)

These images relate to my first experience. The flat tops, the fades, pants, I used to want a peace sign in my head, but I couldn't get that. I'm glad I didn't now. I had a flashback there! (Mario)

Curtis and Christian share similar feelings of nostalgia, and specifically for former

hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur (shown in an image from 1992):

There's a whole bunch I can say about Tupac. Tupac is the smartest, most intelligent hip-hop artist to ever grace the stage. Like when you listen to Tupac, he made you feel like free, like nobody can hold us down. We moving up whether you like it or not. I pretty much sum Tupac up in those words. (Curtis)

Tupac takes me back to '97 when I had my own apartment. I'm not going to say I tried to emulate him, but there are certain things he used to rap about that I could feel. You know I could just recall images of me on my deck in my townhouse smoking a cigar listening to Tupac. (Christian)

71

Clearly, images of hip-hop from the past not only brought up feelings of nostalgia for the

participants, but they also elicited positive feelings about belonging to a larger social

group while being a part of something culturally significant.

Identification Issues

Three themes form the conceptual area of *Identification Issues: Artists, Lyrics and*

*Image*s. *Artists* reveals the impact that hip-hop artists have had on the participants'

personal style. It is interesting to note that older participants (aged 34-43) did not

identify strongly with any artist, lyrics or image at the present time, but did recall

identifying with these things during their youth. In contrast, younger participants (aged

20-29) described identifying more with current hip-hop artists. For all participants,

identification with hip-hop in general does surface as an important part of their personal

development.

Artists

Hip-hop has often been focused on certain key personalities or groups. Each

participant cited at least one such artist who was influential. For example, in 1988, when

Christian was 16 years old, his favorite rap group was Public Enemy:

> My favorite rap group [Public Enemy] of all time growing up when I was 16. You
> would always have a rapper you would try to emulate and try to wear the little
> black pants like Public Enemy. I had my P cap, my black Wranglers and I used to
> listen to everything they'd say. (Christian)

Some participants mentioned identifying with artists in the past who, even though they

may have changed, they continue to follow. Evan sees this as the case with his favorite

rapper:

> My favorite rapper is Lil'Wayne… He can speak on everything, he isn't on just the materialism, the bling-bling like he used to be. Now he's taken a step up and he's…..I just like his style. He can rap about anything taking anybody's beats and pretty much making them better. So that's why I like him…I just like his style he doesn't rap about just one thing like most rappers do. (Evan)

The majority of the participants talked about the influence particular hip-hop artists had on their personal style or behavior during their youth. Mario definitely remembers being influenced by certain artists when he was in middle school:

> As far as looking towards their music, you would dress like them. I mean back then I was young, like I was in middle school going into high school during that time. (Mario)

Sean describes emulating the whole image, including the dress:

> They had an influence on me as far as the cars I had purchased during those days, the way I dressed. I went through the little jewelry phase, the gold chains and that type of stuff. Tried to have that swagger and get all the attention, like the attention they were getting. (Sean)

Lyrics

The second theme, *Lyrics*, discusses the impact that the music of a particular artist or artists had on the participants. When asked whether they thought that hip-hop was about the lyrics, all agreed that it was, albeit differently today than in the past. Participants aged 29-43 identified more with the hip-hop lyrics of the artists of the 1980s and early to mid 1990s. The younger participants, aged 20-24, while they had a lot of respect for those same artists, identified more with hip-hop lyrics of the late 1990s to the present.

73

All participants believed that the lyrical content of some hip-hop during the late 1980s and early 1990s was important or innovative. Certain artists were cited as being particularly influential. For Julian, it was the artist Rakim:

> When Rakim came on the scene he forced MCs to go back to the lab and step their game up, as he brought in a more harder, thorough brand of MCing, he compacted lots of words into small spaces. His thoughts just transcended beyond the boroughs and the avenues, he took it to a whole other level. (Julian)

James and Gavin agreed:

> I think Rakim just stepped the game up in terms of lyricism. He was definitely ahead of his time I would say. (James)
>
> Eric B. and Rakim, yep that's them. I always liked their style too…like I said the rap back then was so clean, you know what I'm sayin'. His lyric….everything was so different then. And now it's about power and money, you see that's the big difference… (Gavin)
>
> Christian cited Tupac Shakur as having a particular style that was innovative, and even incendiary.
>
> Tupac had an edge and an anger to his lyrics that I really liked. He would call out rappers that I didn't care too much for, which I thought was cool. (Christian)

Some participants felt the lyrics of today are not as meaningful as in the past, and even to the point that they sound artificial and commercialized. However, while the lyrics are disregarded, the music or beats can still be appreciated:

> I still like it, but mostly I listen to the beats because I can't really listen to what people are saying because everybody's lying. I kind of hate the way everybody talks about the same thing. (Mario)

74

Evan sees it as mostly image, with little substance.

> People aren't speaking on real topics, its false advertising that's why it's falling off… Nowadays you don't….you see a certain rapper talking about things but you never hear about or never see them doing it, none of that. Like I said it's a lot of false advertisement yeah…. (Evan)

Images

The third theme, *Images*, examines the participants' opinions and perspectives on present and past images of hip-hop. A number of the participants voiced the opinion that hip-hop has changed over the years, but not necessarily for the good. In the early years of hip-hop, the image was about being unique, sending a positive message and creating your own personal style. Gavin remembers how Run DMC had this unique look:

> At this time these guys [Run DMC] here were, they started out young plus they had their own image, you know what I'm sayin'? Their style, their own style….they were always, you know unique with their style, you know, they dressed alike, they wore hats and chains. They brought the big gold chains in and they were wearing Adidas that's their trademark really, with no shoestrings. (Gavin)

These looks would become major trends among the subculture, and in time, shifted the focus from the music to the look itself. As Sean describes:

> So as far as how you would dress how you would carry yourself. They talk a lot about the things back then…today…you know hip-hop today they don't talk about nothing. As far as looking towards their music, you would dress like them. I mean back then I was young, like I was in middle school going into high school during that time. (Sean)

Images presented did seem to resonate with many of the participants, who identified with the early artists as African-American role models. As Wesley explains,

I think when you're a teenager or a pre-teen, you're very young and impressionable…and so you see things on TV or hear them on the radio and you say "I want to be just like him or her. I want to dress like him or her. I want to dress like he dresses, sound like him or have the kind of jewelry he does or drive the kind of car he does."...You get older, you get wiser hopefully and you start to realize some things are okay to emulate, some things are not. (Wesley)

Some participants believe that the images of certain current artists portray African-American males in negative ways. As Evan describes, they create stereotypes about black males that detract from the value of the music itself:

Some artists see trying to bring it back like some of the older guys, who established like the Jay-Zs, the TIs, the Lil' Waynes. They [newer artists] are making it worse, they're making it bad. Then the ones who are getting their foot in the door, they lead the media to believe this is how they speak of it in the media, they can't blame…. it's not like it used to be. I mean when you see the people you see everyday. ..these rappers everyday, these are the faces of African-Americans that you are seeing so of course everyone is…I'm not going to say everybody, but they stereotype black men…pants sagging, jewelry…that's the media, that's, what people are seeing, our face, our black people we're seeing everybody on BET. Of course that's why they are going to stereotype a black man as pants sagging, hats, baggy clothes all that stuff. (Evan)

Overall participants' opinions about hip-hop today were framed by their views of its development. Each acknowledged that it has changed as expressed through the artists, lyrics, and images associated with the genre.

Dress within Hip-Hop

Dress is clearly an important part of the messages communicated within hip-hop today. Participants referenced it frequently and in different ways. Many cited different influences on dress coming out of hip-hop, such as certain brands and styles. Most of the participants felt their sense of style was to some degree influenced by hip-hop. All agreed

that there is a time and place for wearing full on hip-hop style, even though its influence

is becoming more mainstreamed.

Types of Influence on Dress

Some of the current styles in dress within hip-hop are very popular among many

of the participants. These styles include that of the "rock star," which is a favorite of both

Curtis and Derek:

> Right now I'd probably have to say my style…they can't see me but I'm wearing
> the chain [on his jeans]. I'd say I lean more towards the Dip-Set, the whole rock
> star….. as far as the style you got people dressing up with chains on their jeans.
> (Curtis)
>
> As far as the rock star look, it's kind of in now as far as everyone dressing like
> rock stars, with chains and the graphic t-shirts and stuff. So I think I dress like that
> sort of sometimes. (Derek)

Hip-hop style has become quite diversified, with different trends defining "sub

styles" related to the genre. A general influence can be seen across the participants'

descriptions, ranging from details like certain cuts of jeans and t-shirts to certain brands

of sneakers:

> Yeah, I still try to keep up with the trends you know, I'm not the baggy pants
> wearing type of guy. I wear every now and then a hip-hop related shirt. I try to
> keep up with the sneakers, I'm still a sneakers man. But that's pretty much it,
> sneakers, t-shirts, jeans. (Christian)

For Sean, the influence remains in the form of how he sees dress as a means of comfort.

> I guess I was raised that way, I'm not a flashy guy but I like to look good. Hip-
> hop clothes are comfortable; I know people label you as far as what you wear.
> (Sean)

77

It appears that participants were more influenced by hip-hop dress when they were younger, and more susceptible in general to being influenced by hip-hop styles. For Aaron, during his first years of college he was heavily influenced by hip-hop when it comes to his personal style, "The first couple of years in college yeah…but then I gained a sense of self so I kind of found myself like looking at my wardrobe." After maturing and moving into his senior year, hip-hop was no longer an obvious influence on his personal style. As he gained a sense of who he was, he began to dress according to his changing social roles and expectations:

> I'm like "I'm not feeling this, I'm not wearing this anymore," so it was off with the long white tee, baggy jeans, stuff like that. It is more custom fit and looks presentable as I grew. I want to dress older, I want it to help me as I go out and look for jobs, stuff like that…it sets a bad example. I wouldn't say it sets a bad example but people perceive you one way if you wear something. Especially if it's….I don't know …it's just the clothing and the attitude is just not me anymore. So I mean I'm grown, I've grown older more mature. So priorities are different trying to make money, trying to get a job and everything. So clothes…..our appearance, talk, everything has to change you know. (Aaron)

Since the beginning of hip-hop, brands have been important to communicating the wearer's status. Many of the brands now associated with hip-hop are worn by hip-hop artists and/or owned by them. Participants were very brand aware, and mentioned the brands that are some of the most recognized and worn labels in hip-hop. For example, Curtis describes two well-known brands: Ed Hardy, known for its high-end "rock and roll" style, and Bathing Apes, a Japanese clothing company that specializes in urban fashion:

....definitely Ed Hardy…You take somebody like Fab and put Ed Hardy on him and he gets on a video, everyone's going to want to wear it. They're going to say "Oooooo look at what Fab had on." They're not going to see a regular dude on the street and say "That's a tight outfit" and go get it. They're going to go get it 'cause Fab had it on in a video. Like the Bathing Apes, nobody was wearing the Bathing Apes until Lil' Wayne started wearing them. So it's whoever's hot currently, I think they look to big people like Kanye, Wayne, and Dip Set. (Curtis)

As Curtis goes on to point out, companies often exploit this by looking to hip-hop artists for label promotion and even give them clothes to wear in their videos.

They give clothes to them, they don't even have to purchase them. They give it to them because they know once they put it on their video everybody's going to come running. They don't care how much it costs, they're going to get it because they had it on. There's definitely an influence as far as clothing, retail, cars, all of it. (Curtis)

Shoes and boots are also important elements of dress within hip-hop culture, going back to the early days of Run DMC's Adidas sneakers. Evan and Sean point out a few of the footwear brands that are considered staples of hip-hop fashion today:

Shoes probably… Coogi. Coogi's big in hip-hop, Air Force Ones. Jordans, that's the main shoe you hear about. Probably the Jordans, the Forces. (Evan)

Timberland boots, wish I could get everyone of them. I know hip-hop had a lot to do with Timberlands. I wish I could get everyone of them. And I recently bought a pair of Timberlands. The purchase was influenced by hip-hop. (Sean)

Another important element of hip-hop dress is the cut or silhouette of garments. During the earlier days of hip-hop, the overall silhouette was fitted and worn close to the body, reflecting the popular styles of the 1970s and '80s in general. As the 20th century closed, a baggier, looser silhouette became the norm. Many participants mentioned that

they like this loose fit (although not too loose), and specifically in their jeans and t-shirts.

> I do wear some things that I would say reflect the hip-hop culture. I like my shirts a little bit bigger, I like my pants a little looser, not so much that they're sagging but not to the extreme with it. Yeah, I don't like my stuff to be snug, I like it to be a little bit loose….I made a purchase recently, a couple of shirts. They're very basic, I like button-down shirts like a polo-type shirt. (Wesley)

> Yes, I'm influenced a little bit but by…..by….I mean my jeans are a little baggy or whatever and…..my shirt….sometimes I wear my shirts big but I don't wear big tall tees that go to your knees or something like that. (Brandon)

James points out how this looser cut is influenced by hip-hop, yet has been around long enough to have an impact on men's wear overall.

> I think you can see the influence of hip-hop style is even mainstreamed now. Just the way jeans are cut or the way shirts are cut or what have you, you see it everywhere now. (James)

When asked if any recent apparel purchases were influenced by hip-hop, participants' responses were somewhat ambiguous. For example, Brandon cited, "I'm not tryin' to do what they do but I kind of still want to be fashionable." Evan admitted that he is influenced by hip-hop artists, and he even named his favorite artist: "Yeah, I get a lot of style from hip-hop artists. I rock with Lil' Wayne, I like his little style, the way he switches it up. But nobody in particular." It is interesting to note the ambiguity present in Evan's response. In the beginning, he reveals that he is influenced by hip-hop artists but at the end of his response he backs away from the degree of influence they [hip-hop artists] have on his style of dress.

Some participants admitted to being influenced by hip-hop when it came to recent

purchases. Yet it was important for them to point out that the purchase was to

communicate their interest in hip-hop but still maintain their own unique identity. A

degree of ambiguity was again evident when the participants were asked if television

programs featuring hip-hop influence their decisions as to what styles to adopt. Mario's

response was, "Yes and no. More so yes. Once again, you don't want to be the lame guy.

But even if everybody's doing it, I like to go the other way."

Continuum of Appropriateness: Time and Place

Participants were asked whether or not hip-hop influenced their everyday style

and to what degree. Specifically, Christian and James, who had corporate-type jobs,

were very adamant about when and where they wore hip-hop trends. They thought time

and place were important considerations when dressing:

> In my line of work I cannot relate from a slang hip-hop perspective with my
> superiors or people that are currently working with me. My life as it relates to
> hip-hop is more or less listening to it on my own time. During here and there I'll
> have on some hip-hop, I use slang language around people that pretty much can
> relate. But I leave hip-hop at the door when I'm in the corporate world.
> (Christian)

> Yeah, I would say I'm not going to come up to work with Tims [Timberland
> boots] and a hoodie on… there are certainly things I like that are hip-hop style
> or urban style. I think there's a time and place for everything. Don't want to go
> to the interview with your Tims and your hoodie, I guess that's what I'm saying.
> (James)

Similarly, Derek, a young college student, points out that certain elements of hip-hop,

such as slang, plays a role in personal life but is not appropriate while he is in class:

> It's kind of a big role but it's just again my personal life. It's nothing I do in
> school, but when I'm with my friends I use slang that they use in hip-hop and
> stuff like that and I listen to hip-hop. (Derek)

81

Many participants recognized that hip-hop dress is not accepted in the workplace or in the classroom setting. To some degree their identity is therefore compromised, and their personal interests in hip-hop are put aside in order to fit into certain social contexts. Participants must therefore move back and forth between two different identities, while trying to maintain a balance of who they are as Black men within hip-hop culture. This back and forth reflects the fifth stage of the development of African-American identity described by Lewis (Winter, 2004). *Internalization/Commitment* is when the individual begins to think of how he will be perceived in society in regard to dress as it becomes less important to establishing self-identity. Indeed, for James, Christian and Derek, there is a time and place for hip-hop and conservative styles are worn when appropriate.

Consumption Factors

Alongside the importance of dress, participants expressed strong opinions about the increased use of material objects to communicate within hip-hop. The most cited objects were "grillz," the Rolls Royce Phantom, and expensive tire rims, which are also some of the most popular material status symbols within hip-hop. Participants often talked of such objects as they related to certain artists. Those of the younger age group (20-24) believed that the emergence of materialism in hip-hop took place during the 1990s, but older participants felt it has always existed, or at least since the mid-to-late 1980s. Interestingly, though participants could appreciate the cars, money and jewelry as symbols of artists' success, most believe it to be too excessive.

"Grillz"

As discussed in Chapter 2, "grillz" worn over the teeth encrusted with diamonds have become a major hip-hop trend (see figure 12). Some participants thought "grillz" were wasteful and gave suggestions as to how the money could be utilized for something more useful:

> A waste of money, for one thing and I don't see what you're getting out of it. Being honest with you, it's really just attention. (Gavin)

> I can't get with it, I can't floss them. You use that money to get your teeth fixed. (Christian)

Brandon points to the message that such wasteful spending sends to young Black males in society. By focusing on the surface, substance is no longer an option.

> This right here the fronts….is…..one of the reasons why people aren't going to school….why black people are not going to school. Because they are spending their money on things like this….on fronts that cost a lot of money. This is why….I hate to say it. This is why people in the black community can't afford things because they're spending their money on things like this. (Brandon)

As Derek explains, wearing a grill during his first few years of college proved to be an expensive mistake:

> I had a grill my freshman year because of the song ["Grillz" by Nelly]. But as I look back at it, I wasted about $200 on it. It serves no purpose. You can't eat with it, you look stupid with it. It was white gold and it had a diamond cut because a brother couldn't afford diamonds back then. It looked like diamonds from a distance. (Derek)

Julian agrees,

> Paul Wall is a pioneer of it… again it's flashy, it's flossy, people have always
> been attracted to things that are flossy and they depreciate the moment you buy
> them. I mean if you walk right out of the store, then walk back in and change your
> mind, you couldn't sell it back for 60% of the value. (Julian)

Sean was not opposed to others wearing "grillz" but he personally would not wear them.

His response reflected a certain degree of ambiguity when it came to the importance of

"grillz."

> I don't knock them. I don't see anything wrong with them but they're not for me
> of course. Gold teeth, I think it's just a fad that comes and goes. It was hot a
> couple of years back because of the South taking over the hip-hop game. I don't
> see nothing wrong with it; it can be tacky at times when you have them on. I don't
> have a major problem with them, I just know it's a fad right now. (Sean)

For James, "grillz" were not relevant to his life:

> This just doesn't make sense to me; I mean I just don't understand it at all. I know
> a lot of the kids like it and you see people around now with fronts on and fake
> jewelry because you know…and maybe its style but I don't get it. I can't…I can't
> relate. (James)

While Curtis also would not wear one, he believes "grillz" are just one way to

demonstrate a sense of accomplishment within hip-hop:

> I'm not a big fan of grillz. I think grillz was brought into play because it was a
> symbol of that we made it. (Curtis)

Similarly, participants like Evan and Mario cited "grillz" as emblems of success among

rappers. Yet they also point to how "grillz" fuel negative stereotypes at the same time:

> It's another stereotype; most rappers got 'em. I guess and that says your
> down or you can't be a rapper or you don't have money if you don't have

them. (Evan)

You know I used to like the stuff Wu-Tang did with the fangs, but now it's a tad bit…I have to say it's ignorant. I don't want to say it's ignorant because sometimes there's nothing wrong with having a grill, there's no need to walk around with $2 million dollars worth of jewelry on. (Mario)

While each participant felt differently about the concept of hip-hop's current levels of conspicuous consumption, all of the participants felt a certain rap artist and record executive named Bryan Williams, better known as Birdman (see figure 11), is the biggest symbol of the materialistic side of the hip-hop lifestyle. He is known for wearing an excessive amount of jewelry in his mouth and around his neck. When shown the photo of Birdman, several participants responded in a similar manner:

Whatever you choose to do with your money is up to you right? But there's no reason to have a house in your mouth. He's got $250,000 of jewelry, diamonds and gold and platinum in his mouth. And probably you know, $1 million of jewelry. And that's not…you know this is the image he wants to portray which is fine. He's earned every penny of it, one way or the other. But I don't see how the average young kid in the ghetto can relate to this. I don't see how the average person that works a 9 to 5 can relate to this. So…I know it's… I guess it's…maybe there's somebody that wants to be like him. I mean to me this doesn't do anything for me personally. And I don't understand the level of materialism you know…the…I personally don't get it. 'Cause I think there's more things and I'm sure he does good things for his community, but I think there's a better way to spend money and spend time then to put a house in your mouth. When I look at it, that's a house you got in your mouth and like you know a couple of cars on your pinky ring, you know it just seems wasteful to me. And I guess because I know I have to work hard for every little penny I get and I can't even imagine, even if I was a millionaire. (James)

To me that's just crazy I just can't get over that. I mean that's borderline ignorant if you ask me. I just don't get it! That's what he wants to do, God bless him. God bless him, I'm not knocking him, it's just not for me. (Sean)

As far as hip-hop, rappin' for the people, he's [Birdman] not really a lyricist. I go off the lyricist and he doesn't really talk about anything. He just talks about the same stuff, like jewelry, ice….so if I was going to put him in a video to show things off. As far as hip-hop, he should be a CEO like he is, he shouldn't be rappin'. (Curtis)

On the flip side, Julian sees things a little differently, pointing out how these items reflect how a person can rise above and be successful.

Unfortunately, there's good news and bad news. The good news is I can't call a grown man Baby, but Mr. Williams is an astute business man, he's really hood-rich…literally. He doesn't have an education but he's hustled his whole life and he found a way to culminate all that money into hip-hop culture. He prides himself on having….owning multiple vehicles. (Julian)

Phantom

The Rolls Royce Phantom is one of the most coveted luxury vehicles in hip-hop culture (see figure 19). It is regarded as one of the ultimate symbols of success among rap and hip-hop artists. When asked to reveal their thoughts about the Phantom, the initial response was positive. Although some of the participants did not consider themselves to be materialistic or agree with what the car stands for in hip-hop culture, they could appreciate its value as a high-end vehicle:

Yeah it's going to hurt your wallet but it's a nice car. A very, very nice car you see it in hip-hop videos but I can't see myself riding in it because I'm not trying to go broke. But it's really the epitome of what some hip-hop artists try to get to. They're like that's what I want, that's what I'm trying to get to. Let me go ahead and do these tracks, get my hustle on so I can get to this. This is what the grills, the cars and the jewelry inspires them to be a hip-hop artist to get into the hip-hop community, to get this. (Brandon)

Very nice car, I can't even lie about that, it's a very beautiful car. But with that said I think it's reflective of where the music has come and gone….the Phantom represents the whole materialistic, commercial side of the music industry. Especially what's going on in hip-hop nowadays. (Wesley)

As Sean points out, the use of the Phantom is fairly image-driven and few people actually own one.

Like I said if you can afford it, I see nothing wrong with it if you can afford them. I see them in a lot of videos…its funny, because you always see the black entertainers with the Phantoms. And you're not going to see them in my neighborhood, not in person unless you go to a major city. (Sean)

James tries to be realistic about it, thinking broadly about the expense just for a nice car.

I'm simple so I could say…and I can say truthfully if I was a multi-millionaire, the kind of money these guys are probably making I don't think I could sink $300 or 400,000 into a car. And um…I don't get it, I'm sure they've got so much money they don't what else to do with it. It's a great looking car and is it really worth it? And why this one? I mean I just don't know, I don't get it. It's a nice looking car, don't get me wrong, I'd love to ride around in it but I'm not spending my money on it, I don't care how much I've got. Ya'll would not know I was rich. (James)

In contrast to James, for Curtis the Phantom represents success, and he has no objection to revealing the materialistic side of his nature:

I have seen so many of those cars and I'm not going to lie, I've said to myself if I ever do get rich and make money….money I'm going to invest…definitely going to have to get me one of those. I'm not going to lie, I am influenced…..like a lot of people say they're not influenced by materialism and stuff. (Curtis)

Similarly, Derek explains that the Phantom is a representation of the fusion of hip-hop culture and the mainstream:

The finest side of hip-hop…the luxury, it kind of merges hip-hop with that corporate mainstream white America, where they drive nice cars. Hip-hop artists drive nice cars too and that's kind of where they come together as far as the luxury standpoint of it. (Derek)

However, for Evan the expensive cars are just another example of the rapper stereotype

and a symbol of the direction hip-hop has gone.

That's the same thing. Another stereotype of a rapper, you hear about it [the Phantom] a lot in songs, yeah another thing you have to have to be considered a rapper or somebody famous, yeah… (Evan)

Rims
Rims, as discussed in Chapter 2, are another emblem of success in hip-hop

culture (see figure 21). Today it is not uncommon to see African-American males of all

ages riding around in a vehicle with 20 inch rims or larger. This particular status symbol

is not one that has gained familiarity and acclaim only recently. Rims, like jewelry, have

been a large part of hip-hop culture since the mid-1980s. Always featured in videos, and

particularly on Mercedes and other high-end vehicles, rims have been important

throughout hip-hop's evolution. James recalls how rims are one way that African-

American males have communicated social status:

Now this [rims] for me is not as bad as some of this other stuff. And I think this goes back to…I'm just going to speak for how I grew up and where I grew up...And if you had a car you hooked it up somehow, whether it was the system or you know back in the day you put rag tops on 'em or whatever it was. I think that's us as African-Americans a lot of times, we are very um… flashy… I guess I can relate to this because I see this more than I see the Phantom. But I can see how growing up as a teenager, a young guy wants a nice car, want it to look good, want it to be clean, want it to be hooked. Up. So now this is the way where as I was growing up, it was something else. You had to have 12-inch woofers in your car and whatever the hot rims were back then. So I guess I can probably

88

relate…this is more attainable for the everyday person verses the Phantom and the platinum diamond grill. (James)

Sean also remembers how important rims were in his teenage years:

> I went through that phase in the '90s every car I had, had the rims and all. But I'm not into it. I don't have nothing against it you know a lot of people want their car to look good. I know hip-hop has a lot to do with these 22s now...seems like that's the way you show people you have money. I found out a long time ago that's not the way to do it! You see these rims today, you know, they're like 3 and 4,000 dollars. And a lot of people are getting them financed, now…if I can't buy them, I'm not going to finance them, I can't live in them. (Sean)

Likewise, while Curtis can appreciate what rims represent he would not purchase them for himself:

> I know a lot of rims right now that look really nice. I could name them all day. But I'm kind of like Jay; I'm on my grown man. So probably when I get the set of wheels I want, I won't put any rims on it. I'll keep it grown man. (Curtis)

For some participants, like Christian, rims are too flashy, "To me flashy, this is flashy, too much" (Christian). In contrast, other participants felt that there is no harm in having rims on a vehicle, they just should not be too large. Some point to the role of rims within the typical hip-hop video:

> …you think of rims you think of hip-hop music videos. (Aaron)

> That is definitely a sign of the times right there. You hear a lot of the artist rhymin' about material things, and one of those things of course is their cars and what their cars are "sitting" on. I think that's reflected with the times. (Wesley)

For others, like Evan, rims were yet again another form of materialism that has reached tremendous heights of popularity via hip-hop, reinforcing the notion that material goods

89

equal success:

> It's not like it used to be. It's a lot of materialistic stuff going on, it's not like it used to be. People aren't speaking on real topics, its false advertising that's why it's falling off… Nowadays you don't….you see a certain rapper talking about things but you never hear about or never see them doing it, none of that. Like I said it's a lot of false advertisement yeah…. (Evan)

The Importance of Status Symbols

The participants did not see themselves as materialistic per se. Some, however, could understand why rap and hip-hop artists feel the need to acquire certain objects and status symbols. Many of the participants even recalled someone in their neighborhood who had such objects and was considered to be the trendsetter during their youth. As James explains,

> Just materialism and a lot that is you know the images of who we saw in our neighborhoods and thought "That's the man right there," because he had a nice car and he had a few ropes around his neck. You know whether that came from hip-hop or it was just a reflection of that dude in your neighborhood who had it like that. I just think it's always been there but now it's blown out of proportion, it really is. (James)

Participants contend that such status symbols were often used by people to be noticed by their peers and to be recognized for their success by society at large:

> That [grillz] represents again like the Phantom before, and the 22s, it represents from a people who have not had in the past. It represents to me a person wanting to show in some type of way, somehow they have achieved something or they have arrived in some capacity. They are a way of saying I'm doing a little better than I have been and I want people to notice that, I want people to notice that. I want people to notice me and notice what I'm doing…a basic socioeconomic statement to the community and to the world. (Wesley)

It's not just the white people or the superiors running around with jewelry and ice. It's to show off we got money too, we can be flashy. (Curtis)

For participants like James, Aaron, and Brandon, status symbols have always existed as an important element of hip-hop, regardless of whether it is right or wrong.

I think it was always there, it's probably not as overt or as obvious as it is today. I mean if you think back to even the early days. Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Biz Markie, Slick Rick, we called them Dukie ropes back in the day, so all had the big ropes and the medallions. They had the Mercedes-Benz back then, I think that's always been there. I think Cash Money took it to like the 10th degree I mean when they came out. So I think it's always been there, the jewelry, the cars you know. (James)

When like Kool Moe Dee and all them had the big gold chains, LL Cool J and stuff like that. But I mean it's just…I don't know, different now. Like with materialism its part of hip-hop, always has, always will be. (Aaron)
People trying to be like this with the chains are kind of what's hurting them so much money wise. But this is a decent amount. When you get yourself situated there's nothing wrong with having something like that and maybe a ring and big face watch, there's nothing wrong with that. Just don't spend yourself broke getting it. (Brandon)

Some of the participants voiced negative opinions about the excessive lifestyle promoted by many rap and hip-hop artists. Participants raised questions about the value of buying objects that lose their value and what happens after the music career is over. Many rap and hip-hop artists are not known for investing their earnings in ways that could provide for the future. Christian and Julian were eager to express how this lack of a legacy could have an impact for future generations to come:

There are things you can put your money towards. Education or if you have any kids, are you trying to set aside for them or are you trying to burn it all up? It's true you can't take it with you but you can at least make life more accessible to any 2nd or 3rd generation of people that will follow you along your family tree.

91

> You got to put the money in the right place. Say when the person who had these rims goes away what is he going to be known for? Rims? And his kids are still going to be in the projects… With all of the things going on today, you need to be allocating your money to the future. Why waste it on this temporary thing? And that's kind of what I see; it doesn't mean anything to me. (Christian)

> Put your money into tax shelters like real estate, you know we are into anything that is flossy, glossy, and flashy. (Julian)

Indeed, status symbols have been important in communicating success within hip-hop culture since its early days, and it does not appear that the focus on materialism will be going away anytime soon. Often viewed as being the negative side of the culture, material objects like cars, jewelry, and luxury brands are now synonymous with the hip-hop lifestyle.

The Future

Participants were asked to talk about the future of hip-hop. Many argued that the direction of hip-hop today is too commercialized and mainstream and thus it should get back to its "pure" form. There are many hip-hop artists today who are in fact trying to reclaim the once "pure" hip-hop that talked about topics ranging from everyday struggles to having a good time and feeling positive. Others argue materialism has taken hip-hop in a new direction and that it will never be the same as it was in its earlier years. They contend that it has become so saturated that the focus has been taken away from the creative aspects of the genre. They cited examples of how hip-hop is now being integrated into commercials advertising products of all types, ranging from fast food to windshield replacement to chiropractic therapy.

Projecting the Direction of Hip-Hop

According to many of the participants, the rap and hip-hop of today is not the

same as it was in its prime or what some refer to as its "Golden Age," back when the

artists had something to say. Participants contend that most of the lyrics and images

promoted by rap and hip-hop artists of today are dominated by themes of misogyny and

material possessions. Both James and Gavin appear to be disillusioned with where the

genre has gone.

> I would say again, that you know I just think that hip-hop has been a big influence on the country you know for the past 25 years or so. And I think it will continue to be a presence. I mean a lot of people didn't even think it would be here. I remember my mom and dad sayin' "Turn that mess off." But you know they couldn't relate to it. I was…it was probably whatever they had when they were growing up. I mean that was us. So I think it's, probably in my opinion, I think we've seen the best were going to see out of hip-hop. (James)

> I probably wouldn't buy, I wouldn't buy a lot of the music now that I would back then. So, I would rather keep what I had back then…than what's out now. I mean I'm gonna hear it but the way I would hear it is on the radio, you feel me? I wouldn't buy it. I don't get into much anymore because it has changed so much. (Gavin)

Sean even goes out of his way not to buy new hip-hop, and instead has gone back to what

he listened to in the past.

> A lot of times I find myself buying old hip-hop, stuff I bought years ago. It's hard to get into because they're not talking about anything. Like I said they talk about money, cars, where they've been. You know they're not talking about anything today. (Sean)

For some, like Julian, the good old days were a time when the lyrics meant

something and the beat was musical. Now, it is the opposite.

> I am a gatekeeper, I am a patriot for old school hip-hop. What we have these days I wouldn't consider it hip-hop. I don't even consider it craftsmanship, I don't even

consider it music. Its let me get my fisher-price keyboard and make a beat off of it and have my little nephew come and rap to it. (Julian)

On the other hand, some, like Aaron, defend hip-hop's future and its impact, saying that it still deals with a lot of the issues in the African-American community. Arguing that it is portrayed negatively and unfairly by the media, he states:

> People in the media try to make it seem like everything is hip-hop's fault. And some of the reason is ignorance and then some of the reason is hip-hop's fault itself for…I mean…the people are….making the music and getting in trouble and stuff it puts a bad label on it. Therefore people who like hip-hop they are looked at in different ways….I don't like that kind of viewpoint. Because you get hip-hop in a bad way, then you get black people in a bad way. So it's like a racial thing…I don't know I'm just thinking out loud. It's just upsetting…..for a type of music I usually listen to on the regular is dragged in the mud for something one person did and it's stupid. (Aaron)

Is Hip-Hop a Fad?

Twenty years ago, many critics believed hip-hop was just a passing fad. But it has proven that is has staying power, and for some, this has meant the loss of uniqueness for the sake of mass appeal. Hip-hop is everywhere, as rap has become the new pop. Moreover, hip-hop continues to have an influence on a global scale. As pointed out in Chapter 2, hip-hop is no longer popular just in American culture, it has been integrated into many cultures around the world and continues to grow into a genre that is often infused with local influences. For example, one of the participants, Curtis, had the opportunity to live in Korea, and found it to be quite advanced in terms of its rap and hip-hop music. During his stay he was able to learn and experience hip-hop firsthand within the Korean culture:

94

A lot of people who have never been to Asia they would be surprised about how advanced and knowledgeable they are in hip-hop. You'll see the Asian click where they all wear New York hats and they have the Tims on. I mean you'll see it, and say, "Am I in Asia?" Then you have the crowd that has the bandanas, the Chuck Taylors, the Dickie suits. You could put a song on…..and the clubs you'd think that you'd go over there and maybe hear techno music or might hear a little hip-hop. But they have every song you hear now on the radio over here, you got it at the same time. (Curtis)

Interestingly, when asked to define how hip-hop today would evolve, the key issue for participants became defining what hip-hop actually is now. Arguments about what it should be called, whether "rap" or "hip-hop," suggests the extent to which this is a contested issue. Some argue that rap is more about saying words that don't have any real meaning or creativity over a backdrop of simple or sampled beats. Hip-hop, on the other hand, is innovation in the use of words and extensive storytelling coupled with creative music and production, usually played by actual musicians on instruments. The participants were asked to describe their thoughts on the difference between rap and hip-hop music.

That old school stuff, there's a difference between rap and hip-hop. Rap is…what you got now it's like whatever you can come up with anything and everything. I was pretty young back then but recognize the groups and all but it's more or less you know when it wasn't so commercial….commercialized. When Snoop started in the game I remember all that you know from like '93 on that when I started getting more influenced by hip-hop, so…..just when it was real…people…it felt real. Now it's like whatever, it's the trend…(Aaron)

I think now for me what I really think in my heart is hip-hop, I don't see a whole lot of it out there anymore. To me I see a lot of rap, and I see a lot of (pause) everything is just so mainstream, so cookie cutter. You showed me pictures of all these different groups, all those were clearly different. And they had all their different places. But now it feels like if you don't sound like the guy before you, then they're not going to put you out. You're not going to have a record. So today….like I said I don't really feel like there's a lot of hip-hop out there. (James)

95

One Word Hip-Hop

Participants clearly see a distinct difference between rap and hip-hop. Indeed, this is an argument that has been around for a long time and continues to be an unresolved topic among hip-hop fans and critics alike. To further investigate this issue, the participants were asked to use one word to describe their feelings about hip-hop. This was quite difficult for them to do, and if they did select a word, many more came to mind. To the participants, hip-hop does not resonate as something that can be defined by a single word, so there were many conflicting responses. If the word was positive it was often linked to their feelings of nostalgia, but was immediately followed by words that were in sharp contrast. Julian and Curtis view hip-hop as a way of life:

> Movement, the culture. A way of living. It transcends political boundaries, cultural, economical….economic boundaries…educational boundaries. (Julian)

> I can't actually think of just one word, I would have to say food for the soul. (Curtis)

Other participants, like Evan, Mario, and Christian, framed their definition of hip-hop as "not like it used to be":

> Yeah, I'd probably say whack…yeah. It's not like it used to be. It's a lot of materialistic stuff going on, it's not like it used to be. (Evan)

> I think it's a lifestyle. I think its music. It's more of a culture than music. I kind of go back to this stuff here, the '80s….Now? I can give you a couple of one words, tired…needs to change. One-dimensional…and needs more responsibility. But hot! (Mario)

> Right now, guided, too trendy. It's like it's that one song and I'm more or less….when I hear….it's a rarity for me to buy a CD these days and I can put it in on and actually listen to it from beginning to end. Some CDs you get all the way

to track 6 then you skip and go to track 14 and there are 25 songs. I remember back in the day. It'd be 7 or 8 songs on a tape or something and all of them would be nice. Now they're flooding CDs with 25 songs and you got to flip through them to get to the 7 songs you like. I find it hard to believe that it seems more profitable today then it did when it was hittin' to me. (Christian)

Hip-hop has undergone a transformation from its early origins in the South Bronx. Today's hip-hop has lost many of the core elements that made it the cultural phenomenon it has become. It is a genre that is ever-changing and some say will never go back to the way it used to be. James sums it up best with his response to what comes to mind when he thinks of the word hip-hop.

I think to me hip-hop is the style, the dress and it's obviously the music. It's kind of one of those words that's hard to describe because I believe it's beyond the music. I think it's just in some cases it could be a way of life. So that's a pretty difficult one to answer. It's such a big thing, it's really become so big and it's evolving and it's changed you know…I'm sure there's people who still do graffiti but that's not as big as it used to be. I mean breakdancing was huge in the early 80s. I mean now you see a lot of professional dancers doing it. But you're not going to go to the club and see something break out into the windmill. That was hip-hop then, in the early 80s. I can remember me and my friends waiting to find a piece of cardboard so we could throw it out in the street and try our best to mimic what we saw on TV. Hip-hop has changed, it's really hard to put into words everything that it is, especially with it changing all the time. (James)

James goes on to discuss the one word he would use to describe how he feels about hip-hop today,

Today I would probably say "disappointing" because again I think….we won't ever see what we saw in the late 80s or the early 90s…the mid to late 90s in terms of the type of music that was being put out or how relevant it was at that time. I think at some level because you know the African-American community or you know rappers in general, 99% are young black men. I'm disappointed because of my higher expectations of them. I think a lot of them to fit into. And that they're

97

not necessarily always being themselves. And I know how you still got some guys out there doing some good stuff but I would say overall I'm disappointed. (James)

Although what hip-hop is today remains a contested issue, its influence on cultures around the world is undeniable, as is its popular appeal as a mainstream music style. Artists take on popular music personalities as major corporations like McDonald's incorporate it into their national ad campaigns. Many countries, both large and small, have infused hip-hop into their local culture and continue to reinvent it. Yet all of this does not necessarily mean that the origin of hip-hop has been completely abandoned, but that, according to participants, it has simply been reinterpreted for the masses.

As illustrated in this chapter, all of the participants have an in-depth interest in hip-hop and use it as a means of communicating identity in their everyday lives. However, hip-hop no longer defines their identities to the extent that it may have in their youth. Although they still listen to hip-hop and wear hip-hop influenced apparel, they talked about the importance of merging these elements with the roles they play in their daily lives. Although hip-hop is not always at the center of their lives, it does play an important role in their identification with peer groups and their social roles outside of the workplace or school. And, certainly, hip-hop has and will continue to have a special place in their childhood memories as it stirs strong feelings of nostalgia for each of them.

Summary

To understand how hip-hop is perceived and experienced by African-American males, this chapter presented a thematic interpretation of participants' responses. Five conceptual areas and their respective emergent themes connected participants'

experiences in order to highlight the similarities, as well as differences, among them.

Chapter Five discusses the overall conclusions of the interpretation, as well as provides

suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter includes the following areas: (a) a discussion of findings relative to the study objectives, and (b) limitations and recommendations for further research.

Research Objectives

Four research objectives are used to address the goal of the study and to examine dress in the context of hip-hop. These objectives are:

1. To investigate the role of dress in shaping and expressing identity within hip-hop.

2. To explore the use of material objects, including brand name apparel, as status symbols within hip-hop.

3. To examine the role of consumption-oriented values related to dress within hip-hop.

4. To explore the messages and images used within hip-hop to communicate identity, status, and consumption-oriented values through dress.

Discussion of Findings

Five major findings surfaced from participant's responses which help address the research objectives: 1) hip-hop dress and its pervasiveness throughout the participants' experiences, 2) the role of hip-hop styles and brands relative to participants' personal style, 3) what hip-hop's messages of consumption mean for African-American males, 4) the negative impact of excessive materialism, and 5) feelings of ambiguity about the messages and images promoted by mainstream hip-hop.

The Pervasiveness of Dress

For the participants, dress and hip-hop were clearly linked. Their first introduction to the music was, for many, an introduction to dress. With the advent of music videos, participants were able to see what their favorite rap artists looked like, and, in turn, begin emulating their dress. This was the case for Christian: "I was trying to dress like a lot of the rappers…when I was coming up in the late '80s" (Christian).

Dress has always been an important way of expressing an artist's individuality within hip-hop and often is used to send a message to society. Early on, hip-hop artists of the 1980s focused on communicating membership within a unique subculture and creating a positive means of identification for Black men. For instance, the three member hip-hop group Run DMC (see figure 13) discussed in Chapter 1, were highly regarded as having their own image. "They had their own image…they were always unique with their style, they dressed alike, they brought the big gold chains in and were wearing Adidas" (Gavin). Indeed, the participants thought that Run DMC used a single gold rope chain as the foundation for that image. They deliberately used dress as a unifier, yet also as a way to distinguish the group, and soon its followers, from the mainstream.

Sometimes participants' dress was influenced by a family member who was into hip-hop. For example, Christian's older cousin was the person he emulated the most and therefore was the most influential when it came to hip-hop dress. From that point, Christian's exposure to hip-hop became constant so he was able to keep up with the genre's changes as he grew into a teenager. This initial exposure encouraged him to

explore hip-hip further, and by age 16 he began looking to his favorite artists for dress ideas.

The Roles of Hip-Hop Styles and Brands

Participants varied in the degree to which they incorporated hip-hop styles into their personal style. Among the younger participants (aged 20-29), brands seemed to play an important role in developing their personal style. Many looked to hip-hop to see what labels were popular and sought to incorporate these labels into their dress. In contrast, the older participants (aged 33-43) cited that the style of their dress, such as the silhouette, was to some extent influenced by hip-hop, and that while there may be a certain brand they preferred, brands were less important than the actual fit of the apparel: "I can't even remember the brand of them but the way the jeans are now, they have that faded look" (James). Many of the older participants preferred to detach themselves from the specific brands that are closely associated with hip-hop in favor of creating their own image and identity. In contrast, a few of the younger participants admitted to emulating the styles of their favorite rap and hip-hop artists, including wearing chains on their jeans and purchasing some of the more high end labels, such as Ed Hardy, currently popular in hip-hop.

Memories of participants' initial exposure to hip-hop were very significant because these memories helped shape an enduring interest in the genre. Although the participants are at different stages of adulthood, hip-hop influence continues to be a part of their lives, even if only on a limited basis. For example, Christian and James work in corporate settings where hip-hop related apparel is unacceptable. Both grew up in the late

102

1980s listening to the popular hip-hop group Public Enemy (see figure 5). Public Enemy

was well-known for having militant views and speaking out about the issues faced by the

black community. This group had a significant impact on both participants' self-image as

teenagers. By affiliating with the group's music, they were able to develop a sense of

pride and to identify with what it meant to a young black man in America. "Public

Enemy came into my life at a young age, they taught me to be conscious of who I was

and kind of understand how society viewed me as a young black man. I think now 'cause

I'm 34 years old, I kind of understand that" (James). Yet as they grew older, they found

that it was important to internalize this influence in order to conform to society at large.

Now that they are in corporate environments, they have had to change their appearances

in order to fit in.

This idea of needing to create a different identity in order to fit into one's

workplace surfaced frequently in participants' responses. It is mandatory in many

workplace settings that slang not be used and that silhouettes associated with hip-hop

culture such as baggy t-shirts and loose fitting pants not be worn. Participants'

experiences point to the need to blend in with their co-workers to become part of a

collective. Clearly, while hip-hop has become mainstreamed, is not yet associated with

corporate dress. Therefore, while styles and brands may have a certain degree of

influence in the lives of those interested in it, such elements must still be reserved for

"days off." As Wesley cited, "We may talk a certain way if we are in the workplace or

school, but when you're with your friends…with your family you may talk a little bit

more relaxed or less confined."

Whether this is the case because of hip-hop's association with the Black community or with youth is not clear. What is clear is the impact that hip-hop styles had on the participants as they were growing up, thereby influencing the development of their identities and personal style to some extent. Indeed hip-hop appears to have had a stronger influence on participants' style when they were younger. Much like their favorite hip-hop artists, participants used dress as a way to define their beliefs and communicate them to mainstream society. Therefore, hip-hop's significance in the lives of those who follow it is powerful, to the extent that it provided role models and fashion leaders for these young men to look to for dress and identity cues.

All participants were exposed to hip-hop through family interactions or peer groups during their youth. The participants' memories of their initial experiences with hip-hop have significantly shaped their perspectives of the genre today. Although the younger participants (aged 20-29) were introduced to hip-hop in the late 1980s, while the older participants (aged 33-43) were exposed to hip-hop beginning in the late 1970s to early 1980s, they were all around the same age when they first experienced hip-hop music. Naturally, the time period of the participants' initial exposure to hip-hop was an important factor in determining the nature of the influence on their style and in defining who their favorite artist would be.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Lewis describes four stages in the evolution of African-American identity, the first being *Encounter*, which occurs during adolescence (Winter, 2004). Participant responses reflect this notion when recalling how they emulated the appearance of a favorite hip-hop artist or group as a way to form their own

identity and indicate belonging to a particular social group. Indeed, for Curtis and Evan, this influence is still evident in their 20s. They both named a favorite artists' style of dress that they currently emulate because he uses dress to distinguish himself from other artists. But by the time the older participants (aged 33-43) reached their 20s, there remained only a subtle influence on their personal style and by age 30 most began to redefine their identifies and began to use only isolated elements of hip-hop style to communicate this identity.

African-American Men and Hip-Hop's Messages of Consumption

Although the older participants (aged 33-43) and the younger participants (aged 20-29) were exposed to hip-hop at different times, the lyrics were considered by all to be an important factor in determining whether they liked a particular artist. All participants had the most appreciation for the lyrical content of hip-hop during the mid to late 1980s. Indeed, participants agreed that the early days of hip-hop and its artists were better than those of more recent times. In particular, the positive images of hip-hop that the older participants (aged 33-43) observed during its early days helped each to develop a sense of pride as a young Black male. Interestingly, these same images were just as recognizable to and positive for the younger participants (aged 20-29), who recalled positive feelings and memories about these early artists and associated them with the influence family members or peers had on them.

The messages and images presented within hip-hop today are quite different from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Artists who once focused on creating unique images are now creating commercialized consumption-oriented images with mass appeal.

Participants like Wesley further this idea: "It seems like there had been a shift after maybe the mid '90s into the new millennium…It was more about commercialism and materialism." James agreed, "I think it [hip-hop] really became commercial in the mid '90s. And from there on I think a lot of what hip-hop used to be has been lost and has been mainstreamed so much."

Most of the participants indicated that they were not influenced or affected by the messages present in hip-hop today, mostly because they had already developed a strong sense of self. Participant responses point to how feelings of pride have been somewhat diminished by the images in hip-hop today that promote stereotypical, negative ideas about Black males. "The baggy shirts I think that's where the stereotypes come from and they [society] think that's what hip-hop's all about, they think that's all young black men are about" (Derek).

Participants raised concerns about how, rather than encouraging young Black males to create positive images of themselves, today's hip-hop artists instead send the message that you have to own a certain car, wear certain brands of apparel or wear a certain amount of jewelry in order to be considered successful. Participants felt disappointed that the image of the popular hip-hop artist is a superficial one and no longer sheds light on the deeper aspects of what it means to be Black in American society, and specifically a Black male. They are concerned that these messages suggest that a Black man cannot make important and positive contributions to society.

Most of the participants had a problem with the negative stereotypes that current hip-hop images and messages send about Black males. Participants like Evan and Mario

even think that hip-hop artists strongly associated with materialism, such as Birdman (see figure 11) send a message of ignorance rather than success. Participants contend that hyper-consumption, the negative side of hip-hop, is now a primary focal point in lyrics and videos, but that there are many artists who do not participate in or associate themselves with this mainstreamed version. However, the participants contend that such artists are not as well-known and are rarely acknowledged in the media, if at all. Popular hip-hop has become all about the consumption of status symbols at the risk of forgetting its original purpose.

The Negative Impact of Excessive Materialism

All of the participants were able to see through the facade of the status-driven imagery in hip-hop today, even to the extent of being quite adamant about pointing out that artists do not actually own many of the material goods featured in their videos. Many of the participants, both younger and older, voiced concern about the consequences of excessive spending on material objects by rap and hip-hop artists. They instead emphasized the importance of spending money wisely on things like education and retirement, those investments that provide a legacy, especially when measured against the fleeting value of status symbols. It is evident that all participants, regardless of age, recognized the consequences of focusing on material possessions in the short-term without regard for the future.

Interestingly, a certain level of ambiguity surfaced among the participants when they were shown photos of popular hip-hop status symbols like "grillz," tire rims and the Phantom. Many had conflicted responses. For example, some saw "grillz" as emblems of

success, yet at the same time, symbols of excess. Participants were more accepting of rims as a part of hip-hop culture, and felt they were important element to hip-hop's evolution. Rims have been around for a long period of time and have become so commonplace in society today that they seem to be criticized or categorized as status objects less often. Some of the participants owned rims, putting them on their cars, as they were already a widely accepted form of expression. Many thought that rims were acceptable, provided the size was within reason. Similarly, participants had an appreciation for the Phantom as a luxury vehicle, however, some felt the money could be better spent on a house or college.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Veblen's theory of Conspicuous Consumption is based on the notion that some individuals seek wealth in order to be considered successful by their peers and that the most obvious method of expressing success is by the acquisition of material goods. Hip-hop has embraced conspicuous consumption as many artists seek to indicate their success to others in the culture and to society at large. Certain goods, as status symbols, have been always been used as a means to exhibit wealth, and hip-hop's "grillz," rims, and luxury cars are no different. Indeed, while the specific objects and brands used to communicate success via hip-hop have changed, the meaning of these material goods has not. According to the participants, status symbols have always been an important aspect of hip-hop. "People have always talked about having things in rap and hip-hop music. They've always talked about their jewelry being the nicest or the biggest" (Wesley). Artists have relied on different markers of identity to

communicate their success as hip-hop evolved, but the most common take the form of cars, jewelry, and clothing brands.

According to the participants, hip-hop's focus on materialism sends the message that Black men are only interested in acquiring material possessions. Participants agreed that certain rappers like Birdman (figure 11) are the epitome of hip-hop success as indicated by their hyper-materialism. Veblen's theory of Conspicuous Consumption points to an individual's need to display wealth through the consumption of goods. Many of the products within hip-hop do not serve any utilitarian purpose but are meant only to communicate success thorough wealth.

When asked, most participants do not consider themselves to be materialistic. Of all the participants, Curtis (age 24) was the only one who said that he was influenced by materialism. He believes that people say they are not influenced by the material objects so prevalent in hip-hop today, but that there is a reason for their popularity. James, on the other hand, (age 34), was very pragmatic about materialism. He was very clear that he did not understand nor relate to the need to spend money on objects, such as the Phantom, that quickly depreciate in value. When it came to the Phantom in particular, he revealed that he would like to ride around in one but even if he was rich he could not see himself purchasing it. Seeing himself as a man who works hard for his money, he could not relate to the excessive lifestyle. Others, like Christian, indicated the need to save money and leave a legacy for future generations: "With all of the things going on today, you need to be allocating your money to the future."

Feelings of Ambiguity

A level of ambiguity was clearly present among the participants when asked about hip-hop's influence and significance. Hip-hop itself is somewhat ambiguous, in that its messages point to the need to prove success via wealth and to display wealth through objects. Although this focus may be a negative one, hip-hop has nevertheless been one of the most visible vehicles of African-American success in contemporary U.S. history.

Ambiguity is also evident in the participants' responses about the influence of hip-hop on their personal style. The participants admit to being influenced, but emphasize the need to maintain uniqueness in the face of mainstream hip-hop. For example, when asked if hip-hop influenced his personal style, Derek replied: "To a point yes and to a point no. You got to be, you know, different and stand out of the norm, but to a point yes it does." When it comes to the influence of hip-hop on participants' purchases, more ambiguity surfaces, this time from a social perspective. Their interest in keeping up with the trends to impress their peers has to be tempered somewhat by age and social status. The participants aged 20-29 showed concern about not being considered cool enough to fit in with their social groups: "Yes and no. The rappers tend to dictate what's cool and what's not, so to speak. Yes hip-hop does because you don't want to be the guy they're talking about looking lame. So yeah it plays a big role" (Mario). This ambiguity about being an individual but also wanting to fit in with peers was also present among some of the older participants' responses, like Wesley, who states, "I would say in some degree yes…I mean not totally….I do wear things that I would say reflect the hip-hop culture."

This ambiguity is perhaps experienced by many Black males in American society today. As the participants reveal, it is a struggle to continually change their identity, dress, and even mannerisms in order to fit with the social expectations of their environments. They are very aware that while they want to stay true to the role they play in regard to their social lives and within their peer group, they know they must often change who they are to be considered part of the collective. As illustrated throughout the participants' responses, hip-hop style has the potential to both help and hinder their attempts to achieve balance between the two.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations that could be addressed in further research on the role of dress in hip-hop. Because participants in this study were males, females should be included in future studies to explore their experiences. Likewise, because this study only examined the role of hip-hop dress in shaping and expressing identity among Black males, research on the role of hip-hop and use of status symbols in the lives of Black females is needed. On the whole, very little research exists that focuses on the female perspective on hip-hop. Moreover, the images used in this study depicted some the most popular male rap and hip-hop artists. Future studies should include images of female hip-hop artists who are believed to be pioneers or influential in hip-hop.

Further understanding of the less materialistic side of hip-hop and how it contrasts and compares to the materialistic aspects discussed in this study is needed. As found in this study, Black males, regardless of age, do not necessarily see themselves as influenced by the materialism that is a large part of hip-hop today. For example, the

younger (aged 20-29) participants, who may be considered to be the most influenced, had some of the same reservations and opinions that the older (aged 33-43) participants had about the role of consumption-oriented values within hip-hop culture.

Future studies on high school aged participants should be conducted to gain their unique perspective on the direction and future of hip-hop culture. Research on the influence of hip-hop on their lives in relation to their individual identities and most importantly, to their peers groups should be explored. The level of exposure to lyrical content and the portrayal of women within hip-hop culture and how it influences this age groups interactions, should also be investigated.

Further investigation of other countries where hip-hop is becoming popular and having an increased influence on local culture is needed. Such research should include questions about the participants' perspectives on world hip-hop and its importance or relevance to American hip-hop. Research in cultures where the influence of hip-hop is growing should be conducted in order to compare and contrast it with the U.S. Ethnographic studies that explore the impact of hip-hop across the globe would be very valuable.

Further research on Caucasian participants who are the dominant consumers of rap and hip-hop music should be explored. This notion is supported by sources within this study that cite Caucasian consumers as being the majority when it comes to purchasing and reading hip-hop related magazines. They also represent a larger percentage of the hip-hop that is consumed in Canada. Such research may provide an understanding of the reasons hip-hop culture appeals to Caucasians and why they may

choose to listen to hip-hop versus other types of music. Regional differences that may exist among consumers of hip-hop such as urban environments versus rural areas versus suburban areas should be investigated.

Future studies might examine how hip-hop influences purchase decisions by different consumer groups, as well as the extent to which this influence shapes the development of new products. Consumer attitudes and preferences toward brands associated with hip-hop might also be explored. Finally, the effectiveness of marketing that addresses the ambiguity that surfaced in this study, and particularly about the images and messages communicated by hip-hop, might also be investigated.

Summary

This research provides a snapshot of what hip-hop culture means for some African-American males. More than just music, hip-hop is about culture, lifestyle, and consumption and is an important part of the lives of those who identify with it. The participants believe hip-hop was once considered to be a subculture, but it has now spread to the mainstream, influencing all aspects of American popular culture. As the participants discussed, hip-hop is difficult to define, but it will continue to exist in many different forms as it takes on different meanings for different people. Participants contend that, like it or not, hip-hop styles, sounds, and symbols are here to stay.

REFERENCES

Arthur, D. (2006). Authenticity and consumption in the Australian Hip-Hop culture. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *9*(2), 140-156.

Bagwell, L. S., & Bernheim, B. D. (1996). Veblen effects in a theory of Conspicuous Consumption. *American Economic Review*, *86*(3), 349-373.

Barnard, M. (2002). *Fashion as communication,* (2nd Ed.). New York: Routledge.

Belk, R. (1984). Three scales to measure constructs related to Materialism: Reliability, validity, and relationships to measures of happiness. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *11*, 291 – 297.

Belk, R. (1985). Materialism: Trait aspects of living in the material world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *12,* 265-280.

Belk, R. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, *5*, 139-168.

Benstock, S., & Ferris, S. (1994). *On fashion*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Bonsu, S., & Belk, R. (2003). Do not go cheaply into that good night: Death-ritual consumption in Asante, Ghana. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*, 284-296.

Burroughs, W. J., Drews, D. R. & Hallman, W. K. (1991). Predicting personality from personal possessions: A self-presentation analysis. *The Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, *6*(6), 17-163.

Burroughs, J. E., & Rindfleisch, A. (2002). Materialism and well-being: A conflicting values perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *29*, 348-370.

Carlsson, B. (2001). Depicting experiences. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *45*(2), 125-143.

Chamberland, R. (2001). Rap in Canada. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global noise: Rap and hip-hop outside the USA* (pp. 306-325). Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Chandler, R. M. & Chandler-Smith, N. (2005). Flava in ya gear: Transgressive politics and the influence of hip-hop on contemporary fashion. In L. Welters & P.A. Cunningham (Eds.), *Twentieth-century American fashion* (pp. 229-254). Oxford, UK: Berg.

Clark-Ibáñez, M. (2004). Framing the social world with Photo-Elicitation Interviews. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *47*(12), 1507-1527.

Condry, I. (2001). A history of Japanese hip-hop. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global noise: Rap and hip-hop outside the USA* (pp. 222-247). Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University.

Collier, J. (1957) Photography in Anthropology: A report on two experiments. *American Anthropologist, 59*, 843-859.

Collier, J., Jr., & Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology*: *Photography as a research method*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Craik, J. (1994). *The face of fashion: Cultural studies in fashion*. New York: Routledge.

Cross, W. E. (1991). *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Damhorst, M.L. (1999). Dress as nonverbal communication. In M.L. Damhorst, K.A. Miller, & S.O. Michelman (Eds.), *The meanings of dress* (pp. 78-89). New York: Fairchild.

Dant, T. (1999). *Material culture in the social world*. Buckingham, UK: Open
    University Press.

Davis, F. (1985). Clothing and fashion as communication. In M. R. Solomon (Ed.), *The
    Psychology of fashion* (pp. 15-27). Lexington, KY: Heath/Lexington Books.

Douglas, M., & Isherwood, B. (1979). *The world of goods: Towards an anthropology of
    consumption*. London: Allen Lane.

Dyson, M. E. (2007). *Know What I Mean?* New York: Basic Civitas Books.

Eastman, J. K., Goldsmith, R. E. & Flynn, L. R. (1999). Status consumption in Consumer
    Behavior: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Marketing Theory and
    Practice, 7*(3), 41-51.

Hannerz, U. (1969). *Soulside*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Harper, D. (1998). An argument for visual sociology. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based
    research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 24-41). London: Palmer
    Press.

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*,
    17(1), 13-26.

Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. London: Routledge.

Hinds, S.S. (2006). Hip-hop stars get hot on Grills. Retrieved February 28 from
    http//: www.allhiphop.com/hiphopnews.

Hirschman. E. C. (1980). Commonality and idiosyncrasy in popular culture: An empirical
    examination of layers of meaning concept. In E. C. Hirschman & Hirschman, E.
    C., & LaBarbera, P.A. (1990). Dimensions of possession Importance. *Psychology
    and Marketing*, *7*, 215-233.

Holland, S. (2004). *Alternate femininities: Body, Age, Identity*. Oxford, UK and New York: Berg.

Holman, R. H. (1981). Product use as communication: A fresh Appraisal of a Venerable Topic. In *Review of Marketing*, B. M. Enis & K. J. Roering Review of Marketing (pp.106-119). Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association.

Hyatt, E. M. (1992). Consumer stereotyping: The cognitive bases of the social symbolism of products. *Advances in Consumer Research, 19*, 299-303.

Kasser, T. & Ryan, R.M. (1993). A dark side of the American Dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65,* 410-422.

Kaiser. S. B. (1990). *The social psychology of clothing: Symbolic appearances in context*. New York: Macmillan.

Kilsheimer, J. (1993). *Status consumption: The development and implications of a scale measuring the motivation to consume for status*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL.

Kochman, T. (1981). *Black and white styles in conflict*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Light, A. (1999). *The Vibe history of hip-hop*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Loeffler T.A. (2004). A Photo-Elicitation study of the meanings of outdoor adventure experiences. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *36*(4), 536-556.

Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1992). *Cool pose*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Mancini, J.K. (1981). *Strategic Styles: Coping in the inner city*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage.

Mason, R. (2001). Conspicuous Consumption: A literature review. *European Journal of Marketing*, *18*(3), 26-38.

McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *13*(1), 71-84.

McRobbie, A. (1994). *Postmodernism and popular culture*. London: Routledge.

Mitchell, T. (2001a). *Global noise: Rap and hip-hop outside the USA*, Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Mitchell, T. (2001b). Fightin' da Faida. In T. Mitchell, (Ed.), *Global noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (pp. 194-221). Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Morelli, S. (2001). Who is a dancing hero? In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (pp. 248-258). Middleton, CT. Wesleyan University Press.

Muhammed, C. (2001). *Hip-hop Fridays: Material Love*. Retrieved on February 28 from http://www.blackelectorate.com.

Munson, J. M., & Spivey, W.A. (1981). Product and brand user stereotypes among social classes. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *8*, 696-701.

Oh, M. (2005). *Bling-bling: Hip-hop's crown jewels*. New York: Wenner Books LLC.

O'Cass A., & McEwen, H. (2004). Exploring consumer status and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, *4*(1), 25-39.

O'Neal, G. (1997). *The power of style: On rejection of the accepted.* In K.K.P. Johnson and S.J. Lennon (Ed.), Appearance and Power (pp. 127-139). Oxford, UK: Berg.

Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pennay, M. (2001). Rap in Germany. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global noise: Rap and hip-hop outside the USA* (pp. 111-133). Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Prévos, A. J. (2001). Postcolonial popular music in France. In T. Mitchell, (Ed.), *Global noise: Rap an hip-hop outside the USA* (pp. 39-56). Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Prosser, J. (1998). The status of image-based research. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 97-112). London: Palmer Press.

Prown, J. D. (1982). Mind in matter: An introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method. *Winterthur Portfolio*, *17*(1), 1-19.

Richins, M. L. (1987). Media, materialism, and human happiness. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *14*, 352-356.

Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *19*, 303-316.

Richins, M. L. (1994a). Special possessions and the expression of material values. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*(3), 552-533.

Richins, M. L. (1994b). Valuing things: The public and private meanings of possessions, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*, 504-521.

Rigby, D., & Rigby, E. (1949). *Lock, stock and barrel: The story of collecting*. Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott.

Roach-Higgins, M.F., Eicher, J. B. (1992). *Dress and identity*. New York: Fairchild Publications.

Rochberg, E. (1984). Object relations, role models, and cultivation of the self. *Environment and Behavior*, *16*, 335-368.

Rose, T. (1994). *Black noise. Rap music and black culture in contemporary America*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Ross, A. (1994). Tribalism in effect. In S. Benstock & S. Ferris (Eds.), *On Fashion* (pp. 284-299). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ruth, A. (2000). *Queen Latifah*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications.

Simmel, G. (1978). *The philosophy of money*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Semmes, C. E. (1992). *Cultural hegemony and African-American development*. Westport, CO: Praeger.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *9*, 287-300.

Stone, G. P. (1959). Appearance and the self. In Arnold M. Rose (Ed.), *Human Behavior and the Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach* (pp. 86-116). New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Solomon, M. R. (1983). The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic Interactionist Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *10*, 19-329.

Stephen, C. (2006). *Hip-hop stars get hot on Grills*. Retrieved on February 10 from http//: www.thenewstribune.com/soundlife.com.

Trigg, A. B. (2001). Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption. *Journal of Economic Issues*, *35*(1), 99-115.

Veblen, T. (1994). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York, Macmillan. Originally published in 1899.

Wermuth, M. (2001). Rap in the low countries. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global noise: Rap and hip-hop outside the USA* (pp. 149-170). Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Wicklund, R., & Gollwitzer M. (1982). *Symbolic Self-Completion*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Williams, R. (1961). *The long revolution*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin/Pelican.

Winter, M. (2004). Interpreting the influence of diverse cultures on fashion. *Human Ecology*, *32*(1), 17 – 19.

Wright, J.K. (2006). *Howard University Hosts First Hip-Hop Symposium*. Retrieved on February 28 from http//: www.allhiphop.com/hiphopnews.

www.arted.osu.edu

www.avclub.com

www.badboyonline.com

www.cartypes.com

www.dictionary.com

www.fortunemagazine.com

www.imdb.com

www.jayquan.com

www.luxurylaunches.com

www.olivelela.vox.com

www.paulwallworld.com

www.reference.com

www.rockabillyhall.com

www.rocklibrary.com

www.sptimes.com

www.starpulse.com

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Hip-Hop Dress and Identity: A Qualitative Study of Music, Materialism, and Meaning

Project Director: Courtney Suddreth

Participant's Name: _____

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES:
The goal for this project is to explore how dress is used to communicate among African-American male members of the hip-hop culture. To address this goal, perceptions of African-American males will be explored. If you agree to this study, you will be interviewed concerning your thoughts about dress within the hip-hop movement. The interview will be audio-taped and will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

You may terminate the interview or audio-taping at any time. You may ask any questions you may have about the interview or the study at any time. Full confidentiality of participation will be maintained. Actual names will not be used in any written accounts of the research project. Digital audio files will be saved on the investigator's computer and password protected. Any written transcriptions of the interviews will be deidentified and kept in a locked cabinet in the investigator's home. Data will be disposed of via shredding and the digital audio files will be erased within five years from the initial start date of data collection. Signed consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the faculty sponsor's office during the project and for three years following the end of the project.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:
It is anticipated that there are no psychological, physical, or sociological risks involved in participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:
The benefits of participating in the study will include contributing to the understanding of the role of dress within hip-hop culture. There are no personal benefits gained from participating in the study.
Benefits to society as a result of this study include an in-depth understanding of how dress is used to communicate within the hip-hop culture from the perspective of African-American male members of the culture.

By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Courtney Suddreth by calling (336) 632-9853. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Courtney Suddreth and are indicating that you are age 18 or older.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature*   Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1.	Describe your first experience with hip-hop. Do any of these images relate to your first experience? If so, explain.

2.	Can you describe this image? What do you see?

3.	How does this image relate to your thought and feelings about hip-hop during that time?

4.	What role did hip-hop play in your life during the mid-to-late 1980s? Early mid-to-late nineties?

5.	What role does hip-hop play in your life today?

6.	Does hip hop influence your sense of style?

7.	Describe a recent apparel purchase you have made. Would you say it was influenced by hip-hop in any way?

8.	Do television programs featuring hip-hop and related topics influence your decision on what styles to adopt?

9.	When you think of the word hip-hop, what comes to mind? Do any of these images help describe it?

10.	If there was one word to describe how you feel about hip-hop, what would it be? Explain. Which of these images best represents it or a combination thereof?

11.	How does this image relate to your thoughts and feelings about materialism and hip-hop in America today?

12.	When did you first notice a focus on status objects in hip-hop? Do you think that materialism exists in hip-hop today?

13.	How do you incorporate any aspects of hip-hop into your life, such as the images or messages it conveys?

14.	Is there anything that we have not covered that you would like to discuss?

APPENDIX C

IMAGES

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 1: Run DMC, circa 1985

Source: www.wikipedia.org

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 2: The Sugarhill Gang, circa 1980

Source: www.flowmagazine.net

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 3: Eric B. and Rakim, circa 1986

Source: www.bbc.co.uk

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Image not included due to copyright reasons

Image 4: Public Enemy, circa 1987

Source: www.arted.osu.edu

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 5: Big Daddy Kane, circa 1987

Source: www.nj4ever.com

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 6: Tupac Shakur, circa 1991

Source: www.tupac-online.com/Pictures/

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 7: TIS 22" Inch Rim

Source: www.twentyinchesstrong.com

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 8: "Grillz"

Source: www.moegrillz.tripod.com

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 9: Rolls Royce Phantom, circa 2006

Source: www.luxurylaunches.com

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image10: Rapper Birdman, circa 2004

Source: www.starpulse.com

Image not included due to copyright reasons.

Image 11: Rapper Chamillionaire, circa 2006

Source: www.realmusicpeople.com