

1-1-2007

# Situating hybridity and searching for authenticity in Canadian hip-hop : how do we "keep it real"?

Cheryl Thompson  
*Ryerson University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ryerson.ca/dissertations>



Part of the [Music Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Thompson, Cheryl, "Situating hybridity and searching for authenticity in Canadian hip-hop : how do we "keep it real"?" (2007). *Theses and dissertations*. Paper 286.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Ryerson. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ryerson. For more information, please contact [bcameron@ryerson.ca](mailto:bcameron@ryerson.ca).

611/65544  
ML  
3531  
T46  
2007

SITUATING HYBRIDITY AND SEARCHING FOR AUTHENTICITY IN  
CANADIAN HIP-HOP: HOW DO WE "KEEP IT REAL"?

by

Cheryl Thompson, BA (Honours), University of Windsor, 2001

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University and York University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Communication and Culture

in the Program of

Communication and Culture

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2007

© Cheryl Thompson 2007

UMI Number: EC53682

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



---

UMI Microform EC53682  
Copyright 2009 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.



## **Abstract**

**Situating Hybridity and Searching for Authenticity in Canadian Hip-Hop:  
How do we “keep it real”?**

**Master of Arts, 2007**

**Cheryl Thompson**

**Communication & Culture**

**Ryerson University and York University**

This project explores the language and discourse around hip-hop in Canada. Through ethnographic interviews, I contemplate the narrative of an indigenized Canadian hip-hop, how that narrative is reflective of national and regional identities, the use of slang vernacular and resistance rhetoric, and, how female hip-hop community members articulate the genre's need for authentication. Through the use of critical content/textual analysis, I also explore the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and identity in the lyrics of five of Canada's mainstream rappers to illustrate how the rhetoric of hip-hop and that of the media influences the way we talk about and consume hip-hop culture. Ultimately, I draw conclusions related to the current status of hip-hop in Canada, and suggest that the genre's dominant contestations are centred on the lack of definition on the Black, White and Native Canadian identity, ownership, and how corporate annexation impedes the genre's ability to transcend.

**Key words:** hip-hop, authenticity, race, gender, sexuality, identity, corporatization

## Acknowledgements

When I started working on this project, I never imagined the impact it would have on my life. Initially, I thought it was about my own personal development; but upon reflection, I realize that it was not just about me.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge every rapper, DJ, breakdancer, and graffiti artist for their artistic expression and contributions. You are the reason we critics have something to critique! It is important to not lose sight of that truth.

I must also thank my supervisor, Jennifer Brayton. I recall our initial meeting back in 2005 when I was a little unsure about this topic, and how I should approach it. But in your own special way, you made me believe in myself and my capabilities as a scholar on a level that I can honestly say I did not think was possible. Inasmuch as you were my supervisor, you have become a friend, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

To Kate Eichhorn and Steve Bailey, you will never truly know how essential your inputs were to the development of this project. I know I've said it a lot but it would not be what it is today were it not for your *keen insights and recommendations*. Thanks for showing me how to use my voice and not hide it behind theory.

I'd like to thank my parents, Leander and Syrilin Thompson, for allowing me to be me. I've always been outspoken, opinionated, a critical thinker, and at times down right stubborn in my beliefs and you always encouraged me to live a life of integrity and as it relates to this project, you demanded your children be "real" at all times. I would not be where I am today without you.

To my twin, Sharlene, I thank you for always challenging me and for our engaging debates about hip-hop. It is your strength and perseverance through adversity that has inspired me the most. I would also like to thank Dahlia and Donnell for making your little sister feel like she was cool enough to hang with you.

Also, to Chantelle, Alyssa, Paola, and Shane, you have been there for me in good times and bad, and you will never know what your support means to me. I love you all dearly.

Finally, I am completely in awe of everything that has happened to me, and by no means do I take my accomplishments for granted. If someone would have told me back in 1982 that hip-hop would one day change my life, I never would have believed them. While I do not know if this project will change the world, it has changed me and I know it has also changed everyone above, so I think that's a pretty good start.

## Table of Contents

<b>Declaration .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Preface: How Hip-Hop Found Me.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Contextualizing Hip-Hip .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. Understanding Hip-Hop as a Culture .....	8
2.2. What is “keeping it real” Really About, Anyway? .....	15
2.3. Hip-Hop’s Cultural Identity in Postmodernity .....	21
2.4. Black Sexuality, Popular Culture and Hip-Hop .....	26
2.5. White Consumption of Commodified “Blackness” .....	33
2.5. Hip-Hop Goes Global .....	34
<b>Chapter 3: Explanation of Methods .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1. Why These Hip-Hop Community Members? .....	38
3.2. Data Collection .....	41
3.3. Why These Rappers’ Lyrics? .....	45
3.4. Who Are They?.....	47
3.5. Limitations .....	54
<b>Chapter 4: Ethnographic Interviews and “Keeping It Real” .....</b>	<b>55</b>
4.1. Why “Keeping It Real”? .....	55
4.2. Expressions of Locality.....	57
4.3. We Need America’s Approval, Or Do We? .....	66
4.4. Use of Language and the Framing of Hip-Hop .....	72
4.5. Canadian Hip-Hop’s Political and Social Agenda.....	81
4.6. National and Regional Identity Politics.....	86
<b>Chapter 5: Mainstream Hip-Hop’s Rhymes and Resistance Lyrics .....</b>	<b>89</b>
5.1. Hip-Hop’s Lyrics Reign Supreme.....	89
5.2. Lyrical Expressions of One’s Location .....	93
5.3. Use of Slang Vernacular .....	96
5.4. Tensions and Resistance Strategies .....	98
5.5. Authenticity Claims .....	106
5.6. What About Women? .....	120
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>126</b>
6.1. Situating and Authenticating Canadian Hip-Hop .....	126
6.2. Future Research .....	132
<b>Appendix 1: .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Appendix 2: .....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Appendix 3: .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Appendix 4: .....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Appendix 5: .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Appendix 6: .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Bibliography: .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Discography: .....</b>	<b>149</b>

## **Appendices**

US hip-hop community members' claims of authenticity  
Non-Black hip-hop community members' claims of authenticity  
Black Canadian rappers' affirmation of racial identity  
Black Canadian rappers' use of the N-word  
Black Canadian rappers' expression of "hard"  
Black Canadian hip-hop community members' claims of authenticity

## Preface: How Hip-Hop Found Me

A few years ago, I went to see *Brown Sugar* (Rick Famuyiwa, 2002), a hip-hop romantic comedy. The film stars Sanaa Latham as Sidney Shaw, a twenty-something hip-hop writer and magazine editor. In the film, Latham's character begins every interview with the same question, "when did you first fall in love with hip-hop?" Although, it was just a movie, I could not help but wonder how I would answer Sidney Shaw's question. Weeks later, I started to think about my relationship with hip-hop and the exact moment when it became a part of my life.

I recall one summer in 1982 when I was five, my Jamaican-born parents took my siblings and I to Brooklyn, New York. A few days later, I heard the song that would later come to be known as one of hip-hop's first commercial hits, "The Message"<sup>1</sup> by Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five:

Broken glass everywhere  
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just  
Don't care  
I can't take the smell, I can't take the noise  
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice  
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back  
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat  
I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far  
Cause the man with the tow-truck repossessed my car

The lyrics of this song profoundly spoke to me since during those two weeks in Brooklyn, I saw broken glass everywhere, people pissing in stair wells, roaches in the house and junkies on the street, but just like the song said, no one seemed to care.

---

<sup>1</sup> Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five. (1982). *The Message*. [CD]. New York: Sugar Hill Records.

My memories of New York in the early eighties remained forefront in my mind. As I (and hip-hop) grew up, it bothered me that socially and politically charged hip-hop began to take a backseat to commercially-driven hip-hop like Cash Money Millionaires' 1999 hit "Bling Bling"<sup>2</sup> with lyrics: "The Cash Money motto we got to drank 'til we throw up/Nigga point the hoe out guaranteed I can fuck/Wootay I'm tattooed and barred up/Medallion iced up, Rolex bezelled up/And my pinky ring is platinum plus." If American hip-hop had changed so drastically over a twenty year period, where had Canadian hip-hop progressed to ten years after the commercial success of Maestro 'Fresh' Wes' 1989 hit album, *Symphony in Effect*?

At the exact moment I was contemplating the state of hip-hop, a discourse began to circulate within the hip-hop community in the US. If hip-hop was created by people who lived life from the margins of society and their music represented the counter-culture angst of youths living in the inner-city, now that that music was firmly entrenched within mainstream culture, under the control of corporate [read: White] America, could it still "authentically" represent its originators? For example, hip-hop scholar Kembrew McLeod (1999) argues that hip-hop's need for authentication reached its peak when in 1999 Lauryn Hill won the Grammy for Album of the Year, and *Time Magazine* subsequently devoted its cover story to hip-hop.

In the years since Hill's award, American scholars have further deconstructed hip-hop's authenticity, lyrical content and its inclusion in the mainstream popular culture (Armstrong, 2004; Cummings & Roy, 2002; Dyson, 2002; Diehl, 1999; Emerson, 2002; Forman, 2002; Kitwana, 2002; Keyes, 2002; Kopano, 2002; Powell, 2000; Saddik, 2003; Yousman, 2003). Conversely, only a few Canadian scholars (Kelly, 2001; Haines, 1999;

---

<sup>2</sup> Cash Money Millionaires. (2000). *Baller Blockin*. [CD]. USA: Cash Money Records.

Ibrahim, 2003; 2004; Walcott, 1997; Warner, 2006) have explored hip-hop in Canada, despite the fact Canadian rappers have had their own struggles since the late nineties.

In Canada, award shows have also been an arena where hip-hop has been contested. The Juno Awards first included hip-hop as an award category<sup>3</sup> in 1991, but it was not until 1998 when Vancouver-based Rascalz (Red1, Misfit and DJ Kemo) refused to accept the award, citing a lack of respect for the genre, which had been moved to the non-televised version of the show, that the spotlight turned on how the music industry discredits Canadian hip-hop. Following the incident, in an interview with Mike Ross, *Canoe Jam!*, Red1 (Romeo Jacobs) said, “I feel like that sometimes, that it’s a racist thing. But, it’s like ... it’s hard to even say that. As soon as you say that, people say, ‘oh, so you’re going to the race card? Not again ... not this argument again!’” (June, 1998). In that article, Ross posed the following questions: Why are the Rascalz so special? Why is “urban” music so special?

While it is easy to appreciate Ross’ comments since several music categories do not make the televised Juno broadcast (jazz, folk, blues, etc.), given the immense popularity (commercially and socially) of hip-hop both in the US and Canada, Ross should have asked: why are Canadian artists, like Rascalz, ignored by their own music industry? For example, in 2006, Kardinal Offishall publicly announced he would boycott all future Juno Awards. He argued that the show prioritizes US artists, and perpetuates the industry’s lack of interest in homegrown talent. In an interview with *Chart Magazine*, Offishall said, “it’s really atrocious what they do to hip-hop in this country and what they do for the artists ... and it’s one of those things, I just feel like the token hip-hop artist

---

<sup>3</sup> In 2003, the category changed to Rap Recording of the Year, as it was originally called back in 1991 when hip-hop was introduced into the show.

from Canada” (Brophy, 2006). Although the 2006 Juno Awards included performances by Massari<sup>4</sup> and Divine Brown,<sup>5</sup> the appearance of US hip-hop group, Black Eye Peas, spearheaded Offishall’s complaints:

For urban music<sup>6</sup> in this country, I mean, not only was hip-hop not televised, but also reggae and R&B ... to me, it’s sickening – and then they have the nerve to bring in a hip-hop act [Black Eyed Peas] from outside the country. I just had enough. The Black Eyed Peas are huge and if I was getting paid as much by the Junos as they were getting paid, I’d be here too ... it has nothing to do with the Black Eyed Peas (Brophy, 2001).

At the same moment African-American artists are debating issues of authenticity as a result of too much commercial and mainstream success, why are Canadian hip-hop artists still struggling to achieve the very same thing?

Importantly, although Black Canadian artists have been quite vocal about their marginalization, non-Black artists from other regions are also ignored by Canada’s music industry. Most notably, Halifax has a rich hip-hop history that dates back to 1984 but it is rarely discussed within the discourse on music in Canada. For example, Thomas Quinlan writes, “With early groups like Care Crew, New Beginning, and Down By Law, Halifax built a strong hip-hop foundation.... The city’s small size has long contributed to its particular sound and vibrant strength” (April, 2000). Further, although the East Coast Music Awards (ECMAs) have been in existence since 1989, and artists such as Rich Terfly, Josh Martinez, Sixtoo, Classified, and Witchdoc Jorun, have been creating “some of the most creative hip-hop music in Canada” (April, 2000), the genre did not become a

---

<sup>4</sup> Born in Lebanon, Massari is an R&B singer who currently resides in Ottawa.

<sup>5</sup> Toronto-based Divine Brown is an R&B singer. Her single, “Old Skool Love” was a commercial hit in 2005.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Juno Awards website, Best R&B/Soul Recording and Best Reggae Recording have been award categories since 1985.



category at the ECMAs until 2006.<sup>7</sup> While Black artists from Toronto and Vancouver are struggling to get the attention of major labels, east coast rappers, like Buck 65 argue that “some ... have had opportunities to sign with majors or to hawk some shit on TV, but didn’t because we refuse to sell out” (April, 2000).

---

<sup>7</sup> According to the ECMA website, Rap/Hip-Hop Single Track Recording of the Year became a category in 2006, prior to, hip-hop fell under the award category Urban Recording of the Year.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

While my foray into being a writer began with *Exclaim! Magazine*, it was not until I started writing for *Chart Magazine* in 2005 that I really began to contemplate the state of hip-hop in Canada. A short time later, I came across an article written by a fellow writer, Del F. Cowie, where he argued that “a distinctly Canadian dilemma that the hip-hop community is ever aware of and constantly trying to escape from is the shadow of our neighbour to the south” (January, 1999). Subsequent to that article, K’Naan, a Somalia-born rapper who immigrated to Toronto as a teenager told me: “There were many influences in Etobicoke where I spent my early years...It was a new black immigrant community... Rexdale was one of the few places in Canada where there actually were riots. The early 90s in Canada for Black people was like Blacks in the 60s in the US”

In his study, “Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation,” McLeod (1999) asked the following questions: What do authenticity claims mean to people within the hip-hop community, and how does the invocation of authenticity function? Second, does the invocation of authenticity make appeals to solidarity across racial, gender, class, or cultural formations? Third, what are the contexts in which authenticity is invoked? Fourth, how and why are authenticity claims – specifically, the term, “keepin’ it real” – contested by members of the hip-hop community? If Cowie and K’naan’s words are true, and Canada remains in the shadows of America, if similar questions are asked to members of Canada’s hip-hop community, what would they reveal? Thus, the impetus for this project is the argument that Canada is “living in the shadows” of America. Is Canadian hip-hop contemplating issues of

corporatization, commodification and authenticity like the hip-hop community in America? Do discourses on race, White appropriation and gender circulate to the same extent as they do in the US? If so, how do Canadian rappers use their lyrics to demarcate the boundaries of an “authentic” Canadian hip-hop?

In chapter two, I contextualize the rise and development of hip-hop in America, from understanding the roots of hip-hop culture, to why claims of authenticity are integral to the genre. Further, I explore how and why issues related to gender, race, and commodification are at the intersection of gaining an understanding of the discursive nature of hip-hop culture. I also provide an introduction to the global reception of the genre around the world. In chapter three, I explain the methodology used in this project, detailing why it was necessary to conduct qualitative interviews in addition to content/textual analysis. I also describe the coding scheme that was employed during my research, and why and how each artist was chosen. In chapter four, I situate the strategies employed by members of Canada’s hip-hop community to remain authentic, or “keep it real,” which includes a detailed comparative analysis of each community member from coast to coast, as well as commentary on the current status of women in Canadian hip-hop. In chapter five, I provide a critique of five central themes inductively drawn from my analysis of lyrics from Canada’s mainstream rappers. These categories include: location, slang use, tensions and resistance strategies, authenticity claims, and talk about women. Finally, chapter six contains a summation of my findings, concluding thoughts and future research possibilities.

## Chapter 2: Contextualizing Hip-Hip

### 2.1. Understanding Hip-Hop as a Culture

Culture as a source of identity does need to be understood as a flexible, open-ended process grounded in lived experience; but it is also a process in the sense that it is constituted by people on the basis of action and choice. – Juan Flores (1994)

Back in the early eighties, hip-hop was deemed a passing fad. However, today it is one of the most dominant forces in popular music. Importantly, the term “rap” and “hip-hop” are often used interchangeably, but it is important to understand how they differ. Rap is the active verb referring to an artist rhyming over top a rhythmic beat. Hip-hop refers to the culture of rap music, which includes three other elements – break dancing, graffiti and DJing – in addition to rap. For the purposes of this project, the terms “hip-hop” and “rap” are considered the same.

One of the fundamental elements of hip-hop that separates it from other popular music genres is that it is first and foremost considered to be a culture, which grew out of the South Bronx, New York in the late seventies. As such, in addition to the catch phrase “keeping it real,” this project is also framed around understanding hip-hop not just as a musical genre, but as a culture. In his book, *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and The Crisis in African-American Culture*, Bakari Kitwana (2002) explains why members of the “hip-hop generation”<sup>8</sup> consider hip-hop to be an inseparable part of who they are. He writes, “Those young African-Americans ... who came of age in the eighties and nineties ... share a specific set of values and attitudes.... Collectively, these views make up a complex worldview that ... first began to be expressed in the insightful mid- to late

---

<sup>8</sup> Kitwana describes the “hip-hop generation” as those born between 1965 and 1984.

1980s socio-political critiques in rap” (p. 4-5). Further, Tricia Rose (1994) explains why, for African-Americans, hip-hop is interconnected with their cultural world view. She writes:

Hip-hop is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip-hop (p. 21).

Although I am not African-American, as a Black Canadian of Caribbean descent, Kitwana’s definition of the “hip-hop generation” and Rose’s articulation of the significance of hip-hop music to the Black cultural experience in America resonates with me, as it does for other Afro Diasporic peoples, irrespective of citizenship. For example, British scholar, Paul Gilroy (1986) argues, “The experience of labour has, since slavery, been a central topic in Black expressive cultures. Their origins in slavery have meant that the relationship between unfree labour and the subtler imperatives of wage slavery has been long debated by Blacks in their music making and non-work activity” (p. 200).

Beyond hip-hop’s beats, rhymes and culture, it contains many of the same elements found in the oral traditions of West Africa, not to mention gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues and soul. In order to understand how hip-hop has come to serve as “a common language between disparate African peoples who had been separated from their lands, language groups, and cultures by the American slave trade” (Woldu, 2001, p. 25), it is important to review the historical development of Black music in America. Despite the fact that hip-hop is a modern music created on American soil, it is rooted in several West African oral traditions.

As Geneva Smitherman (1997) writes, “The rapper is a postmodern African griot, the verbally gifted storyteller and cultural historian... [Rap artists] decry, for all the world to hear the deplorable conditions of the hood” (cited in Cummings & Roy, 2002, p. 61). Second, the act of rapping is “predicated on what communication scholars call *nommo*, the power of the word, a concept derived from the Dogon of Mali” (Keyes, 2002, p. 22). Arthur Smith (1970) emphasizes the importance of black oratory and how it became interwoven into the cultural experience of African-Americans during slavery. Unable to read or write English and forbidden to learn, “vocal communication became for a much greater portion of Blacks than Whites the fundamental medium of communication” (p. 264). As time passed, Blacks in America used music to show reverence towards their African heritage, developing “alternate communication patterns in the work songs, Black English, sermons, and the Spirituals with their dual meanings, one for the body and one for the soul” (p. 265). It was through music that African-Americans “consciously or unconsciously retained parts of their African selves and preserved in a hostile land” (Kopano, 2002, p. 206). Thus, hip-hop’s resistance rhetoric is descendant from the slave spirituals and gospel music of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; further, its improvisational style, lyric structure and commercial appeal resembles the 20<sup>th</sup> century historical development of jazz, rhythm and blues and soul.

In his essay entitled, “Free Jazz and Black Nationalism: A Rhetoric of Musical Style,” Robert Francesconi (1986) describes how the Free Jazz Movement<sup>9</sup> represented an epistemological shift in the European musical validation process during the late thirties and forties:

---

<sup>9</sup> This movement was a departure from expected patterns of musical tonality and rhythmic structures representing a new musical style.

American jazz was the result of a collision of cultural traditions in the American South. It grew from the interpenetration of African and European musical resources (Collier, 1978; Ostransky, 1977; Roberts, 1972; and Tirro, 1977) ... Headed by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie ... bebop was an important development in the history of jazz. It was a partial “re-Africanization” of jazz tradition with its emphasis on the spontaneous improvisation of melody. It defined itself firmly within the Black American tradition.... Melodic improvisation is a fundamental characteristic of jazz, a characteristic it shares with African and other non-Western musical forms (p. 39).

Bebop was the first genre of music developed by African-Americans that cut across the grain of widely held European standards for melodic and harmonic structures. Rose (1994) argues that “harmony” versus “rhythm” is one of the primary distinctions between Western classical and African and African-derived music. Denied access to instruments of rhythmic expression, when Black Americans “began to mimic the very diversity of tones and colors that were inherent to the African polyrhythms of the past” (Neal, 1997, p. 118), they were rebelling against Western classical music traditions centred on tonal functional harmony.<sup>10</sup> By favouring musical practices that valorized “rhythmic complexity, repetition with subtle variations, the significance of the drum, melodic interest in the bass frequencies, and breaks in pitch and time (e.g. suspensions of the beat for a bar or two)” (Rose, 1994, p. 67), the music they produced became a part of their resistance rhetoric.

In the fifties, “signifying,” described by Cheryl Keyes (2002) as “an indirect statement about a situation or another person” (p. 24) or an allusive way of “talking bad” (Woldu, 2001) also known as “playing the dozens” would figure prominently in the oral rhetoric of African-American culture, as “featured in the comedy routines of Redd Foxx

---

<sup>10</sup> Rose defines Tonal functional harmony as clear, definite pitches and logical relations between them; on the forward drive toward resolution of a musical sequence that leads to a final resolution: the final perfect cadence (p.66).

and Moms Mabley, the poetic mouthing-off of the young Muhammad Ali” (Keyes, p. 29). Like the African griots and “jive-talking” comedians of the sixties, rappers continued the African-American tradition of storytelling, creating their own form of musical expression based on reinventions and redefinitions of traditional African forms of communication. As David Toop (1984) affirms, “rap music originated from the narrative poems called toasts, which are rhyming stories, often lengthy, which are told mostly amongst men. Toasts are often violent, scatological, obscene, misogynist and have been used for decades to while away time in situations of enforced boredom, whether prison, armed service or streetcorner life” (cited in Cummings & Roy, 2002, p. 61).

While “playing the dozens” influenced hip-hop’s orality, the corporate annexation of soul and rhythm and blues of the fifties and early sixties, would set the stage for hip-hop’s corporatization. In his essay, “Soul Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music,” Mark Anthony Neal (1997) argues that at first, “Soul and Rhythm and Blues ... represented music that was distinctly created for transmission within ... the Black Public Sphere of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 119), however, once soul music became a dominant popular form, it became a malleable market resource merchandised to Black and White consumers alike. Thus, “the commodification of soul had a particularly compelling impact on African American popular expression, in that political resistance was often parlayed as an element of style” (p. 119-20). In direct response to such co-optation, Gilroy (1988) cites James Brown’s “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud”, the Chi-Lites “Power To the People” and Weldon Irvine’s “Young Gifted and Black” from the late sixties as “obvious illustrations of the character of a period in which soul was revered as the principal criterion for affiliation to the Black Power movement” (p. 177).



As rhythm and blues from the sixties gave way to seventies soul, Black artists formed a new kind of resistance rhetoric directly geared towards Blacks on the subject of their African heritage but withdrawing from direct communication with a White audience (Gilroy, 1986).

By the time of rap's first commercial success, The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" hit the airwaves in 1979, African-inspired, African-American created music had morphed from slavery to jazz to rhythm and blues to soul. However, what set hip-hop apart from prior forms of Black resistance rhetoric was that boasting, toasting and bragging became its dominant tenants as opposed to minor elements; an act that features predominantly in the musical traditions of Blacks in the Caribbean. In talking about the importance of the Jamaican art of "toasting," Martha Bayles (1994) writes, "Jamaican DJs would remove the vocal part of a song (dubbing) and substitute their own vocals there. These substituted vocals were "toasting," a form of rap, which was really improvised poetry with the DJ often making tributes or boasting about himself" (cited in Kopano, 2002, p. 208). When Jamaican DJ Kool Herc – along with Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash, who also have West Indian affiliation – immigrated to the South Bronx in the early 1970s, he brought "the "toast and boast" tradition of roots reggae ... where DJs would bring huge speakers and turntables ... and rap over the simple bass lines of the ska and reggae beats to create a style uniquely Jamaican" (Perkins, 1996, p. 6). Importantly, Gilroy (1986) notes that the study of Black culture within a Diaspora also requires consideration of Rastafari<sup>11</sup> since rappers draw on many of the oppositional themes associated with Rastafari culture, including "a critique of various forms of racial

---

<sup>11</sup> The growth of the movement, particularly during the 1970s, Gilroy argues, would confirm the potency of culture as a conductor of political ideologies between the Caribbean and the overdeveloped world.

subordination and a general analysis of key features of the capitalist mode of production” (p. 198). For example, the lyrics from Tupac Shakur’s “Keep Ya Head Up”<sup>12</sup> are an example of Rastafari theology:

Some say tha blacker the berry  
Tha sweeter tha juice  
I say, the darker the flesh and tha deeper tha roots  
I give a holler to my sisters on welfare  
Tupac cares, but don’t nobody else care

Hip-hop is considered a culture for the ways in which it embodies the cultural experience of Blacks in America. Although it was created on American soil, its traditions are heavily reliant on the oral and rhythmic traditions of the African Diaspora, “both borrowing from and expanding this tradition in its creative use of language and rhetorical styles and strategies” (Kopano, 2002, p. 204).

Finally, the contributions of Latinos to the hip-hop movement can not be overlooked. In the early days of hip-hop, Puerto Rican and Dominicans joined forces with African Americans. In the eighties, “The Real Roxanne (Joanne Martinez) and the Fat Boy’s Prince Markie Dee (Mark Morales) increased the presence of Latino artists in the hip-hop community” (Del Barco, p. 67, 1996). As DMC, of the rap group Run DMC explained in a 1993 interview: “Basically, it was the Blacks and the Latinos out there. It was who was in the ghetto, the inner city. As hip-hop progressed, it got to be a Black thing. Maybe there’s more Blacks doin’ it, know what I’m saying? But it’s all about who’s got soul, who gets the flavour, who gets the raw freedom, the rebellious attitude in them” (p. 67). In the nineties, Latinos such as Fat Joe<sup>13</sup> (Jose Antonio Cartagena), Big

---

<sup>12</sup> Shakur, T. (1993). *2 Pac Strickly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* [CD]. Atlanta: Amaru Entertainment.

<sup>13</sup> Born and raised in The Bronx, Fat Joe is of Cuban and Puerto Rican heritage.

Pun<sup>14</sup> (Christopher Lee Rios), and The Beatnuts<sup>15</sup> increased the presence of Latinos in hip-hop. Since Latino men and women were integral to hip-hop's development (primarily Puerto Ricans in New York) and the genre is primarily considered to be an African-American art form, scholars such as Juan Flores (1994) have called for a rethinking of hip-hop's cultural ownership. According to Flores, the experience of Latinos in hip-hop, in particular, Puerto Ricans has been the story of "intense cultural negotiation and jostling for a place within an ever-broadening field of expressive practices, without relinquishing the particularities of their own community and heritage" (p. 90). While "the emergence of rap may be seen as testimony to the cultural interaction between the Black and Puerto Rican communities" (p. 91), there are those who argue that Latinos in hip-hop always know that they are operating in a "black world" (Chase cited in Flores, 1994, p. 93). Ultimately, the Latino contributions to hip-hop require acknowledgement of the fact that "the strong associations of hip-hop with the African American urban experience have had linguistic consequences ... on youths whose origins are foreign to the African-American community" (Cutler cited in Peter Slomanson & Michael Newman,<sup>16</sup> 2004, p. 207).

## **2.2. What is "keeping it real" Really About, Anyway?**

Hip-hop in the United States is marked by three distinct waves. The early years from 1979 to 1985 is considered the period in which hip-hop first exploded into the mainstream, becoming a legitimate form of musical expression. As Keyes (2002) writes,

---

<sup>14</sup> Also born in The Bronx, Pig Pun is of Puerto Rican decent. He died of a heart attack in 2000.

<sup>15</sup> The Beatnuts are a hip-hop crew from New York comprised of Ju-Ju (Jerry Tineo) of Dominican descent, and Psycho Les (Lester Fernandez) of Colombian descent. They are considered to be an underground group. In 2004, they were caught in a public dispute with Jennifer Lopez for her sampling of their song "Watch Out Now" in her hit "Jenny From The Block" without their knowledge.

<sup>16</sup> In their study of peer group identification and variation in New York Latino English, Slomanson and Newman found this form of English is distinct from both African American vernacular English and New York European American vernacular English.

“From New York street corners to subway stations, rap music poured from large, portable cassette players called “ghetto blasters.” The rap sound eventually spread to neighbouring northeastern cities via homemade tapes and DJ mix tapes” (p. 67). Artists like The Sugar Hill Gang, Whodini and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five became overnight celebrities during this era. Although early rap was dominated by party or fun lyrics, as William Eric Perkins (1996) asserts, “Even rap music’s hyped commercialization could not dampen its tough, raw, hard-core street essence” (p. 1). For example, Kurtis Blow’s “The Breaks,”<sup>17</sup> one of “rap’s first commercial successes” (Perkins, 1996, p. 11), is illustrative of Perkin’s argument:

If your woman steps out with another man  
(That’s the breaks, that’s the breaks)  
And she runs off with him to Japan  
And the IRS says they want to chat  
And you can’t explain why you claimed your cat  
And Ma Bell sent you a whopping bill  
With eighteen phone calls to Brazil  
And you borrowed money from the mob  
And yesterday you lost your job  
Well, these are the breaks  
Break it up, Break it up, Break it up.

During the mid to late eighties, hip-hop moved into its second phase, marked by “‘social critique’ because the message was about ‘the hurt and horror that make urban life a jungle’” (Dyson cited in Cummings & Roy, 2002, p. 62). While some rappers were still talking about partying and fun (LL Cool J, De La Soul, Big Daddy Kane, and Slick Rick, etc.) other artists arose, whose lyrics focused specifically on the ills of inner-city life, social injustice and power inequalities in America. More so than before, rap music began to reflect “a hidden transcript ... using cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities ... a large significant

---

<sup>17</sup> Blow, K. (1980). *Kurtis Blow*. [CD]. USA: Mercury.

element in rap's discursive territory is engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress African Americans" (Rose, 1994, p. 100–101). The most politically charged rap group of this era was Public Enemy, led by emcee Carlton "Chuck D" Ridenhour. With their song "Fight the Power,"<sup>18</sup> from the group's third album, *Fear of a Black Planet*, Public Enemy expressed the pain, anguish and anger circulating within the Black public sphere during this time:

Elvis was a hero to most  
But he never meant shit to me you see  
Straight up racist that sucker was  
Simple and plain  
Motherfuck him and John Wayne  
Cause I'm Black and I'm proud  
I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped  
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps

Following this period, rap moved into its third phase (from the early 1990s to present); a phase Dyson refers to as "pluralization," which involved "experimentation and coupling of rap with different musical styles (such as soul and rock) and various combinations of elements borrowed from rap's two stages" (cited in Cummings & Roy, p. 62). It is during this era that discourses around authenticity and "keeping it real" began to circulate. While there are those who believe that identity in hip-hop is rooted in the specific local experience, and one's attachment to and status in a local group or alternative family (Rose, 1994) – tenets most reflected in hip-hop's first and second phases – there are others who argue that "keeping it real" in hip-hop is rooted in its performance. Baruti Kopano (2002) suggests that "keeping it real" means being true to the rich legacy of rap, a legacy that has given young Black males a primary avenue

---

<sup>18</sup> Public Enemy. (1989). *Fear of a Black Planet*. [CD]. New York: Def Jam Recordings.

through which to access public space – something that they have long lacked. If rappers are first and foremost performers, irrespective of the content of their songs, should hip-hop's legacy be considered a “real” reflection of a collective community or merely a performance, or representation of a reality?

Carolina Acosta-Alzuru and Elizabeth P. Lester Roushanzamir (2003) define representation as being “an active process through which meanings are created” (p. 47). Thus, although the posindustrial South Bronx provided the context for creative development among hip-hop's earliest innovators, shaping their cultural terrain, access to space, materials, and education (Rose, 1994) should songs like Naughty By Nature's “Everything's Gonna Be Alright”<sup>19</sup> be construed as mere performance since hip-hop is also, as Annette Saddik (2003) argues, “part of the African American continuum of performance that did not arise in a cultural vacuum outside of the tradition of theatre” (p. 118):

A ghetto bastard, born next to the projects  
Livin in the slums with bums, I sit and watch them  
Why do I have to be like this? Momma said I'm priceless  
So I am all worthless, starved, and it's just for being a nice kid  
Sometimes I wish I could afford a pistol then, though  
Last stop to hell, I would've ended things a while ago  
I ain't have jack but a black hat and napsack  
Four squad stolen in cars in a blackjack  
Drop that, and now you want me to rap and give?  
Say somethin' positive? Well positive ain't where I lived

It is my contention that authenticity in hip-hop is not rooted in its performance of the Black experience, but rather in the ways in which it serves as a resistance rhetoric against the dominant cultural hegemony. Whether or not groups like Naughty By Nature or Public Enemy are embellishing their words, being “real” in hip-hop is ultimately tied

---

<sup>19</sup> Naughty By Nature. (1991). *Naughty By Nature*. [CD]. USA: Tommy Boy Records.

to the contemptuous African-American experience with capitalism. On the one hand, making money is a part of the American Dream; on the other hand, part of the African American experience has been to resist “the distortions of commodified, corporate culture, and to stay committed to linking political, economic, and social justice to cultural “crossover” (Yousman, 2003, p. 389). Thus, even though hip-hop has gone through a dramatic ascendancy into the mainstream, it has been caught in a contradictory situation of being “inside” a mainstream culture artists had, in part, defined themselves as being against. For example, New York-based rap group, EPMP’s song “Crossover”<sup>20</sup> echoes the values of Black resistance for its lament against rappers who produce albums for the sole purpose of achieving mainstream success:

The rap era's outta control, brother's sellin their soul  
To go gold, going, going, gone, another rapper sold  
(To who) To pop and R&B, not the MD  
I'm strictly hip-hop, I'll stick to Kid Capri...  
(Not like other rappers) frontin on they fans, the ill  
Trying to chill, saying "damn, it be great to sell a mill"  
That's when the mind switch to the pop tip  
(Kid, you're gonna be large)  
Yea right, that's what the company kicks  
Forget the black crowds, you're wack now  
In a zoot suit, frontin' black lookin' mad foul

While “Crossover” was a hit in 1992, over the past few years, rapper 50 Cent has had a string of mainstream hits that speak to the same behaviours hip-hop was criticizing just ten years prior. For example, on “Hustler’s Ambition,”<sup>21</sup> 50 Cent raps about life on “the streets”:

America got a thing for this gangsta' shit, they love me  
Black Chuckies, black skullies, leather Pelle-Pelle  
I take spit over raymo shit, I'm a vandal  
Got the silver duct tape on my tray eight handle

---

<sup>20</sup> EPMD. (1992). *Business Never Personal*. [CD]. New York: Def Jam Recordings.

<sup>21</sup> 50 Cent. (2005). *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Interscope Records.

The women in my life bring confusion and shit  
SO like Nino when New Jack, I holla "cancel that bitch"  
Look at me this is the life I chose.

Meanwhile, he has earned a spot on *Forbes Magazine's* Celebrity Power 100 List<sup>22</sup> outranking Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, and Paris Hilton.

It is important to recognize that hip-hop's contradictions are complicated by the parallels between the genre and mainstream capitalist society. Although 50 Cent may appear to be an exaggerated version of Black masculinity, he is actually aligned with the images of masculinity that circulate within America's cultural discourse as a whole. As Yousman (2003) notes:

Rappers who construct violent, hypermasculine identities draw on the representations of masculinity that may be found in all of American popular culture, not simply in Black popular culture along. American history textbooks, television dramas, and Hollywood gangster films, westerns, and war movies all provide archetypal representations from which rappers and their fans draw, as evidenced by the tendency for some rappers to name themselves after legendary White criminals, such as Scarface (p. 383).

Further, the genre's glorification of material goods and its display of money as a signifier of achievement are not unique to hip-hop; rather, it is consistent with the rhetoric of the American Dream, and the idea that one's happiness in life is inextricably linked to one's pursuit of wealth.

The aforementioned and the fact that hip-hop appeared at a crucial juncture of postindustrial stagnation, increased family dissolution, and a weakened struggle for black economic and political rights has been the impetus for the genre's authenticity claims. It is because artists like 50 Cent are making millions that scholars argue hip-hop needs to remain authentic or as Keyes (2002) writes, strive to remain underground, refusing to

---

<sup>22</sup> Found on <http://sohh.com/>, a hip-hop news website.



identify with a pop (read: White, capitalist) market insisting that staying real necessitates an authentic representation and a continued connection with “the streets” – and hip-hop’s counter-culture roots.

Importantly, authenticity debates have also circulated within rock music. In their study on the lawsuit surrounding the release and manufacturing of rock group Negativland’s single, “The Letter ‘U’ and the Number ‘2’,” Herman and Sloop (1998) found that the ideology of authenticity has provided the ground work to distinguish between “authentic rock,” and “inauthentic rock” wherein “inauthentic rock was mere commercial entertainment; authentic rock was something more – an excess by virtue of which rock can become a significant and powerful investment of pleasure and meaning in everyday life” (p. 2). Hip-hop and rock music part ways is in the way authenticity is framed. While Grossberg (1992) argues that rock music is marked by a “logic of authentic inauthenticity” wherein “authentic inauthenticity undermines the very possibility of a privileged marginality which can separate itself from and measure itself (favourably) against an apparently homogenous mainstream” (cited in Herman & Sloop, 1998, p. 2) marking the collapse of the difference between the authentic and inauthentic, and rendering the absence of alternative spaces, hip-hop scholars refute the logic of authentic inauthenticity.

### **2.3. Hip-Hop’s Cultural Identity in Postmodernity**

The study of popular music has been grounded on the assumption that the music must somehow reflect or represent people. In his examination of the aesthetics of popular music, Simon Frith (1996) argues that “the issue is not how a particular piece of music or

a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience – a musical experience, an aesthetic experience – that we can only make sense of by *taking on* both a subjective and a collective identity” (p. 109). For Frith, music, like identity, is both performance and story wherein identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. Similarly, hip-hop scholars argue that hip-hop not only reflects the Black cultural experience in America, it also constructs a collective identity and aesthetic experience.

In his ethnographic study of identity construction in a teenage rap crew, Michael Newman (2001) found that hip-hop is best understood as a peer culture and aesthetic sensibility, wherein hip-hop has a constructive influence on identity, embodying certain shared value principles. Newman argues that hip-hop culture provides participants with access to attitudes toward identity through the display of a specific identity. Further, Robin Means Coleman (2003) argues that identity in hip-hop is a matter of preservation and maintenance of the Black identity. While scholars like Manning Marable (1992) believe that “Blackness, in purely racial terms, only means belonging to a group of people who have in common a certain skin color and other physical features ... this racial identity doesn’t tell us anything significant about a person’s political beliefs, voting behaviour, or cultural values” (cited in Coleman, 2003, p. 59), Coleman (2003) asserts that “Blackness” in hip-hop takes on a multiplicity of meanings wherein “Blackness represents having overt discursive import .... Those who do not invest in such a stance are labelled ‘sell outs’” (p. 60).

Others argue that hip-hop creates an “imagined community” that is based on a collective challenge to the consensual logic of America nationalism (Decker, 1994;

Kitwana, 2002). Jeffrey Louis Decker (1994) suggests that hip-hop's most revealing attribute is the ways in which it uses the language of nation to rearticulate a history of racial oppression and struggle towards Black empowerment and independence. Specifically, Decker argues that "rap ... espousing a Black nationalist sound, image and message draw both from recent struggles that anticipate the coming of the Black nation, and form a mythical attitude toward an immemorial African nation" (p. 100).

Within the Black American public sphere, hip-hop is positioned as a cultural experience rooted in a collective sense of community. If hip-hop reflects the African-American experience, and participates in the creation of a collective experience, Kitwana (2002) argues that as a result of hip-hop's commercial appeal, the cultural integrity of Black people is a concern. According to Kitwana, "the pervasive use of offensive epithets in rap lyrics, such as 'nigga,' 'bitch,' and 'ho,' all reinforce negative stereotypes about Blacks ... and the use of incendiary words like 'nigga' and 'bitch' has become so commonplace in rap's lyrics that today even those in rap's growing White audience routinely use them when referring to each other and often their Black peers" (p. 203-204). What price has members of hip-hop's Black community had to pay as a result of increased visibility in the mainstream culture given the pervasiveness of negative stereotypes?

In order to situate hip-hop's identity politics, it must be understood within the epoch of postmodernity. In addition to scholarly debates around the disappearance of real (Baudrillard, 1994; Jameson, 1984; Lyotard, 1986), the discourse on postmodernism is

also inclusive of third-wave feminism<sup>23</sup> (Brodrigg, 1992; Butler, 1990; Flax, 1990; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Haraway, 1991).

Jean Baudrillard (1994) asserts that postmodernity is marked by simulation, which is in direct opposition to representation. While representation is often linked to identity for the active ways it constructs meaning, simulation negates any possibility for real meaning because it “envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (p. 6), which for Baudrillard also represents a false reality. From this point of view, the simulacrum is “a fabrication which does not represent any reality beyond that which it creates in and of itself” (Grimwood, 2003, p. 78). While Jean-François Lyotard (1986) opines that among other things, our demands for identity coming from our condition as living beings and even social beings appear today irrelevant in the face of one’s obligation to complexify, mediate, memorize and synthesize one’s self, postmodern-feminists argue that identity is essential to our understanding of representation because the obligation to critique, analyze or mediate one’s self is considered an obligatory action essential to gaining understanding of one’s true self. Thus, Frith (1986) poses a fundamental question that underpins the discourse on postmodernism: How can we now tell the difference between the real and the simulated if when we examine a form in which sound is more important than sight, and time more important than space; when the text is a performance, a movement, a flux, nothing is represented?

---

<sup>23</sup> Third wave feminists, or postmodern-feminists, have critiqued the binary oppositions – women being equal to man; feminine the equivalent to masculine – by examining difference not in terms of opposites, like second-wave feminists, but rather as a phenomenon that is constantly constructed, reconstructed, performed, and deconstructed (Heywood, 2006). Further, Fraser and Nicholson (1990) argue that “feminists, like postmodernists, have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings” (p. 26).

Where scholars like Jameson (1983) argue that our contemporary social system has lost its capacity to know its own past, as such, it has begun to live in a perpetual present without depth, definition or secure identity, Joan Scott (1992) argues that it is impossible to speak of identity without essentializing it since identity is tied to notions of experience. While essentialism is classically defined as a belief in a true essence, that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing (Fuss, 1992), “essentialism articulates itself in a variety of ways and subtends a number of related assumptions” (p. 2), bell hooks<sup>24</sup> (1990) provides a critique of essentialism that speaks directly to non-White women, challenging imperial paradigms of Black identity. Specifically, hooks argues that classic essentialism “creates the idea of the ‘primitive’ promoting the notion of an ‘authentic’ experience, seeing as ‘natural’ those experiences of Black life which conforms to a pre-existing pattern or stereotype” (p.28). From this perspective, the postmodern critique of identity requires understanding of “the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced” (Scott, 1992, p. 33). Importantly, Somer Brodribb (1992) is critical of postmodern feminism and what she describes as the valorization of masculine ideology:

bell hooks asks “what does it mean when primarily white men and women are producing the discourse around Otherness?” (1990, p. 53). ... The postmodern condition tolerates no binary opposition of black to white, female to male; it is embarrassed by words like “struggle” and “solidarity” .... Joan Scott sees theory as a way of ordering experience and determining political practice ... I argue the best methodology for evaluating the practice of theory ... is whether it originates from feminist politics and women’s experiences. Not a tributary to or coincidence with male philosophy (xxv; xxvii).

---

<sup>24</sup> bell hooks is an African-American feminist scholar and activist. Born Gloria Watkins, hooks adopted the pseudonym to celebrate her family legacy, and it is in lower case to acknowledge the substance of her writings not who is writing them.

Since hip-hop is best understood not as producing new texts but new ways of performing texts, and new ways of performing the making of meaning, scholars argue that the question is not how identity has been translated into discursive forms that require decoding, but how identity is produced in performance (Frith, 1996; Saddik, 2003). Rose (1994) argues that hip-hop is not so much working against the cultural logic of Western classical music as it is working within and among distinctly Black practices, articulating “stylistic and compositional priorities found in Black cultures in the Diaspora” (p. 95-96). Meanwhile, Annette Saddik (2003) asserts that “renaming, in the context of hip-hop, signifies both the inhabiting of fictional character and, at the same time, an acknowledgement that, historically, even “real” Black identity is fiction” (p.117). Ultimately, hip-hop must be understood as a postmodern practise not from the point of view that rappers invent fictional names (e.g. Curtis Jackson aka 50 Cent), for example, to reproduce a “simulation that threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imagery’” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3), but for the ways it dispels the myths of prior grand narratives, like modernism, and creates opportunities for different perspectives, a diversity of meanings, and points of views to be equally constituted as knowledge.

#### **2.4. Black Sexuality, Popular Culture and Hip-Hop**

Contemporary popular music is one of the primary cultural locations for discussions of Black sexuality. – bell hooks (1992)

For African-American scholars, popular culture is the primary space where antiquated notions of Black sexuality continue to circulate. Specifically, hooks (1992) argues that “representations of Black female bodies in contemporary popular culture

rarely subvert or critique images of Black female sexuality which were part of the cultural apparatus of 19<sup>th</sup>-century racism” (p. 62) and “representations of Black masculinity equate ... with brute phallocentrism, woman-hating, a pugilistic ‘rapist’ sexuality, and flagrant disregard for individual rights” (p. 102). hooks takes an historical approach to the study of Black sexuality by examining images of Blackness that have circulated since African-slavery and how those representations of difference have served to maintain racial inequalities, cultural subordination, and naturalized understandings of Blackness. Further, the historical process of naturalization has been described by Stuart Hall (1997) as a representational strategy designed to fix difference between Black and White people as ‘natural,’ wherein “for Blacks ‘primitivism’ (Culture) and ‘Blackness’ (Nature) became interchangeable” (p. 245). With regards to hip-hop, African-American scholars debate over the negative effects of the genre’s perpetuation of the ‘hyper-sexual’ Black female and ‘misogynistic’ Black male (Decker, 1994; Emerson, 2002; Goodall, 1994; Radford-Hill, 2002). At the same time, debates centred on the negative depictions of female bodies in relation to the patriarchal male in pop and rock music have also been explored (Gottlieb and Wald, 1994; Jones, 1999).

In the case of pop music, in their study on the effects of race, gender, and fandom on audience interpretations of Madonna’s music videos, Jane Brown and Laurie Schulze (1990) found that in particular songs, female fans interpreted Madonna as perpetuating patriarchal position wherein a woman’s role is to show pleasure to men. Since music is seen as a powerful social and political practice because it entices listeners to “experience their bodies in new ways” (McClary, 1991, p. 25), other scholars argue that punk and rock have provided a forum for misogyny, “foregrounding a potent combination of sex

and anger ... a fertile space both for women's feminist interventions and for the politicization of sexuality and female identity" (Gottlieb & Wald, 1994, p. 253).

Specifically, Angela McRobbie (1981) argues that rock culture has signifying systems that privilege masculinity, systems in which "meanings have sedimented around other objects, like motorbikes or electronic equipment, have made them equally unavailable to women and girls" (p. 29).

The thing that differentiates feminist critiques of hip-hop to that of pop, rock or punk is that "the Black cultural experience in the United States is very different from that of Whites, particularly around issues of sexuality" (Brown & Schulze, 1990).

Historically, African-American women have been characterized as loose, immoral, and as the hypersexualized "'hot momma' or 'Jezebel,' the asexual 'mammy,' the emasculating 'matriarch,' and the 'welfare recipient' or 'baby-momma'" (Emerson, 2002). As such, African-American scholars argue that hip-hop's perpetuation of Black sexual stereotypes allows for the maintenance of hegemonic power and serves to legitimize the continued marginalization of Black women (Collins, 1991; Decker, 1994; Radford-Hill, 2002).

Dyson (2001) contends that hip-hop, unlike other genres of music, has been distinguished by an assault on women, the most visible signs of such are the ways in which "hip-hop culture has helped to reduce the female form to its bare essence ... reflecting the intent of the entire culture: to reduce Black female sexuality to its crudest most stereotypical common denominator" (p. 186-87).

Importantly, a new form of feminism, known as hip-hop feminism, has emerged within the US. Gwendolyn Pough (2003) describes such feminists as creating "definitions of ... feminism that fit their lives" (cited in Jefferies, 2007, p. 209). Specifically, hip-hop



feminists<sup>25</sup> critically assess hip-hop's lyrical and visual misogyny, gender construction, objectification, and the disappearance of resistant female rappers, from the point of view of being members of the hip-hop generation (Humann, 2007; Morgan, 1999; Perry, 2003).

In her analysis of Lil' Kim (Kimberly Jones) and Destiny's Child<sup>26</sup> (Beyoncé Knowles, Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams) Heather Duerre Humann (2007) argues that it is the contradictions embedded in the lyrics of female rap artists that distinguish them from other resistant forms of Black music, such as the blues. While blues songs "provided an outward critique of the existing social order – by decrying unfair social systems and practices – contemporary music forms, including hip-hop, rap, R&B all-too-often praise the current socio-political and economic structure ... rarely speaking out against the system itself" (p. 95). Importantly, while Humann's arguments are certainly true today, during hip-hop's message phase, female rappers provided a counter position to hip-hop's patriarchy. As Imani Perry (2003) astutely writes, "From Salt 'N' Pepa (Cheryl James, Sandra Denton, and Diedra "Dee Dee" Roper) to Queen Latifah (Dana Owens) to MC Lyte (Lana Moorer) and others, there is a feminist legacy in hip-hop and hip-hop feminism continues to exist despite the widespread objectification of Black female bodies" (p. 139). Further, Nancy Guevara (1996) discusses the contributions of both Black and Latina women during hip-hop's early years, arguing that such women expressed "a keen understanding of both the commercial establishment's interest in hip-

---

<sup>25</sup> Hip-hop feminists have been criticized for their lack of attention to anything beyond rap music. Heywood (2006) notes that new theories are still needed to interrogate power, gender construction, and performativity, specifically performances of femininity and masculinity.

<sup>26</sup> I would argue Humann's analysis is somewhat problematic and analogous with most hip-hop feminists who lump hip-hop, R&B and soul music into one discursive category. Some hip-hoppers have argued that the infusion of hip-hop with elements of R&B (its hooks, rhythm structures and mainstream marketability) is part of the problem.

hop and the official opposition to hip-hop by the political authorities, as well as the prevalent gender discrimination manifest in the expectations of their male peers and in the omission or distorted portrayal of their role by the media” (p. 59-60).

With regard to the positioning of gender within hip-hop, it is important to consider Judith Butler’s (1990) argument that “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be.... gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (p. 33) and it is always “performance with clearly punitive consequences for which transgressors are regularly punished” (Butler cited in Farrugia, 2004, p. 239). For example, coupling Butler’s arguments with her examination of electronic/dance music (E/DM) culture, Rebekah Farrugia (2004) found that “the collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness (p. 257).<sup>27</sup>

As it relates to performativity, it is important to consider the ways in which Black (and Latina) women are portrayed in hip-hop videos. In 1994, Rose argued that the lyrics and video images of female rappers encouraged listeners to engage in a culturally reflexive dialogue. She argued that women rappers’ songs and accompanying videos challenged notions of sexuality, and control of Black female bodies by “using their sexuality and knowledge to expose men (“Tramps,”<sup>28</sup> “Paper Thin”<sup>29</sup>) to center female

---

<sup>27</sup> Farrugia ultimately argues that the creation of *Sisterdjs*, a listerv for women who DJ E/DM provided an environment that was based on the shared experience of women trying to negotiate in male-dominated E/DM DJ culture, while attempting to move beyond their prescribed gender roles.

<sup>28</sup> Salt ‘N’ Pepa. (1986). *Cool, Hot and Vicious*. [CD]. USA: Next Plateau Records.

<sup>29</sup> MC Lyte. (1988). *Lyte as a Rock*. [CD]. USA: First Priority Records.

spectators at the expense of male viewers (“Shake Your Thing”<sup>30</sup>) and to link women’s power to their sexual capacities (“Ladies First”<sup>31</sup>)” (p. 171). Today, Perry (2003) argues that “Women hip-hop artists who are self-consciously ‘sexy’ in their appearance, style, and words have a much more difficult road in carving out a feminist space in hip-hop ... because the language of sexiness is also the language of sexism in American popular culture in general, and in hip-hop videos in particular” (p. 140). Further, when female rappers use words like “nigga”<sup>32</sup> and “playa”<sup>33</sup> they are also perpetuating hip-hop’s hyper-masculine image. Despite the fact that artists such as Lil’ Kim may allude to having agency, it is power defined by hip-hop’s male-centeredness. For example, on “Magic Stick”<sup>34</sup> when she raps: “Lil’ Kim not a hore/But I sex a nigga so good, he gotta tell his boys,” her power is “granted by male desire, rather than a statement of the power of female sexual desire” (p. 142). On “Let This Go”<sup>35</sup> Eve’s lyrics suggest the same: Down for you nigga wit’ lie after lie, after lie/...I’m like dawg check ya balls. Mad ‘cause I receive applause/...I’m outta ‘dis here. Pimp jus’ leave me alone.” When the lyrics of Lil’ Kim, Eve and other contemporary female rappers like Kelis<sup>36</sup> are displayed in a visual medium where subjectivity is presented as objects rather than subjects, “the feminist message of their work is undermined” (p. 140).

---

<sup>30</sup> Salt ‘N’ Pepa. (1988). *A Salt with a Deadly Pepa*. [CD]. USA: Next Plateau Records.

<sup>31</sup> Queen Latifah. (1989). *All Hail the Queen*. [CD]. USA: Tommy Boy Records.

<sup>32</sup> Despite the debate surrounding both the history and contemporary use of the word “nigga,” much of it centering on whether or not nigga is any different from the derogatory term, nigger, the hip-hop generation typically identifies a nigga as a man who is hard (Clay, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> A “playa” is sometimes used interchangeably with the term “pimp”. It is most often characterized as a heterosexual male who sleeps with a lot of women.

<sup>34</sup> Lil’ Kim. (2003). *La Bella Mafia*. [CD]. USA: Atlantic.

<sup>35</sup> Eve. (2002). *Eve-Olution*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Interscope Records.

<sup>36</sup> In 2003, Kelis’ single “Milkshake” earned her a Grammy Nomination. The song is overtly sexual and in its accompanying video, Kelis appears scantily clad. According to wikipedia.com, the term “Milkshake” is a possible allusion to oral sex.

Finally, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities have not been widely discussed by African-American scholars. Unfortunately, as hooks (1989) points out, despite the valorization of orality in African-American culture, there are very few oral histories and autobiographies which explore the lives of gay males, lesbians and bisexual women. In their essay entitled, “Sista’ Outsider: Queer Women of Color and Hip-Hop,” Eric Darnell Pritchard and Maria L. Bibbs (2007) recently argued that “since hip-hop culture has become increasingly commodified, many fans continually justify misogynistic and homophobic lyrics in mainstream rap arguing that the music’s content is excusable and even meaningless as long as it is profitable” (p. 20). For example, on “Where Da Hood At?”<sup>37</sup> off his fifth album, *Grand Champ*, DMX (Earl Simmons) raps: “Last I heard, y’all niggaz was havin’ sex, with the same sex/I show no love to homo thugs.” Despite his homophobia, *Grand Champ*,<sup>38</sup> like all of DMX’s prior albums, debuted at number one on the Billboard Top 200. As Farai Chideya’s (2001) astutely notes, gay members<sup>39</sup> of the hip-hop industry are in a precarious position wherein “even with the ubiquitous misogyny of rap, sexism is a little less openly nihilistic than homophobia” (p. 98). Similarly, Andreana Clay (2007) notes that queer women also face marginalization within the Black community, and are often excluded from hip-hop feminists’ (read: heterosexual) critiques of hip-hop. Ultimately, inasmuch as hip-hop is a male dominated arena, and artists are defined by their outward display of heterosexuality, such acts are constituted as normative behaviour within all popular music genres.

---

<sup>37</sup> DMX. (2003). *Grand Champ*. [CD]. New York: Def Jam Records.

<sup>38</sup> According to Wikipedia.com.

<sup>39</sup> Gayhiphop.com is an online forum where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender hip-hop community members share their experiences.

## 2.5. White Consumption of Commodified “Blackness”

The consequences of White consumption of Black popular culture may thus ultimately be the reinforcement of White supremacy and the inequalities of US society. – Bill Yousman (2003)

When hip-hop artists began to achieve and sustain popular success in the late eighties, the genre became inextricably part of the mainstream culture, signifying to corporate America that it had the potential to be commercially sustainable. Importantly, Murray Foreman (2002) notes that at same time rap music showed signs of having “staying power,” it was perceived by many cultural critics as being in a morass, “its cultural traditions threatened by industry interventions” (p. 157). Several scholars have opined that during this period, as MTV began playing rap music on a relatively regular basis, and rap sales reached multimillion unit sales levels, “Blackness” as an attitude, style, and thematic, became “spice” that livened up the dull dish that was mainstream white culture (hooks, 1992; Coleman, 2003; Rose, 1994; Yousman, 2003).

Eric King Watts and Mark P. Orbe (2002) argue that the White imagination appropriates Blackness as commodity, a process that intensifies the pleasure of ‘eating the other.’ As described by hooks (1992), the commodification of otherness “can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power” (p. 23). Since commodity fetishism points to the ways in which the economic forms of capitalism conceal social relations because “the products of human labour appear independent from those who created them” (Riordan, 2001, p. 284), commercial success can conceal a ‘true’ reality. For example, in her examination of Riot Grrrl cultural production in the form of art, zines, and music, Ellen Riordan (2001) found that commodified girl power or pro-girl rhetoric stopped at the

individual level and did not change the social conditions of women's and girls' lives, however, "media corporations continue to make money off of trendy 'feminist' commodities" (p. 294). While Riordan argues that Riot Grrrl's commodification renders the movement co-opted, Gottlieb and Wald (1994) provide a counter argument. They suggest that Riot Grrrl, to use McRobbie's terms, consolidates "a sense of oppositional sociality, an unambiguous pleasure in style, a disruptive public identity and a set of collective fantasies" (p. 263). Gottlieb and Wald, however, acknowledge the limitations of Riot Grrrl's counter-culture position. As they conclude, "If Riot Grrrl wants to raise feminist consciousness on a large scale, then it will have to negotiate a relation to the mainstream that does not merely reify the opposition between mainstream and subculture. Like it or not, the Girl-Style Revolution is bound to be televised." (p. 271).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Bill Yousman (2003) argues that the White consumption of hip-hop may create the impetus for improved relations between White and Black youth, challenging racism but there is little change in the social positioning of African-Americans as "apolitical entertainers are provided with the largest recording contracts and high-budget promotional campaigns (Eminem, 50-Cent, DMX, etc.) while the most transgressive, politically oriented groups (Michael Franti, The Coup, Dead Prez, etc.) are often relegated to independent labels or limited distribution and promotion" (p. 388).

## **2.5. Hip-Hop Goes Global**

European scholars have approached hip-hop from the point of view that it has emerged outside the cultural territory of America, disseminated within a country, and

---

<sup>40</sup> Joan Kennedy Taylor's (1992) book, *Reclaiming the Mainstream: Individualist Feminism Rediscovered* provides a critique of feminists who argue that the movement has become too individualistic and focused on market concerns. She argues that individual agency has just as much power as collective action.

eventually transformed into an indigenous music. Using ethnography and participant observation, Adam Briggs and Paul Copley (1999) studied the ways in which Black ‘Americana’ are consumed by young people in England as part of the ongoing process of identity formation. Briggs and Copley found that their study raised questions about “subcultures and the way that they have become enmeshed in the experience of the global and the local as well as “authenticity”, oppositionality, identity, ethnicity and hybridity” (p. 339). Further, “difference was manifested in the demand for authentic enunciation rather than a home-grown simulacra” (p. 349).

Employing a sociohistorical and textual-semiotic point of view, Jannis Androutsopoulos and Arno Scholz (2003) found that “there is a variety of appropriation procedures on different levels of textual organization” (p. 475). Following a framework developed by James Lull (1995) they concluded that “hip-hop culture and rap music are transmitted to new societies and gain fans there (transculturation). They are then actively performed and adjusted to local conditions (hybridization), and eventually become integrated into native cultural repertoires (indigenization)” (p. 475). For instance, they argue that the Italian rap group, Articolo 31’s philosophy with respect to rap epitomized in the notion of “spaghetti funk” was a clever juxtaposition of spaghetti – “a gastronomical term of Italian origin, and funk, a term from African-American popular music” (p. 469). Second, local samples frequently appeared in Greek and German rap, for while European rap artists listened to (and looked up to) US rap they expect their artists’ lyrics to represent their social environment (p. 471-472). And third, the emancipation from American hip-hop occurred through the use of authentic vernaculars. “The sociolinguistics of European rap differs dramatically from its U.S. counterpart, in that

there is no single language variety that dominates European rap lyrics ... instead European rappers draw on a variety of regional, social, and ethnic dialects, the precise use of which depends on the linguistic repertoires and language attitudes of each speech community” (p. 473).

The impetus for Androutsopoulos and Scholz’ (2003) study of hip-hop in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Greece was that virtually no attempt had been made to compare local variants of rap with one another or to examine how the emancipation process is reflected in rap lyrics. Although, “rap in Europe follows traditions established by US rap” (p. 475) they argue that it is not identical to its American roots because one of the imperatives of European rap discourse is to express local concerns and to reflect local social realities.

In Canada, scholars have focused their efforts on examining the cultural production of race, class and representation; the appropriation of US hip-hop and its affect on minority groups; identity dialogues; and hegemonic discourses (Berland, 1991; Walcott, 1996; Haines, 1999; Kelly, 2001; Ibrahim, 2003; 2004; Warner, 2006). For example, in her 1999 study, Rebecca Haines explored hip-hop in Canada through the conduction of in-depth interviews and subsequent content analysis of the lyrics from twelve Canadian rap albums, to contemplate issues of racism and identity deemed to be integral to the music. Similarly in his study of the dialectics of Black cultural politics and hip-hop culture in Canada, Rinaldo Walcott (1995) sought to “address larger questions of Black subjectivities, and consider the meaning of Blackness as they proliferate in an age of increasing repetition” (p. 7). By focusing specifically on Canada, Walcott argued that he gave his study a “home” and thus was able to look at the difficulties and pleasures of



understanding Blackness as exceeding the rigidities of national boundaries. Employing a different approach to the study of hip-hop in Canada, Awad Ibrahim (2003) explored the process of “becoming Black,” and how a group of refugees at a Francophone high school in Southwestern Ontario linguistically and culturally learned to identify with Black America through hip-hop culture and rap lyrics.

My project attempts to provide an empirical basis for identifying the ways in which Canadian rappers use hip-hop to comment on social issues related to authenticity and cultural identity. The aim of this project is to articulate the material processes by which cultural significance are formed, the extent of the genre’s cultural importance for its performers, and how hip-hop serves as a form of re-territorialized resistance rhetoric. In addition to that which has been identified and discussed by Adam Briggs and Paul Cogley and Androutsopoulos and Scholz, this project will include an analysis of Canadian hip-hop in conjunction with research conducted by scholars in Australia, Germany, Zimbabwe, Switzerland, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Turkey (Maxwell, 1997; 2003; Bennett, 1999; Mitchell, 2000, Solomon, 2005). Overall, this project seeks to further our understanding of authenticity within hip-hop culture by questioning how and to what extent issues related to the definition of identity within competing hip-hop cultural sensibilities are contested, as well as, what kinds of debates circulate within the discourse of members of Canada’s hip-hop community around what kinds of identities should dominate.

## **Chapter 3: Explanation of Methods**

### **3.1. Why These Hip-Hop Community Members?**

When I began this project, my intentions were to restrict my interviews to hip-hop community members located in Toronto. At the time, I thought that there would not be a large enough pool of potential participants elsewhere, and logistically, I assumed it would be difficult to conduct the interviews. However, in order to legitimize the project as being a true (or as true as possible) reflection of Canadian hip-hop, I knew I had to locate participants that were coast to coast and further, Cynthia Fuch's (cited in Armstrong, 2004) observations that White boys, like Eminem, do not have to "represent" solidified the need to talk to artists who were Black, White and Native.

However, some of the challenges associated with conducting qualitative interviews are locating participants and presenting the material. While some researchers benefit from the availability of lists or a centrally located pool of potential participants, others have to seek out their interviewees (Adler & Clark, 2003). Since I fell into the latter category, I resolved to find at least two artists from each geographic region and importantly, female rappers (including an Aboriginal artist) who could affirm or discredit the African-American assertion that hip-hop stands as a resistance rhetoric. Some of the questions I contemplated were: How did hip-hop reach people in other parts of country? Do similar tensions circulate within local hip-hop communities from coast to coast? Is authenticity in Canadian hip-hop based on US definitions of "keeping it real"? Is there consensus as to what being "real" means? Finally, do Canadian rappers agree with Keyes' (2002) assertion that there are alternative readings of "bitch" and "ho" in the hip-

hop community wherein despite the perception by hip-hop outsiders that these terms are negative, their actual meaning depends on the context?

Since a listing of potential participants was unavailable, I used snowball sampling to solicit interviewees for this project. Snowball sampling, as Adler and Clark (2003) explain “involves using some members of the group of interest to identify other members” (p. 132). As such, I relied on hip-hop community members to provide me with names of other hip-hop community members outside of Toronto that had hitherto been concealed by my ignorance. Second, where snowball sampling was not an option, I recruited participants through my own network, Web sites, listservs, and email (see Bart and O’Brien, 1985; Chase, Cornille, and English, 2000; Kelly, 1988 cited in Adler & Clark, 2003). Finally, due to distance, scheduling and availability, while the majority of the interviews were conducted via telephone, recorded and transcribed, others were conducted via email – for some, this was ultimately the only way they could take part in the project.

With the exception of Toronto-based Thrust (Chris France), who is a personal friend of mine, and Jelleestone (David Carty), whom I met at the Urban Music Awards, and through a friend in the industry, I was able to get in touch with the artists relatively quickly. As a result of my thesis supervisor, Jennifer Brayton’s referral to artist, PIMP TEA (TEA), I recruited east coast participants for this project first. While TEA inadvertently served as this project’s gatekeeper, it was not in the traditional sense, as described by Alder and Clark (2003) as a person who “controls access to others ... such as parents and guardians of children under 18 and ... the heads of institutions, agencies, or groups whose members you want to contact” (p. 289). Rather, he opened the door for

me to approach the other participants, allowing me to gain entry to, and acceptance from each interviewee. After speaking with TEA, I contacted Jay Bizzy (Jake Flemming), an artist from Shelburne, Nova Scotia, and the snowballing began to take shape. Bizzy referred me to his friend, artist and fellow Nova Scotian, Classified, whom I later also became aware of from watching one of his videos on Much Vibe. A few weeks later, I contacted TEA again and he referred me to Lee Pearce, a hip-hop producer from Newfoundland. Undoubtedly, the Maritimers who participated in this project underscore why hip-hop is referred to as a “community.”

Coincidentally, a French-Canadian colleague in the Communication and Culture program, who had heard about my research, told me about two pivotal Quebec hip-hop groups – Shade of Culture and Nomadic Massive. After our conversation, I did a search on the internet and found Montreal-based DJ Storm (Dave Blake), formerly of Shades of Culture, and Alejandro Sepulveda, an existing member of Nomadic Massive, and both agreed to take part in the project.

A few months later, I was having a difficult time tracking down west coast artists and attempts to speak with well-known groups like Swollen Members and the native crew, War Party failed to net any results. Once again, I contacted TEA, and he referred me to DJ Neoteric (Jeremiah Rusznyak), who resides in North Vancouver, British Columbia. In addition to being a DJ, Neoteric also hosts his own hip-hop blog, Futility Records. Upon agreeing to be in the project, he recommended I post a message in a Vancouver community hip-hop group. From that posting, rapper XYL (Jesse Day) based out of Vancouver, contacted me and became a part of the project.

My initial intentions were to interview Michie Mee (Michelle McCulloch), who is credited as being Canada's first female rapper, with her 1991 debut album, *Jamaican Funk, Canadian Style*. However, I realized I needed to speak with female rappers who were actively part of the current hip-hop community, and who were either non-Black or not from Toronto to further ground the project as being truly representative of the nation. As such, subsequent to my conversation with Bizzy, I contacted up-and-coming rapper, Eternia (Eternia Semiramis), who hails from Toronto but is of European descent. After speaking with Eternia, she suggested I do an internet search for other female rappers. During that search, I located Tara Chase, who grew up in Montreal (she now resides in Toronto), and an Aboriginal artist, known as Eekwol from Muskoday First Nation, Saskatchewan.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

In order to articulate the extent of Canadian hip-hop's hybridity, I employed content analysis. While the interviews allowed me to articulate the kinds of authenticity discourses that circulate within hip-hop, following a content analysis coding scheme first employed by Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003), I was also able to determine the values, beliefs and cultural imperatives of the genre's lyrics. Second, the reason why content analysis was conducted on mainstream artists, and lesser known acts were interviewed, was as a result of the disadvantage of relying on content analysis alone. As Alder and Clark (2003) explain, "content analysis is usually only applied to recorded communication, it can't very well be used to study communities that don't leave (or haven't left) records" (p. 393). Each of the five commercially successful and urban-based

(Toronto and Vancouver-based) artists (Rascalz, Maestro, Choclaire, K-OS, and Kardinal Offishall) have produced several albums, as such, inductively working out categories based on song samples formulated from the lyric content of their songs proved to be relatively easy in large part due to as Hansen et., al. (1998) write, “accessibility and availability of research material” (p. 101). It would have been tremendously difficult to track down song samples from the lesser known interview participants. Further, because the interviewees’ perspectives have rarely been heard, interviewing them was more of a necessity than the mainstream artists, who have had extensive media coverage over the past few years.

In their study, Androutsopoulos and Scholz inductively worked out seven song topic categories based on a sample of 50 songs from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Greece. They then articulated how the process of “cultural reterritorialization,” as described by James Lull’s (1995) as a “process of active cultural selection and synthesis drawing from the familiar and the new” (p. 476) was manifest in European rap. In a similar vein, it was important to first explore to what extent local cultural symbols are embedded in the vernacular of Canadian hip-hop in order to articulate how cultural reterritorialization featured in the lyrics of Canadian rap.

Second, Androutsopoulos and Scholz examined the “various aspects of verbal and nonverbal rap discourse, such as the use of sound samples, the selection of song topics, the use of vernacular speech, and rhyme structures” (p. 464) to articulate the process of deterritorialization. However, I examined the various aspects of verbal rap discourse not by analyzing the use of sound samples or rhyme structures, but specifically the selection of song topics and the use of vernacular speech. Since sound samples, such as the

blending of (textual integration) traditional folk music with samples of US origin, to contextualize artists' local origin with that of US rap is not a large part of Canadian hip-hop, nor can it be said that mixing yesterday's native folk music and today's rap is, generally speaking, a culturally specific Canadian activity.

Based on the fact that very little Canadian research has been conducted in this area, and specifically around claims of authenticity, I found McLeod's (1999) interpretive framework an appropriate apparatus to employ to "understand how authenticity is at the intersection of powerful cultural symbols, and how those symbols are invoked to maintain pure identity" (p. 135). McLeod used a conceptual apparatus of semantic dimensions previously used by Seitel (1974), Katriel and Philipsen (1981), and Carbaugh (1989, 1996). Seitel (1974) defined a semantic dimension as "a two-valued set that is used to conceive of and evaluate aspects of language use" (cited in McLeod, 1999, p. 137). Unlike quantitative research, McLeod's "qualitative study did not bring an a priori coding scheme to the analysis of data. Rather, like Seitel (1974), Katriel and Philipsen (1981), and Carbaugh (1989, 1996) ...an indigenous coding scheme from the data" (p. 137) was derived.

Like McLeod (1999), I reviewed hip-hop magazines, hip-hop song lyrics, and conducted interviews with hip-hop community members, then I analyzed the data, setting the criteria for what constituted a symbol of authenticity discourse as being any appearance of the terms "true," "real" (and any derivation of that word, such as "realness"), and "authentic" (or any derivation of that word, such as "authenticity"); after reviewing the data, I noted the number of times the themes appeared. McLeod (1999) argued that "the six major semantic dimensions of meaning inductively derived from the

data that may be active when hip-hop community members (i.e., hip hop fans, artists, and critics) invoke authenticity... are deeply interrelated and can provide a way of comprehending authenticity claims as rich, meaningful discourse that draws upon important cultural symbols” (p. 139-140). Ultimately, I determined what constituted a symbol of authenticity discourse by identifying which words represented expressions of authenticity and then noting when, how and by whom such expressions appeared.

While authenticity debates have also circulated around graffiti, rap videos and performance, I chose not to review, as McLeod did, any “discursive context in which the two symbols of authenticity and hip-hop co-occur” (p. 137). I did, however, recognize that I also needed to identify articles, and printed materials that made reference to the subjects in this project (Hansen, et al. 1998). As such, following Edward Armstrong’s (2003) use of McLeod’s semantic dimension to articulate how White rapper Eminem constructs an authenticity identity, I scrutinized not only the lyrical content of the mainstream artists’ music but also their responses to interview queries and autobiographical statements.

Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003) found that the categories that reflect hip-hop’s chronological evolution in the US do not necessarily hold true for individual artists or for all of European rap. Similarly, in a content analysis of lyrics from Maestro, Choclaire, Rascalz, Kardinal Offishall and K-OS, based on a sample of 101 songs, I also found that some of the US categories did not hold true. The five song topics I found present in the lyrics of these five artists were broadly defined as location, which included talk about oneself, and the neighbourhood one grew up in. Second, slang and hip-hop vernacular use, broadly defined as either US-derived or Canadian “street” talk. Third,



tensions and resistance strategies, broadly defined as talk about race/ethnicity, spirituality, politically charged sentiments or Anti-American rhetoric. Four, authenticity, broadly defined as McLeod (1999) did, as any appearance of the terms “true,” “real” (and any derivation of that word, such as “realness”), and “authentic” (or any derivation of that word, such as “authenticity”) but also any appearance of the terms “hard” (or any opposites to that word, such as “soft”) and “original” (and any opposites to that word, such as “being fake”) or reference to having to stay true to “the streets”. The last category included talk about women.

### **3.3. Why These Rappers’ Lyrics?**

In January 2006, I spoke with K-OS (Kevin Brereton) about urban music in Canada. The rapper, who was born in Trinidad and raised partly in the Flemingdon Park area of Toronto and the suburbs of Ajax, Ontario, is one of few artists in Canadian hip-hop to be on a major US label (Virgin/EMI). While my research for this project had already begun, his comments reflected an etymological difference, I thought, between US rappers and Canadian rappers with respect to their connection to the word “urban.” For example, in response to a question regarding having won multiple Urban Music Awards, K-OS said:

I'm from the suburbs so I don't know about urban music. What do I love about black music? I love Al Green, I love Aretha Franklin, I love all that stuff. Do I think there's sensibilities in black music now? Is it urban or is it soul music? You know, everyone knows I could go on for 200 minutes about what I don't like about music. I don't know. All I know is that God exists (Thompson, 2006).

Why did K-OS negatively juxtapose his life in the suburbs with urban music?<sup>41</sup> When you consider how the word “urban” is prioritized in African American culture, as a word that connotes a locale of “a primary reference” (Keyes, 2002, p. 29), and in hip-hop, as a Black cultural experience that reflects, replicates and reimagines the African-American narrative (Rose, 1994), K-OS’ use of that word did not seem to reflect the same sentiment.

Underpinning the narrative of African-American culture is this idea that having “soul,” and living in an “urban” context, are synonyms for the Black experience. As such, hip-hop must be contextualized as a genre that is marked by “the massive migration from the rural South to the urban North between the 1920s and 1950s, wherein Southern traditions were transformed and modified in the new milieu and generated expressions reflecting urban life. The rural context in which African Americans gathered in the South ... were replaced in urban centres ...” (Keyes, 2002, p. 28-29). Like soul music, where Neal (1997) argues is “a representation of a powerful “bricolage” or collage of black public formations, whose presence can be dated to the antebellum South” (p. 119), hip-hop’s prioritizing of the word urban is historical; thus, it is inseparable from and unanimous with the Black cultural experience.

Taking into consideration African-American history, and the legacy of African slavery, while K-OS, Kardinal Offishall, Rascalz, Maestro, and Chocclair are Black, these five rappers are of West Indian descent (either they were born in the Caribbean or their parents were born there), thus, their connection to the urban context is quite different. As first generation Canadians, their connection to their ancestral past is at the forefront of their identities and is something that must always face consolidation. While African

---

<sup>41</sup> In Canada, urban music is synonymous with hip-hop, rhythm and blues and soul music.

American scholars situate the urban environment not just as a place where hip-hop originated from, but, as Rose (1994) explains, a place where “postindustrial conditions ... across America reflected a complex set of global forces that ... shaped the contemporary urban metropolis” (p. 27), given the differences between Black Canadians and African-Americans, in a content analysis on the mainstream Black artists, I contemplated the following questions: Do Black Canadian artists prioritize the urban context, like their African-American counterparts? If so, how is authenticity tied to the rhetoric of inner city life? And, if “real” hip-hop is located within America’s inner-cities, can the same be said about music originating out of Canada’s urban locations?

### **3.4. Who Are They?**

Thrust gained a name for himself in 1997 when he teamed up with Rascalz, Kardinall Offishall, Chocclair, and Checkmate<sup>42</sup> on the single, “Northern Touch.” Born and raised in Scarborough, since the late nineties, he has been a pivotal part of Toronto’s hip-hop scene and is also credited for coining the term “T-Dot” before anyone had even heard of such slang.

Jelleestone was born in Toronto, but during his childhood years he split his time between his Rexdale neighbourhood and the Bronx, New York. Like other Black Canadian artists, who spent their formidable years visiting New York, Jelleestone also credits that experience as his introduction to hip-hop. For example, one of his fan websites includes the following anecdotal account:

In 1983, he became familiar with what would be his ... passion: hip-hop. During one of his New York visits, he saw people break dancing.... "When I came back, I was telling one of my friends

---

<sup>42</sup> Lesser known rapper from Vancouver.

that I saw these dudes doing some crazy moves,” he says. “He knew about it and he showed me some moves. I tried to learn everything until I was nice.”<sup>43</sup>

In the summer of 2006, Jelleestone released his first full length album, *The Hood Is Here* (Universal). Importantly, the Canadian media have framed Jelleestone as a rapper from “the streets.” For example, a biography of the rapper on Much Music’s website implies that because Jelleestone is from Rexdale, euphemistically known as “Doomstown” with its high concentration of highrise buildings, and government housing complexes, he is the “real” deal. Meanwhile, on *The Hood is Here*’s title track,<sup>44</sup> Jelleestone rhymes: “T-Dot MC, but I ain’t Kardinal, I ain’t Saukrates<sup>45</sup> / My name ain’t Chocclair, you could get shot here,” further perpetuates the notion that he is an authentic rapper because his neighbourhood more closely resembles a US ghetto.

Bizzy was born in Halifax, but grew up in the small town of Shelburne, Nova Scotia. With a population of approximately 2,000 people, he says he “discovered” hip-hop at the age of 10. In 1999, he wrote and recorded a song called “U R Shelburne When” and in large part due to the advent of Napster – which was a free internet music streaming service at the time – the song grew in popularity becoming somewhat of an anthem for small town Nova Scotia. In collaboration with his friend, Classified, in 2002, Bizzy released his first album, *Hard Rhymes in the Maritimes* (Independent). His second album, *The Ghost of Jacob Marley* (Urbnet Records), was released in 2006.

Classified hails from the small-town of Enfield, Nova Scotia. He has become one of the most recognized east coast rappers in Canada with eight full length albums to his

---

<sup>43</sup> Available at <http://www.wbr.com/jelleestone/bio.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Jelleestone. (2006). *The Hood Is Here*. [CD]. Canada: Blacksmith Records.

<sup>45</sup> Saukrates is a well known Toronto rapper considered to be of the same flare as Chocclair, Thrust and Kardinal Offishall.

name, the latest of which, *Hitch Hikin' Music* (Urbnet) was released in 2006. In an interview with a colleague at *Chart Magazine*, Classified talked about his hometown and what it was like growing up in such a small environment:

I'm coming from Enfield, where no one barely listens to hip-hop, let alone makes it. So I figured I had to work a lot harder, and just create something a bit different, so people would recognize it and remember it (Simons, 2006).

Classified has also developed his own label, *Halflife Records*, which currently releases not only his music, but other east coast artists as well.

TEA was born in Fredericton, but in 2006 he relocated to Ottawa, Ontario. His involvement in hip-hop began while attending the University of New Brunswick. As a computer science graduate and a NSERC (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada) scholarship recipient, he began rapping on the side, and quickly gained a name for himself in large part due to his astute sense of humour. For example, in "Ice Ice Water" (1995), he parodied White rapper, Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby" (1990). He has produced several albums, however, his sophomore project, *An Urbal Remedy* (2004), along with the single "Shake Ya Caboose," which won the 2005 East Coast Music Award for Urban Single of The Year, has garnered him a place as one of the east coast's most respected rappers. While he originally performed under the moniker, PIMP T, he told me why he later changed his name to TEA:

PIMP T stood for "Power Is Mindful Peace"... PIMP T sort of making fun of, poking fun at hip-hop a little bit the way it had become so mainstream ... then the other side will be the power as mindful peace side where it was more um the intellectual side, the conscious side.... I felt that the moniker didn't really suit me um so I switched to PIMP TEA, which stood for "Positively Influencing More People to Excel Artistically," which meant trying to break free from ... trying to fit the mainstream stereotypes.

Lea Pearce hails from Mount Pearl, Newfoundland, a town of approximately 20,000 people. Pearce describes his hometown as very rural and that there is at least 1,500 kilometres separating Mount Pearl from the nearest hip-hop city – Halifax. Although he is a producer, he also works under a moniker, Hotbox, mixing, mastering and making beats for hip-hop artists. Most notably, Pearce has worked with Classified, TEA, and Bizzy. He currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland.

DJ Storm was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec. The son of West Indian parents – his father is from Jamaica; his mother is from Trinidad – he became a part of the hip-hop ensemble known as Shades of Culture in 1992. Shade's debut, independently released *Mindstate* (1998) was followed by a few mixtape albums. In addition to Storm, the group includes three other artists known as Pat Wrizzo, D-Shade, and Revolution. In addition to sharing the stage with Canadian rappers, Storm has toured with US rappers, KRS-One, Common, Pharcyde and Onyx.

Alejandro Sepulveda is a member of the Montreal-based collective, Nomadic Massive. In an interview with *The Gazette*, Sepulveda explained how the band was formed: "We went (to Cuba) to participate in an international hip-hop festival two summers ago. We put together the band for that purpose. We all knew each other from the Plateau" (Dunlevy, 2006). In addition to Sepulveda, Nomadic Massive is comprised of eight members, (Lou Piensa, Waahli, Butta Beats, Meryem, Voc Sambou, Rawged MC and DJ Static), who perform songs in French, English, Spanish, Creole and Arabic.

DJ Neoteric currently resides in North Vancouver, but he was born and raised in Rodney, Ontario, which has a population of approximately 500 people. In 1999, Neoteric moved to Vancouver with his family. Since then, he has traveled across Canada DJing for

Canadian and American artists. His latest music project, *Indie-cent Exposure, Vol. 4* is a mixtape that has garnered him a reputation as one of the hardest working DJs on the west coast. He has worked alongside some of the biggest names in Canadian and US hip-hop, including Raekwon from Wu Tang Clan, Buck 65, K-OS, OutKast, and K'naan, to name a few.

XYL (pronounced 'Exile') also hails from Vancouver, but was born, raised and has lived there his entire life. In addition to being a rapper, he is also a producer and promoter of hip-hop on the west coast. While XYL has not yet released a full length album, his debut EP, *Twisted Genius* (2006) is critically acclaimed on the west coast. He is currently working on a second EP, *Make Way*, due out the summer of 2007, which will be followed by a nationwide tour.

Eternia has been a part of Canada's hip-hop scene for almost a decade; however, it was not until her single, "What We Gonna Do" (2001) that people began to take notice. Since then, she has performed across Canada, the US, and Australia. Prior to her 2006 debut album, *It's Called Life*, which was nominated for a Juno Award for Best Rap Recording, Eternia produced several singles, like "Work It Out," "Sorrow Song," "Understand If I" and "Love" that have garnered her nationwide radio-play.

Tara Chase was born and raised in Montreal. After moving to Toronto in 1995, she became a part of the hip-hop collective, The Circle. As an artist, she has won several awards in Canada and is also credited for having the first video from a Canadian female rapper played on *Black Entertainment Television* (BET). In addition to her own work – she's released three singles, *Autonomy*, *The Northside* and *Like it Like* – Chase has also been featured on songs with other Canadian artists, like Rascalz ("Dun Dit It"), Offishall

(“Powerfull,” “On Wit da Show,” and “Put em Up”) and Chocclair (“Til Now,” and “Just a Second”).

Eekwol (pronounced ‘Equal’) (Lindsay Knight) is an Aboriginal rapper whose family roots are from the Muskoday First Nation in Saskatchewan. In 2002, she released her first solo EP, *Soundsick?!* and is one of the main artists on the independent label, Mils Production, which she co-owns with her producer and brother, Mils. Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Eekwol currently resides in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

In 1989, hip-hop in the US had already produced stars from LL Cool J to Public Enemy to Salt ‘N’ Pepa. Meanwhile, in Canada, there was no nationally recognized hip-hop artist prior to Maestro ‘Fresh’ Wes (now known as Maestro) and the single, “Let Your Backbone Slide.” Born in North York, Ontario, Maestro (Wes Williams), the son of Guyanese parents, is known for having produced the biggest hip-hop single in Canadian history. Since then, he has recorded six albums *Symphony in Effect* (1989), *The Black Tie Affair* (1991), *Naah, Dis Kid Can’t Be From Canada?!!* (1994), *Built to Last* (1998), *Ever Since* (2000) and *Urban Landmark* (2005). Most recently, he has been touted as “The biggest-selling hip-hop artist in Canadian history” (Wright, 2005).

Born Kareem Blake, Chocclair has been described as a rapper who grew up in “the streets of Scarborough, Ontario” (Muchmusic) and as an artist who “began his early music career being the ‘best rapper on the block’ (Hayward, 2005). Chocclair’s career took off in the late nineties, around the same time the single, “Northern Touch,” in collaboration with Rascalz, Checkmate, Offishall and Thrust, became a hit. He has produced four albums *Ice Cold* (1999), *Memoirs of Black Savage* (2002), *My Demo* (2003), and *Flagrant* (2003).



The group known as Rascalz consists of two emcees, Red-1 and Misfit, alongside DJ Kemo. While they consider Vancouver, British Columbia their hometown, Red-1 was born in New Jersey, Misfit was born in Montreal, and Kemo in Chile. The group has not released an album in several years, but during the nineties, they were the first Canadian hip-hop crew to sustain mainstream success. One of Canada's foremost music magazines, *Exclaim!*, has described Rascalz as "one group that has embraced incorporating the largely ignored and maligned elements of b-boying ... for the group sees the manifestation of all four elements as integral to the representation of hip-hop" (Cowie, 1999). They have produced three albums, *Cash Crop* (1997), *Global Warming* (1999), and *Reloaded* (2002).

Kardinal Offishall (Jason Harrow), the son of Jamaican parents, hails from Toronto, Ontario. In 2001, he burst onto Canada's domestic scene with his debut full length album, *Quest For Fire: Firestarter, Vol 1*. From the outset, Canadian music critics described him as "one proud Canadian" (Ross, 2001) and an artist "full of JA-style bravado" (Galloway, 2001), while most recently he has been called "Canada's hip-hop ambassador" (Thompson, 2006). In 2005, Kardinal Offishall released a second album, *Fire and Glory*.

And finally, Trinidad-born K-OS' (Kevin Brereton) rise to stardom in Canada's hip-hop scene began with the release of his debut album, *Exit* (2002). Since then, he has been the subject of numerous interviews and articles. For example, in an interview with US-based AllHipHop.com last year, the rapper made the following comment, "The way I'm coming across ... doesn't really fit into the American Disapora of what the Black identity is.... Black people are never [presented as] human beings, they're never

characters. They're never just people who are evolving..." (Hope, 2005). Others have described him as an artist "staying true to hip-hop's history" (Berman, 2005) and one who is "unconcerned with breaking into the US market" (Frank, 2002). In addition to his debut, K-OS has released two albums *Joyful Rebellion* (2004) and *Atlantis: Hymns For Disco* (2006).

### 3.5. Limitations

This project was limited by my general lack of knowledge of hip-hop outside of Toronto. As such, extrapolating the findings from the content analysis portion might not reflect the broadest extent of Canadian hip-hop's cultural reterritorialization. Second, I underestimated the extent that race and gender would factor into the participant's hip-hop identities. For example, when asked to describe what hip-hop means to him, Thrust said:

They call it 'urban' music you know what I mean, but it's Black music. Urban is just a way to be political and not have to say Black. People don't like saying it.

This should have been an area of inquiry amongst the other participants. Further, only in response to Tara Chase's side comments on being a woman in hip-hop did she tell me this:

I never saw myself as a female emcee. It wasn't until people starting saying female emcee ... that I, it really didn't dawn on me that I was a female. I just say myself as an emcee. I'm an emcee period because that's how I was treated.

Expanding the content analysis to include artists from coast to coast, and asking questions related directly to race and gender would likely increase the possibility of articulating, on a more conclusive level, the extent of Canadian hip-hop's hybridization and its claims of authenticity.

## **Chapter 4: Ethnographic Interviews and “Keeping It Real”**

### **4.1. Why “Keeping It Real”?**

Before I started this project, I had several personal conversations with members of Canada’s hip-hop community, which led me to believe that I would need to conduct interviews to further explore issues of authenticity. Further, Baruti Kopano’s (2002) conclusion that for African-Americans, “keeping it real” in the context of hip-hop relates to the ways hip-hop holds a mirror to society, and how it stands as a “rhetoric of resistance primarily to issues of race but also to issues of class and sex (gender)” (p. 213) inspired me to contemplate whether the same conclusion could be drawn in a Canadian context. As such, I decided to formulate my questions around the phrase “keeping it real.”

While ethnographic inflected works have been known to run the risk of “othering”, in which the researcher constitutes, encourages or celebrates the exotic differences of the subjects in research (Briggs & Cobley, p. 338; cited: Back, 1993, 1994; Gillespie, 1995; see also Clifford, 1988), as a hip-hop writer, I approached each participant from the point of view that I am also part of the community; therefore, while I had a set number of questions, there were moments during the interviews where it became more conversational and these moments proved to be the most fruitful. I understood the slang of my participant’s speech, the historical references to hip-hop’s roots and positioned myself as a peer not as a researcher – understanding that as an insider this project also has the potential to contribute to Canada’s hip-hop community. Generally speaking, here are the questions I asked each hip-hop community member:

1. What does hip-hop mean to you?
2. How did you first get involved in Canadian hip-hop?
3. What are the local elements of hip-hop across the country?
4. In your opinion, how is hip-hop different in each city across the country?
  - How do Canadian artists go about conveying local issues, sounds, and cultures?
  - How are local sounds influenced by global sounds?
  - How is Canadian hip-hop different/similar to American hip-hop in terms of song topics, rhyme structures, and use of local slang?
5. What does the phrase “keeping it real” mean to you?
  - Who, in hip-hop, is not “keeping it real”?
  - What makes someone real in Canadian hip-hop?
  - What makes someone fake in Canadian hip-hop?
  - How do you feel about the way the phrase “keeping it real” is used in hip-hop?

In retrospect, I would have asked slightly different questions in the “keeping it real” section. My questions here were a little redundant, and at times I did not bother to ask each sub question in its entirety, because it was already answered by the participants’ initial responses. Second, there should have been questions concerning issues of race, socio-economic class and gender, since these issues are central to the African-American experience, and are also core contestations in the lyrics of the five rappers in this project. Third, more emphasis should have been placed on situating hip-hop within the wider discourse of popular culture, which in general terms, is also an arena where hybrid identities are negotiated. As Yousman (2003) writes, “popular culture borrows from whatever is available to it with no regard for imagined or real cultural barriers” (p. 372). Since American popular culture has influenced music all over the world, it might have been worth asking questions that dealt with the boundaries between White culture and Black culture. As Black scholars (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Watts & Orbe, 2002; and

West, 1994) have argued, “various groups have borrowed from one another, and borrowed from the borrowings, with such frequency that the distinctions have become basically meaningless” (cited in Yousman, 2003, p. 372). Questions relating to these arguments made by African-American scholars might have been an important point of dissonance.

Ultimately, I entered this project void of any in-depth knowledge of hip-hop outside of Canada’s mainstream (and commercially successful) Black artists. It was not until I spoke to each of the lesser known (non-commercially successful) artists that I gained an understanding of what issues, themes, and more importantly, what biases circulate within each geographic region in Canada and how each region’s connection to hip-hop is shaped by their race, gender, and socio-economic class.

#### **4.2. Expressions of Locality (rural vs. urban)**

Importantly, the east coast is often a forgotten region in Canada. Hip-hop aside, people sometimes neglect to recognize how Maritimers contribute to our collective cultural identity; as a result, Atlantic Canadians are cognisant of the fact that they are often ignored – their lived experience marginalized and similar to African-Americans, they are ghettoized as being poor, or uneducated. For example, *Exclaim! Magazine* writer, Thomas Quinlan cited the following comments about Halifax’s hip-hop scene:

“People think Montreal is the Eastern-most point in Canada,” complains DJ Gordski, who has released three solid full-lengths.... Production wizard .... DJ Moves expands on the problem: “The only drawback is Halifax’s geographical location. Being on the very East Coast can make it difficult to make certain moves in the industry....Halifax pioneer Witchdoc Jorun makes it a little clearer: “We learned what we knew from what little was

given to us. We taught ourselves, no instruction manuals, all trial and error” (April, 2000).

Unlike the Toronto-based participants, who credit their childhood experience of either visiting New York or watching artists from New York perform live in Toronto, the reception of hip-hop in eastern Canada was more of a mediated process. Each of the Maritime participants cited television and listening to the radio as their introduction to hip-hop, both African-American artists and Canadian artists, like Maestro. Generally speaking, there was virtually no outlet for these participants to share their interest in hip-hop. As Lee Pearce told me, “There was absolutely no scene here whatsoever. Nobody I knew or even remotely knew at the time was involved in any of the elements of hip-hop.” Further, Classified said: “No one could have called a song ‘The Maritimes’ being from New York, it wouldn’t make sense, same with up here, no one could have a song called ‘The Dirty South’. I like to write about what I’m living and what I’m going through ... a lot of things Americans talk about wouldn’t make sense to me.” Further, Pearce said, “when suburban rappers or whatever who have never seen a gun before all of a sudden start rapping about shooting and cooking up crack and serving the neighbourhood scene, it’s not realistic.”

For the Toronto participants, situating hip-hop within a specific location was not a necessary part of “keeping it real.” For instance, Thrust told me: “Hip-hop has an energy about it. So, if you’re a person around a person, no matter if they’re from New York, Cali, Vancouver, Regina it doesn’t matter, if they are really true to that and they listen to it, you’ll see those elements that we all hear.” When asked about differences between Canadian and American hip-hop, Jelleestone said: “Toronto, we have our own little swagger, our own little slang and it’s very heavily West Indian and Jamaican influenced

... but overall there's no difference in terms of the conditions of what hip-hop is about in terms of the environment ... people are struggling and trying to make good on nothing and making something out of nothing."

While Montreal-based DJ Storm (Storm) is Black and of West Indian descent, his comments were the polar opposite to his Black counterparts in Toronto; further, he openly expressed why the stance taken by Toronto rappers was a misrepresentation of Blackness, in his opinion.

Before Canada's music industry got on the hip-hop bandwagon (e.g. promoting and spending money bringing US artists, like 50 Cent, to Canada), DJ Storm talked about a period of time in Canada's hip-hop history, when as Thrust first explained, there was more advocacy within the local hip-hop scene: "I was fortunate to come up with our version of Kool Herc, which was Ron Nelson. He was the main promoter up here in the eighties and he brought everybody from Public Enemy to you know Ice T and he's also very much an advocate of Canadian talent, he made sure to put Canadian talent on the bill." Similarly, Storm told me:

You could tell you know people who were from Winnipeg and Edmonton and Calgary and all that and then of course ... you come back East and it's the same thing as the whole East and West Coast thing in the States it's kinda a unique sound to each province ... even the articulation of words. You could tell by an accent of some sorts. Those were were you know more from the East ... the Maritimes and PEI and all those places you can tell that they had a little bit of a different way of speaking ... and obviously Montreal depending if the artist was Anglophone or Francophone ... I wouldn't say Toronto had it's own sound ... but um you could tell or not if someone was from Toronto... Unfortunately um you know I don't know for what reason or why but most people are afraid to ... do it themselves and do something different. I mean you've got a bunch of Canadians who are Canadian who come out and speak American ... first of all, you weren't born there, you didn't grow up that way and the only

reason you sounding that way is to kinda fit in ... you just want to you want to sound hip-hop, you know?

Storm might not be able to articulate the shift that occurred within Canada's hip-hop scene, but it appears to resonate at the level of corporatization and the marketing of certain images and types of hip-hop. The aforementioned was especially relevant amongst the female participants in this study.

Meanwhile, for Hispanic hip-hop artist, Alejandro Sepulveda (Sepu), the focus was more on the power of the music to cross borders. Nomadic Massive represents the most unique perspective of all the participants. While its members are from Montreal, as the group's leader Sepu explained, Nomadic is Haitian, Chilean, Argentinean, French, Algerian, Chinese and Iraqi: "I honestly don't see all these countries coming together in many other cities. We are living in a multicultural city and we have used the experience to enrich our musical and cultural knowledge." What is so distinct about Montreal culture that such a diverse group is able to assert their individuality, while rappers in other large urban centres, like Toronto, are unable to? According to Statistics Canada's 2001 Census data,<sup>46</sup> of the 3,380,645 who live in Montreal, 458,330 (13%) are of a visible minority group, as compared to 1,712,535 (37%) of Toronto's population of 4,647,960. As such, why are the faces of Toronto's hip-hop scene predominately Black when according to these numbers, it is a more multicultural city than Montreal? One possible explanation could be attributed to the lack of national media attention in Montreal; in the case of Nomadic and other Francophone artists, they have the ability to access the global marketplace as a result of domestic exclusion, and because their hip-hop is multi-lingual – not true for the unilingual Black and White participants – they are exempt from the

---

<sup>46</sup> Retrieved: <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/demo53a.htm>.



pigeonholing that befalls upon other hip-hop communities. Other differences could be attributed to what Tara Chase describes as a collective shift in support for Anglophone to Francophone rappers that occurred in Quebec during the nineties:

It was in the mid-nineties and then there was also um you know French rap groups MRF (Mouvement Rap Francophone) in ah Montreal and some other groups that were kinda coming up ... but it was still very I think maybe the majority English but then there was a shift to where you know there was more French representation in hip-hop ... I think now the French MCs are definitely dominating from what I can see and I don't think the English guys are getting um much of a break out there.

For west coast rappers, XYL and Neoteric, their introduction to hip-hop was similarly mediated through either television or radio. Unlike Toronto artists whose introduction was largely coincidental to their visiting New York, these artists had to find hip-hop; and two, becoming part of a wider community has been the impetus for their continued involvement in the music. As Neoteric recalled, "It just started from seeking it out when it was really difficult ... having to put in that work and then kind of reaping the rewards of that and kind of forming a community of people that are like minded from there you get to just ah you know networking, branching out and talking to people with similar interests." XYL told me: "As a young child listening to Run DMC, LL Cool J, Young MC, the Beastie Boys, a lot of the old school stuff ... I became fascinated by it like I was a kid just listening to whatever." When asked about his definition of old school, XYL explained that he grew up during hip-hop's "Message" phase (late eighties to early nineties), a time he describes as "before gangsta rap really emerged and got big it was like a lot of it ... is like really fun loving sort of lyrics ... it kinda makes you laugh, and some of it makes you think." The east coast rappers similarly romanticized this period in hip-hop as being the most influential in shaping their interest in the genre. To a

large extent, west coast hip-hop is very much reflective of some of the same elements as east coast rap. In Neoteric's opinion, when it comes to hip-hop in Canada, there's Toronto and then there is everywhere else. For that reason, Neoteric said that when he did his latest CD he purposely incorporated as little Toronto content as possible:

There's so much happening and there's so much New York influence and I also think ah there's a lot sounding the same. More formulaic I guess.... I like a lot of Toronto hip-hop but I've also just found that it's hard for me to break into it and found out about it.

Women have always been a part of hip-hop. From the ultra feminine Salt 'N' Pepa from the early eighties, to the more street smart and aggressive MC Lyte (Lana Moore) and Queen Latifah (Dana Owens) in the late eighties and early nineties, to Lil Kim (Kimberly Denise Jones), Eve and Missy Elliott of today, notwithstanding the genre's male-centeredness, the female rapper has always been vital to hip-hop's success. However, as the content analysis of the five rappers' lyrics shows, and the absence of commentary on the role of women (also a reflection of my neglect to ask questions related to gender) by the male participants in this project, the voice of women in hip-hop today is largely silenced. How did this happen? Where did all the female emcees go? What do Canada's female rappers think about this shift in hip-hop? In order to contextualize the female participants' responses, it is necessary to explore some of the contestations, tensions, and authenticity debates that have circulated within US hip-hop regarding the female rapper.

Importantly, McLeod's (1999) study confirmed that for male rappers there are clear demarcations between masculinity and femininity,<sup>47</sup> wherein "selling out" is a term associated with being soft, as opposed to hard. In hip-hop, the oppositional terms "hard"

---

<sup>47</sup> Demarcations also exist between heterosexuality and queer communities.

and “soft” are also gender-specific “with soft representing feminine attributes and hard representing masculine attributes” (p. 142). Second, for female African-American hip-hop scholars (Emerson, 2002; Goodall, 1994; Radford-Hill, 2002) some of the issues that women in hip-hop have, and continue to struggle with are adapting a masculine style in order to “fit in” and displaying their sexuality as not something that they engage in but as something they do only to get what they want from men.<sup>48</sup> For instance, during hip-hop’s “Message” period, Goodall (1994) argues that there were three kinds of archetypal female rappers: MC Lyte, the street-smart “homegirl” who buries “her sexuality and defers to her male counterparts in order to make a name for herself” (p.89), Queen Latifah, a politically conscious Black woman who did not deny her sexuality outright, like Lyte, but was “reluctant, perhaps afraid, to exhibit any signs of femininity” (p. 89), and finally, Salt ‘N’ Pepa, who openly discussed their sexuality but never completely separated their desire for sexual fulfillment as being on their own accord.

In 1991, feminist scholar, Robin Roberts wrote that in order to appreciate female rap videos, “the viewer must first redefine the idea of a ‘text,’ expanding it to include a multitude of nonverbal signs and freeing it from monologic and auteurist assumptions. In a music video, the performer’s dress, gestures, enunciations, and style all become signs liable to interpretation” (p. 143). As hip-hop has moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what interpretations of the “text” are viewers making now?

Over the past five years, the status of the video girl dancer has in many ways usurped the female rapper. While this project is not about hip-hop video production,<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Not all female rappers have taken this position. Yeastie Girls were an independent, underground female rap group from the 90s who provided a counter position to hip-hop’s misogyny. Their most well-known song, “You Suck” spoke directly to female sexuality, but on their own terms.

<sup>49</sup> See Rose (1994).

music videos have played an important part in rap music's reception. For example, writer Jeannine Amber astutely notes:

As hip-hop enters into its third decade, one icon has captured the imagination of the current crop of rappers ... Round-the-way girls and African Queens need not apply. Women here have one job: to portray every shade and variation of a girl enthralled, enslaved by and beholden to a rapper-pimp (March, 2005).

Thus, it should have been to no surprise that the video vixen (a term used to describe these women) would be an area of contestation for the female participants in this study. Importantly, this was not something that I considered prior to formulating my questions, but since the images of female sexuality and in turn male sexuality have changed over the years, it would have been valuable to have asked gender-specific questions to both male and female participants.

Eekwol, Eternia and Tara Chase's introduction to hip-hop, like most of the male participants in this study (with the exception of the Toronto artists), was a mediated process, which included hearing hip-hop on the radio, watching music videos on Much Music, or as Chase explained, by way of her parents and early hip-hop films:

“My dad had Sugar Hill Gang records and I listened to pretty much ... I guess the first time me so much in terms of wanting to be involved in hip-hop probably came after I saw *Beat Street*<sup>50</sup> ... I really liked the emceeing aspects ‘cuz I liked the DJing and the dancing.”

Like their male counterparts, the female participants also conceptualized hip-hop as a culture. It is interesting to note, however, in response to the question what does hip-hop mean to you, Eternia said, “I don't want to be overly academic about it though; hip-hop is

---

<sup>50</sup> *Beat Street* (1984) is considered to be hip-hop's second mainstream feature film behind *Breakin'* (1984).

NOT<sup>51</sup> about academia's definitions or parameters." While I certainly appreciate her position and the fact that academics can sometimes be guilty of over analyzing, I wonder if Eternia's hesitancy to assert ownership over hip-hop could also relate to the fact, as she further said, "I wasn't around for its birth, I was just raised around its rise" and her distance from extreme poverty or social marginalization. For example, Chase, who grew up in a tough neighbourhood in Montreal, described hip-hop as "definitely a hug part of my history and a part of who I am you know my style, my dress, my speech, um my attitude towards a lot of things you know independent black woman I guess, you know what I mean, fighting, overcoming a lot of things that I had to overcome and that I'm still trying to overcome" and Eekwol told me: "hip-hop represents sort of part of a struggle and you know growing up sort of below the poverty line, you know, parents struggling and you know addiction is sort of all around you it's kind of something that you can grab on to and I think that's how it originated."

The female participants in this project also agreed with their male counterparts that there were regional differences within Canadian hip-hop; however, there was not consensus among them. For instance, both Eternia and Chase felt that Vancouver's "sound" is more influenced by California's Bay Area, while Toronto, as Eternia said is "100% influenced by what NY thinks sounds dope." Meanwhile, Eekwol's comments mirrored the west coast participant's view that rappers from rural areas experience hip-hop differently to their urban counterparts:

In Canada we have like a lot of smaller areas with less dense regions you know with smaller communities all across whereas when you go to America ... it's like huge urban centers.... I grew up in the Prairies and I really relate to my experience on the Prairies ... I'm not going to be talking about guns because guns

---

<sup>51</sup> Emphasis added by Eternia.

are illegal here or you know pimping or anything because I'm a woman you know.

It is interesting to note that Eekwol said Kamloops, British Columbia is unique for its high concentration of people who are into graffiti, an often neglected aspect of hip-hop culture.

Where realness in the US is defined by not disassociating one's self from "the streets," and emphasis is placed on one's ties to a community that is not geographically located in the suburbs, the hip-hop community members in this project (with the exception of Toronto) agreed that "real" Canadian hip-hop is distinguished by its prioritizing of the suburbs, or more appropriately, rural and close knit communities as opposed to trying to affiliate one's self with US notions of "the streets." While this is not meant to suggest that Toronto rappers who talk about gang violence or the ghetto are "fake," in a Canadian context, hip-hop artists who put on an urban aesthetic that mirrors their African-American counterparts are more often than not considered to be "sell-outs." America is distinguished by its segregated cities and geographically speaking most African-Americans reside in urban locations while White Americans live predominately in the suburbs. However, since Canadians, on a collective basis, do not associate Canada's inner-cities as being comprised of either White or Black neighbourhoods, authenticity for the participants in this study is negatively defined by aligning oneself with "the streets."

#### **4.3. We Need America's Approval, Or Do We? (staying true to your community vs. following US trends)**

In the US, McLeod (1999) found that the discourse among hip-hop community members valorized individualism and demonized conformity to media-generated representations of hip-hop; that is “real” hip-hop is distinguished by its accurate portrayal of the individual artist’s life. Similarly, east coast participants stressed the importance of “being true to yourself,” which they interpreted as not trying to be American. McLeod’s US conceptualization of “following mass trends” was inverted by the east coast hip-hop community members to be “aping an American style” – a term Briggs and Copley (1999) described in their UK study.

While there were tensions about race, location, and gender (sexuality) in the lyrics of the Toronto and Vancouver-based artists, staying true to yourself versus following US trends was the dominant tension for east coast rappers. Although each participant felt that the phrase “keeping it real” has become a bit cliché, they agreed that authenticity and “keeping it real” is ultimately a matter of being unique and staying true to one’s local community. When asked about the attributes of “keeping it real” and who in Canadian hip-hop is being “real” or “fake”, east coast participants were hesitant to name specific artists; however, the attributes they considered to be indicative of being “real” in Canadian hip-hop included: being true to one’s self, making concept songs about a way of life, and talking about things you personally have experienced as opposed to what you have heard others talk about.

When asked about the local elements of hip-hop and how the genre is different or the same across the country, Jelleestone and Thrust agreed that “being true to yourself” is important but they did not suggest that one’s truth had to resonate from one’s hometown, like the east coast participants. For them, “keeping it real” is not a matter of trying to add

to hip-hop culture or about being a representative of one's local community; on the contrary, realness is an individually-defined term. For instance, Thrust said, "It's different for per person so me being authentic is totally different than somebody else who hasn't walked the path I have." Meanwhile, Jelleestone replaced the term "keeping it real" with the word "Treal," which he explained is the combination of being simultaneously "true" and "real": "Real means to be true and true means to be honest; honest first with yourself, and then with everything around you and what's what's real." When asked about the attributes of "keeping it real" and who in Canadian hip-hop is being "fake", unlike east coast participants who considered being "true to one's self," making concept songs about a way of life, and talking about things you personally have experienced as opposed to what you have heard others talk about attributes of a "real" rapper, Thrust and Jelleestone provided commentary on what it means to be a "fake" rapper. They described such rappers as someone who did not give back to their fans, and obvious attempts by non-hip-hop community members to portray a hardcore image [e.g. Thrust referred to Jessica Simpson rapping about being from the 'hood]. More so than any other region, these Toronto rappers appeared more willing to perpetuate the media-supported image of Blackness as defined by US hip-hop.

Unlike Toronto and the east coast, where artists have definitive opinions on the phrase "keeping it real," for Montreal artists, the phrase either meant very little, was difficult hard to describe, or was considered to be colloquial, lacking any implicit meaning. For instance, Sepu said, "Keeping it real is defined by the reality in question. It refers to maintaining some sort of predetermined standard. If the genre of hip-hop was anti-establishment, then perhaps "keeping it real" would be not to "sell-out" to the



establishment, but how many artists have done that in recent years?” Storm told me: “Real is different to absolutely every single human being. Forget hip-hop. Real is real. What you deal with, what your reality is different from my reality ... I’m not going to adapt my reality to fit hip-hop.” When asked about the attributes of “keeping it real” and who in Canadian hip-hop is being “real” or “fake”, again, these Montreal artists had a different take on the matter, by and large, attributing the focus on making money, like their American counterparts, as the key indication of “fakeness”. Sepu explained that while the phrase is subjective, on a national level, the tensions surrounding authenticity are complicated by the industry: “We may criticize an artist who has started mimicking American hip-hop or sold out in a sense that they become stars in the states and then neglect their origins ... if they allow themselves to be fabricated by producers then they are fake.” Further, Storm said: “every Canadian artist is too busy trying to sounding like an American.... You don’t hear a guy saying ‘hey, you know what Maestro is my influence because Maestro is the first guy I saw and he’s dope’.” Ultimately, for Montreal-based hip-hop community members, while Canada is indebted to America for hip-hop, today, remaining true to hip-hop’s “roots” is complicated by the Canadian music industry’s promotion of mainstream US hip-hop. It is interesting to note that Storm pointed to Vancouver-based Swollen Members as being “authentic” because they did not seek out US validation: “They’re Canada’s version of “keeping it real” ... they didn’t run across the border and say ‘hey we’re good, make us better,’ you know, they did what they did and people found them.”

For west coast participants, hip-hop in Canada is not bound by any particular geographic location. On an individual basis, Neoteric said he had not heard much hip-hop

that addressed local Canadian issues. Specifically, in XYL's opinion, not a lot of people in Canada go about addressing political issues, and as a result, like the east coast rappers' opined about Toronto rap, he argues that there is a lot of US mimicking:

I've heard some stuff that seems to be pretty influenced by American stuff like that you know kind of crunk<sup>52</sup> like in the club sort of stuff a lot of people are kind of getting into that and there's definitely some people around here who ah try to emulate that sound in some respect that whole mainstream that really mainstream hip-hopish sound which comes from America is influences to a certain degree ... because it is so ridiculously popular.

Similar to the east coast and Montreal participants, XYL and Neoteric opined that the phrase "keeping it real" has been overused, as a result, it has lost most of its meaning. Further, the west coast participants also emphasized one's pursuit of money as being inauthentic, and vice versa staying true to yourself versus appealing to the masses, as being exemplary of a "real" rapper. For instance, XYL said: "Not trying to ah you know make music just because you think it's gonna make you money, and ... you're 'keeping it real' would be like not trying to please everyone else and trying to like appeal to the masses but just sticking to your own message and your own work ... maintaining artistic integrity, I guess." Examples of a loss of "artistic integrity" would be an artist altering his/her lyrics because they might offend someone or changing your lyrics to suit a certain audience or to get played in a club. Neoteric also brought up the term "keeping it right" like east coast rappers, TEA and Bizzy, however he also described what he considers to be a "keeping it real" misconception: "It's turned into 'keeping it real' is being hard and representing somewhat of a thug mentality or something like that." Importantly, being "hard" is one of the core tenets of "keeping it real" authenticity circulating within US

---

<sup>52</sup> Crunk is a brand of hip-hop that originated in the southern part of the US. Artists like Lil' Jon, Three 6 Mafia and Juvenile are best known for ushering in this kind of hip-hop.

hip-hop; for example, McLeod's (1999) study found that "being a real man doesn't merely entail having the proper sex organ; it means acting in a masculine manner" (p. 142), a manner that implies an ability to handle altercations physically, like a "real" man should. This point also served as an area of contention among the Aboriginal participant in this project. As Eekwol told me, First Nations communities in Canada struggle to resist perpetuating hypermasculine aspects of US hip-hop:

We suffer from so much oppression and you know the whole history of colonization that when we get into hip-hop ... a lot of times it's like almost an extreme version of the gangster thug mentality coming out of LA or NY ... it's the complete loss of identity and it's like grasping on to this identity just for something to grab onto you know, the whole gang mentality.

Is the Native experience much different from Black male rappers in Toronto who are constantly striped of their identities when their music is lumped together with their African-American counterparts, and as result, they are perceived to be feigning an American style?

Tara Chase also commented that hip-hop is "never going to be Canadian or French, German or Japanese or whatever because the originators of it all was in the US," which made me wonder, does it have to be this way? While it is generally agreed that rock and roll was created in America, we would never discredit the Rolling Stones (England) or AC/DC (Australia) because their music is grounded on their US influences, so why then is the US standard always the measure for "real" hip-hop? Further, Eekwol's approach to "keeping it real" was more complicated than the other participants, male or female. As she explained:

People have really liked to categorize ... I end up falling into a lot of categories and of course you know being a female rapper that's one ... being Indigenous that's another one ... being from

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan that's another one right there.... I get a bit of media attention and it's always like 'The female rapper from the prairies' ... I don't want to be a female rapper, I want to be a rapper.

Ultimately, for the female participants, "keeping it real" mirrored the opinions of male rappers from coast to coast; that is, trying to represent where you come from, rapping about things you have actually experienced, and not pretending that you are something that you are not.

Where McLeod (1999) found that for US rappers, individualism is "played against the negative symbols of "the masses" or "mass trends" and aligned with "staying true to yourself" and "representing who you are" (p.140), the same is true of Canadian hip-hop. However, as the participants (except Jelleestone and Thrust, to a lesser degree) in this project affirm, "staying to true to yourself" and "representing who you are" must be a direct reflection of where one was born, where one was raised and the culture of that particular community.

#### **4.4. Use of Language and the Framing of Hip-Hop (references to Canada vs. reference to US)**

References to Canadian cultural locators, and the lack of US-derived slang (or mitigated use), are two dominant criteria for what constitutes an authentic Canadian hip-hop for east coast participants. As Pearce told me, "I think a lot of Canadian rappers aren't even being original, you know, I hear a lot of stuff that seems to just emulate what's coming out of, you know, the American commercial hip-hop, a lot of rappers in Canada portraying the role of like you know, the New York thug." Further, Bizzy said,

“If I’m talking about Alexander Keith’s beer or something or the Rock ‘cuz I know that people ... relate to that, you know what I’m talking about.”

Unlike other participants who embrace references to their local community, both Jelleestone and Thrust were uncomfortable talking about Toronto’s local hip-hop scene and the label “Canadian” hip-hop. According to Thrust, while Offishall is often praised for his use of Toronto slang phrase “T-Dot,” that is part of the problem: “Either they don’t mention Toronto, like don’t mention it at all ... or they go to the farthest extent and the whole song will be about Toronto.” For Thrust, the ultimate goal is to get US exposure, thus, talking about one’s location could ruin a rapper’s chance of being accepted by America’s hip-hop community. For example, in his recent single, “What You Like” he raps: “I’m concert halling, yes ya’lling/not Adelaide and Richmond, club crawling.” When asked about that song, he subsequently explained:

I mention Adelaide and Richmond. I’m not saying Toronto you understand what I’m saying ... that’s what the other cities started doing even in the states and New York ... it’s important when you go to the States and the States is like “yo, what’s Toronto?”

For Jelleestone, the label “Canadian hip-hop” was seen as a negative:

Hip-hop is hip-hop.... In terms of hip-hop what we do, we’re not you know we haven’t changed the rules we’re not changing the rules of hip-hop in terms of or changing what hip-hop is and so forth so you know, I’m just, I just like to hear about hip-hop in Canada more than Canadian hip-hop ... ‘cuz I think you know, there is no Canadian hip-hop or there shouldn’t be.

Second, these rappers’ conceptualization of hip-hop as a “culture” was somewhat different, and more based on the genre’s historical development in New York and its ability to give a voice to people [read: Black] who were otherwise silenced at one point. After speaking to Jelleestone and Thrust, I wondered, why were their responses in

regards to the use of language and the framing of hip-hop in Canada so drastically differed from the other participants?

Unlike other regions in Canada, hip-hop in Toronto has been more widely discussed. Kardinal Offishall, Choclaire, Maestro, K-OS, even Jelleestone and Thrust are well known across the country, and are also recognized as the “faces” of Toronto’s hip-hop scene. On another level, the accomplishments of the aforementioned have often been overshadowed by American artists, such as 50 Cent and the G Unit Crew (comprised of rappers Lloyd Banks, Mobb Deep, and Tony Yayo). For example, in February of 2006, CBC.ca/arts dedicated a four-part series to hip-hop. While the intent of the series was to dispel the belief that hip-hop is to blame for the apparent increase in crime in Toronto, it demonstrated the tendency in mainstream media “to discursively equate chaos, violence, and corruption with Blackness even when the links are tenuous at best” (Yousman, 2003, p. 381).

In “Hang the MC: Blaming Hip-Hop for Violence,” writer, Matthew McKinnon first highlights the shooting death of Jane Creba, a 15 year-old White girl who was violently killed by gun violence on December 26, 2005 in Toronto. This tragedy is then juxtaposed with a 50 Cent concert at the Ricoh Coliseum in January, 2006, and lyrics from 50’s song, “Gunz Come Out”<sup>53</sup>:

The semi-auto spray, run, if you get away  
We’ll find your whereabouts and clap at you another day  
Nigga play with the bread, get a hole in your head  
You touch a dime of mine, thug, and your ass is dead

Next, McKinnon attempts to contextualize his connection to the story by providing the following anecdotal account: “I’m sitting amongst a small group of Black adults, the men

---

<sup>53</sup> 50 Cent. (2005). *2050: Before the Massacre*. [CD]. Mixtape.

in baggy jeans and jackets, the women in short skirts in full effect.... This is the youngest, Whitest crowd I've seen at a rap concert." Following the Creba shooting, a *Globe and Mail* editorial posed the following questions: Is it merely a coincidence that youths in Toronto who engage in the same reckless, sociopathic behaviour as US ghetto youths also listen to the same music, watch the same videos and dress and talk the same way? Or do these influences help legitimize the resort of violence?

While the *Globe's* editorial comments did not mention race, by referencing the US ghettos, implicitly, they are illustrative of the tendency to associate Blackness with wrongdoing; masking the real links between Canada's social problems and crime. For example, as Henry Giroux (2000) notes, "when White boys go on murderous rampages in their suburban schools, race is not mentioned as a factor in the tragic violence that ensues, but one can only imagine the media discourse if the perpetrators were young Black men" (cited in Yousman, 2003). Similarly, according to Statistics Canada,<sup>54</sup> in 2005, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba (each province has a considerably higher White population than Black) recorded the highest homicide rates in the country. While generally speaking homicides have been on the rise across the country since 1995, at last count, Edmonton is the most violent city in Canada with a homicide rate of 4.29<sup>55</sup> as compared to Toronto's rate of 1.96.<sup>56</sup>

By creating the perception that the youths (read: Black) in Toronto who listen to hip-hop are more criminal minded, the real issues, like the fact that representations of violent and hypermasculine men are in all elements of popular culture, are masked. Also, McKinnon's comments regarding the Whiteness of 50 Cent's audience neglects to deal

---

<sup>54</sup> Retrieved at: <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/061108/d061108b.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> Rates are calculated per 100,000. There were 44 victims in Edmonton.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. There were 104 victims in Toronto.

with the issues around how the White identity is framed in Canada. In the US, Yousman (2000) argues further that the White identity is in crisis “by simultaneously rejecting and embracing various aspects of that identity – rejection through the consumption of cultural signifiers of the “other,” such as music ... and embrace through the retention of the privileged status that comes from protected political, social, and economic status” (p. 382). Can the same be said about the White Canadian identity? Instead of asking, if rap music should be considered a positive or negative force in our society, more appropriate questions are: Since violent lyrics exist in rock, pop and punk music, why is the spotlight on a genre predominated by Black males? Further, why are no associations drawn between the violence on the streets of Canada’s Whitest cities, like Edmonton, and the music its residents listen to?

These events are an important backdrop to gaining an understanding as to why Thrust and Jelleestone, the only Black male participants in this project from Toronto, responded the way they did to questions regarding the local elements of hip-hop in Toronto, slang use, and “keeping it real.” Their responses to questions tapped on a lot of the above issues; albeit, the conclusions I have drawn are largely inferred from their comments. For instance, Thrust told me:

People get mad at 50 Cent all day but you know what, what he talks about is happening.... And, a lot of people think that’s not conscious; he’s not conscious. Consciousness is a word that’s been coming to us all year; it’s being aware. How can you sum up consciousness as Chuck D’s being conscious, you gotta put the two together to get the solution.

Is it a coincidence that Thrust referred to 50 Cent as an example of hip-hop consciousness? Further, Jelleestone said “Toronto’s got a high Black population and so forth ... but when you go out to the other cities especially in between those cities don’t



have too much of an urban radio, it's like the same kids that are listening to the rock stuff or the pop stuff etc., are the same kids that are listening to hip-hop." Is it by chance that Jelleestone isolated Blackness as a one-dimensional and static existence (i.e. Blacks only listen to hip-hop) and non-Blacks as multi-dimensional with myriad musical tastes?

Their comments are reflective of Kenneth Burke's (1973) notion of associational clusters. According to Burke, any given symbol is implicated in a web of representations, as such, an associational cluster is "what kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc." (p. 20). Further, Bettina Heinz and Ronald Lee (1998), paraphrasing Burke, argue that "uncovering associational clusters ... can reveal the predominance of certain cultural values. Values indicate a society's understanding of particular objects or sentiments as desirable or necessary" (p. 89). While Burke's theory was applied to capitalist consumption and the fetishization of traditional commodities, like clothing or jewellery, hip-hop has become a commodity, and Blackness fetishized wherein its listeners "are led to see the meanings of things as an inherent part of their physical existence" (p. 87). Thus, the double-bind tensions that I found to be existent in the lyrics of the five mainstream Black rappers also appear in Thrust and Jelleestone's comments; that is, they also frame their identities in very rigid, one-dimensional ways, and more importantly, as being not that much different than their Black American counterparts.

Similar to east coast participants, west coast interviewees opined that rural artists have an easier time and are arguably better at representing (lyrically) their audiences because there is a strong sense of a collective, like-minded community. For example, Neoteric said, "I've heard references from Prairie rap that is very 'Prairie-centric' where

as opposed to Toronto where it's very general lifestyle the major centres would be familiar with." Having never heard the term "Prairie-centric" before, I asked Neoteric to provide an example:

There's some people I know from Edmonton and Saskatoon that have made regional songs about regional issues that aren't even your stereotypical rap content. I think that's another thing about Prairie rap, it's non-Toronto rap, it's that a lot of it is more regionalized and based locally.

Specifically, Neoteric referred to three rappers as being exemplar of regional hip-hop that would not, for example, come out of places like Toronto. First, a rapper from Winnipeg, Manitoba named John Smith, and his album *Pinky's Laundromat* (2004) which was released on the independent Vancouver-based label, Peanuts and Corn Records as a concept album based around the north side of Winnipeg. In Neoteric's opinion, album's such as Smith's are "real" because the lyrics mean something to the people who know about its subject matter. Second, Neoteric pointed to Saskatoon-based, Clothes Horse Records rapper, Epic because he raps about songs that have to do with real local issues. As Neoteric explained, "they have songs about a native guy getting beat down by the cops or gets murdered by the cops and just things like that that are actual real local issues that happened in the paper you know about in music in a way specifically their audience can relate with while spreading kinda the message to everyone." Third, Neoteric pointed to Classified, his incorporation of Celtic influences, and the lyrics of his song, "Maritimes"<sup>57</sup> off his album *Boy-Cott in the Industry* (an obvious play on words) as being illustrative of the east coast's "brand" of hip-hop:

---

<sup>57</sup> Classified. (2005). *Boy-Cott in the Industry*. [CD]. Canada: Urbnet Records.

Welcome to the east coast home of the innocent  
Still pigeon hold as a farmer or a fisherman  
No major league teams, baseball or hockey  
No urban radio, just country and pop beats  
I'm trying to shake these stereotypes  
So give me space please let me arrow my life  
I don't even eat fish, shit I never tried lobster  
Can't play the fiddle, and never was a logger

Ultimately, Neoteric's comment that "it [keeping it real] depends on whether people are trying to represent where they're from or trying to represent what they think people want to hear" is really the dominant contestation among all the participants.

The female participants also talked about the influence of American hip-hop on Canadian hip-hop and the fact that a lot of rappers' lyrics teeter the line between being influenced by and being carbon-copy duplications of US rappers. Part of the problem is, as Eternia said, "We speak English, we have a similar accent" and two, as Chase described, our geographic proximity to the US:

I think the problem is you see the advantage say a UK emcee would have or a German emcee would have over a Canadian emcee is the fact that they're so separated from the US that they can actually exist and they can develop whatever it is a German emcee does and even though they do get music from the US and from whatever, it's still not you know, they don't flood their market like how they flood our market.

Further, Canadian hip-hop's difficulties are often exacerbated by Much Music. As Chase explained further, "... the odd chance I catch an actual Canadian hip-hop video on Much Music that's very rare nowadays ... but if I do, I'm like this guy sounds like a ... this guy sounds like a cheap imitation of you know whatever's going on in the states."<sup>58</sup> Further, Eternia told me: "It's hard 'cuz a lot of the time artists are just trying to give Much Music

---

<sup>58</sup> Chase further argued that even a rapper in France would be considered a cheap imitation of a US rapper because even if he was doing his own thing, his influences would be from the US or his samples would be American.

and commercial stations like Flow what they gonna play and what they wanna play is stuff that blends seamlessly into their American hip-hop stuff.” The vast majority of the hip-hop community members in this project talked about a time in Canada’s history where Much Music celebrated and promoted home-grown hip-hop – something it no longer does to the same extent. Thus, another tension in Canadian hip-hop is the fact that artists are constantly pitted against American artists. Despite an artist’s attempt to be distinct, the industry does encourage deviations from the mainstream American hip-hop that bombards the Canadian marketplace. Chase provided the following example:

Everybody’s liking Eve because that’s what they hear and then I or someone comes out with something different and they go, ‘I don’t know if I like that’ ... and then me wanting to sell and wanting to make a little bit of money well you know I gotta tone it down a little bit and maybe try to come on that a little bit of that commercial vibe so I can, they can say ‘ok, we got a Eve, ah Tara kinda sounds like Eve.’

In response to the industry’s “American-washing” antics, a resistance strategy Canadian rappers employ is to embrace their regional accent and celebrate their lived experiences (albeit doing so on independent labels with smaller distribution networks). As the east and west coast participants confirmed, the aforementioned, not money or fame is what makes a Canadian rapper “real”. Similarly, Eekwol told me: “Somebody like him [Epic] or like Buck 65 ... like I find them very unique to Canada because they’ve actually created their own way of rhyming you know and they use their, they um, it’s like they celebrate their accents as opposed to trying to sound like “yo yo, what’s up I’m from New York.” While Toronto artists are caught (either at their own volition or due to industry forces) trying to distance themselves from anything Canadian by including a large percentage of US-derived slang, lesser known artists are able to reflect a “real”

Canadian hip-hop, albeit it is often hip-hop relegated to each respective artists' geographic location.

#### **4.5. Canadian Hip-Hop's Political and Social Agenda (the underground vs. commercial)**

The underground versus commercial dichotomy is US hip-hop's measure for separating artists that are in it just to make money from hip-hop that remains tied to the (inner-city) community, and is reflective of a collective culture. To my surprise, east coast participants agreed that hip-hop is a culture, and further, their responses to what hip-hop meant to them reflected a strong sense of (underground) community. For instance, TEA described hip-hop as a way of expressing himself, adding that "there's a camaraderie ... within the hip-hop community ... the people who are out to help other people end up working together and it's just it's a good feeling." Bizzy described hip-hop as being more than just music, "it's a way of life, it's like an attitude, hip-hop is so many things, it can be political or it can just be party music." Classified's description of hip-hop as "a way of expression, honesty, and entertainment" was reminiscent of the term "edutainment" first used in hip-hop by the rap group, Boogie Down Productions, during the early nineties. The term suggests that while hip-hop is a source of entertainment, its intentions should also be to educate its followers. Although none of the east coast participants used the term, their responses to questions related to "keeping it real" indicated that this tenet derived from US hip-hop's "Message" period meant something to them.

Second, east coast participants felt that "selling-out" has more to do with a lack of creativity wherein "street credibility" is gained by attempting to be original, whether or

not one is signed to a major or independent label. For example, Bizzy explained, “If people want to listen to gangster rap, they’re going to go for what’s down in the States ... It’s more of a reality than it is up here ... we’ve got to come up with ... we’ve got to be creative and come up with other things.” According to Pearce, “You have a lot of things coming out of the underground which is ah a lot of wordplay, a lot of creative music coming out,” and TEA said, “People that aren’t really aware of the underground scene a lot of time tend to be more influenced by what they see in videos ... as they become more aware of the underground sort of um ... realize that you have to sort of portray a real message.”

Importantly, TEA, Bizzy, Neoteric and Eternia, said the phrase “keeping it real” should be replaced with “keeping it right,” which to Eternia meant “being genuine and not fake in your actions not just words.” Specifically, TEA explained why the phrase “keeping it right” is more of an appropriate phrase in hip-hop right now because of the multiple meanings people associate with “keeping it real”:

“Keeping it real” has taken on the stereotypical um gotta be blinged out, gotta ... be associated with money, can’t be you know caring and sensitive, you have to be selfish .... Get rid of the façade. Let’s talk about “keeping it right.” Let’s talk about helping other people out. Let’s talk about being who you are instead of trying to kid people into thinking that you’re something that you’re not.

When I completed these interviews, I realized this new phrase could have been posed as a question to subsequent participants; however, it did not occur to me at the time how significant it would be.

While east coast artists negatively talked about the American influence over hip-hop in Canada, and the importance of the underground scene, for Thrust and Jelleestone,

there was no mention of an underground Toronto scene, nor was America positioned as a negative force on Canadian hip-hop. Instead, these artists talked about their contributions to hip-hop, and the lack of support from corporate Canada. For example, Jelleestone said:

I think Canada as a whole, especially you know the role we always played in hip-hop is we been open to everything, everybody's been able to sound off over here ... my point is that ah I believe our counterparts get the credit because they're able to mass produce it .... I think in terms of that, we we we could have the market cornered on that if there was a little more support ... in terms of the big money markets and corporate Canada, you know, because everybody uses hip-hop you know to sell their product nowadays.

Further, Thrust talked about the fact that in order for Toronto artists, like Maestro and Offishall to get noticed by Canada's music industry, they had to make it outside the country first: "We had a point where it was nine artists here signed internationally in one year." On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Montreal-based, Storm pointed to this crossing of the border as a signifier for being "fake."

In 1998 when Red1 spoke out about the lack of support for hip-hop in Canada, most people assumed that almost ten years later things would be different. In 2006, when I spoke to Red1 about Canada's music industry, I was surprised to hear him tell me that despite the genre's gains – rap is now part of the televised Juno's Award show – its biggest challenge today is dealing with an industry that does not promote artists who dare to diverge from the formulaic, commercially viable African-American style of hip-hop:

You have to understand that the industry basically copies what the consumer wants. It's all about profit of course. If the consumer is feeling a certain thing, the artist will try to please the demand. If the Lil' Jon sound is hot, and the consumers keep buying it, that's what the market will produce ... When they see young bright cats with ideas and style, they feel threatened and they don't want to empower them because they could lose their job.... There isn't really anybody in a position of power in Canada that's doing

anything. People are just trying to collect a paycheck and that's it (2006).

Similarly, Storm could not definitively comment on the local elements of hip-hop across the country; in fact, he went so far as to say that hip-hop in Canada is dead, along with the underground scene:

Unless you have like this major backing on a major label of some sort, I mean no one really cares about you anymore ... a lot of people have taken a lot of risks ... the best example is Kardi ... he tried his best to break out in Toronto and nobody was having it and he went to New York and did the same things he was doing here and everybody loved him and then all of a sudden Canada adopted him again.

Every city has their own little underground scene going on ... unfortunately, there's not a lot of exposure to it anymore ... the whole underground scene movement is more or less dead I mean everything from promoters to to artists and all that I mean no one is doing anything any more.... Even the stuff that's on like mainstream and all that. I mean none of these guys are saying anything. They're chatting a whole lot of stuff by they're not really saying anything.

At first I was shocked by Storm's position, but when juxtaposed with Red1's comments, and the fact that at some point most of the five Black artists in this project were on a US label (K-OS is the only one remaining), I wondered if there was some merit to what he was saying. I then recalled Offishall's comments about being dropped from a US label. The problem is not with artists like Offishall or K-OS going to the US, the problem is the stereotypes we formulate about each region across the country. For example, Sepu's told me: "Toronto is known for American style artists and videos. Halifax is known for White rappers. West coast has its share of Asian and Indian rappers ... there is a completely separate hip-hop scene in Quebec for French artists. They receive exclusive funding and tour other French speaking nations." Undoubtedly, the



demographics of a particular city has influence over the style that emerges out of that city, but does that mean that “aping an American style” is the only way a Toronto artist can get a record deal? What about members of Halifax’s historically Black community, are they not accepted because Halifax is where Canada’s “White” rappers come from? Why are French Canadian rappers the only group in Canada to receive formal government funding?

When asked what attributes would make someone “real” or “fake” in Canadian hip-hop, unlike their male counterparts who opined that one’s pursuit of money is a signifier for a “fake” rapper, for the female participants, it is not just one’s pursuit of money but pretending to have money that constitutes a “fake” rapper. As Chase explained, “anybody who’s out there and is like ‘I got a Benz and I’m making this much money’ it’s like please, nobody in Canada if they’re an emcee I don’t care anybody can come chat, other than maybe K-OS, ain’t making big money off of emceeing ... there ain’t no flippin’ Jay-Zs<sup>59</sup> in Canada.” Second, as Eternia explained, “flossing”<sup>60</sup> would be preposterous in Canada since Canadian culture is more humble and a lot less consumer driven than the US.” Further, feigning poverty would also be considered “fake” because as Eternia continued, “Anybody in Canada (unless you’re from a native reserve) can’t really rap about ghettos. We got low income housing but it AIN’T<sup>61</sup> the same. I can say that, I’ve lived in them (in Canada) and seen American projects.”

Where US hip-hop is distinguished by “artists whose music is played on television on the radio – those who make “hits” ... and ... real, underground hip-hop is

---

<sup>59</sup> Jay-Z (Shawn Corey Carter) is a rapper, and current president and CEO of Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records. Chase’s comments allude to his obvious financial status.

<sup>60</sup> Slang for showing off.

<sup>61</sup> Emphasis added by Eternia.

defined in opposition to these symbols of identity that represent inauthenticity” (McLeod, 1999, p. 142), “real” hip-hop in Canada is defined by representing an underground that is in opposition to US commercial hip-hop, which is similarly defined as McLeod described as music that is played on television and the radio, while inauthenticity is linked to one’s appearance of wealth, even if one has attained commercial success, because that is not a collectively agreed upon reality for Canadian artists.

#### **4.6. National and Regional Identity Politics (the old school vs. mainstream)**

McLeod (1999) describes the old school versus the mainstream contestation as discourse that “addresses hip-hop’s status as a culture that has deep and resonating traditions, rather than as a commodity” (p. 143); the idea being that hip-hop from “back in the day” – that period in time before hip-hop became popular – refers to a more close-knit community of people who helped nurture and develop hip-hop as a culture, and who were not necessarily concerned with making money. East coast hip-hop is still very much reflective of hip-hop from “back in the day.” For instance, Bizzy said, “I’m trying to take hip-hop back to its roots ... you know just working the crowd and and really having a party” and Pearce further epitomized the collective outlook of Maritime hip-hop: “A lot of the more popular mainstream rappers that you hear in the States, like you know, Jay-Z and whoever else, you know a lot of their lyrical content is based on materialism .... It’s not like that here because we’re just struggling you know we’re just modest kind of people.”

The west coast participants agreed that hip-hop is a culture but they also credited the genre for being able to contribute to a person’s personal growth and for its allowance

of individual self-expression. For instance, XYL, who is also a trained musician, told me: “Due to the fact that the lyrics play such a key role um in hip-hop more than any other style of music like rock and stuff, people write lyrics and they mean something but they’re not really being listened to on the same level as an emcee’s flow when you’re listening to hip-hop.” His comments on hip-hop’s lyrics reflect an important point of divergence from other genres of music. Paraphrasing Keyes’ (2002) explanation of signification and hip-hop, where a lot of words and expressions that originated in hip-hop (e.g. “dope” or “bling”) have now been adopted by the mainstream, rap’s lexicon has become a part of everyday speech. When XYL talks about the importance of lyrics, he is referring to the fact that in hip-hop, lyrics serve as indirect commentary “through ambiguity, allusion, imagery, metaphor, braggadocio, or insults” (p. 132) as a result, the construction of rhymes give an emcee the ability to “remain cognizant of their communities’ concerns about everyday issues” (p. 139). For hip-hop community members, like XYL and Neoteric, lyrics are similarly most important to them. As XYL continued, “when I get a new hip-hop CD I’m really listening to the lyrics and really picking them out right whereas if I might be listening to rock or something like that or some sort of folk music.” It is interesting to note that in an interview with Offishall last year, he told me that lyrics had died: “To be honest, I’m not interested in the majority of hip-hop. I love hip-hop to the max, but it’s like all you need is a corny lyric and you’re done, you know what I mean ... people don’t care about lyrics anymore” (“Kardinal,” 2006). Importantly, each rapper’s comments beg the question: Is it that lyrics do not matter anymore to hip-hop’s artists or its listeners?

When asked what attributes would make someone “real” in Canadian hip-hop, the west coast hip-hop community members stressed the importance of staying true to the art form’s roots, speaking about something that can be useful in society and not “selling-out” (for money), which was also reflective of the east coasts’ valorizing of hip-hop’s “Message” period and being an “edutainer”. For example, Neoteric concluded: “When people say that they’re ‘keeping it real’ I wonder what they mean by that. I don’t think they mean they ‘keep it real’ by paying dues and you know doing things the way earlier rap people had which is essentially what ‘keeping it real’ used to be.”

Ultimately, although it seems surprising that (White) east and west coast hip-hop community members, who are the furthest removed from commercial success, are also the least aggressive in their pursuit of money, it is a result of their distance from commercial hip-hop. What they are doing is so distinctly Canadian (and regional) it fails to garner much attention by mainstream media forces, who are primarily interested in hip-hop that closely resembles US (Black) hip-hop. As a result, while lesser known artists, like their US hip-hop counterparts, “identify the old school and back in the day as a period when a pure hip-hop culture existed” (p. 144) by invoking an authentic past to stabilize the present, for them, “back in the day” hip-hop is not about the genre’s ability to make money, but first and foremost about remaining “real” to a collective community. Meanwhile, the Black participants in this project appear to be caught trying to replicate US hip-hop’s commercial success, so it is more difficult to attempt to remain true to the genre’s roots.

## **Chapter 5: Mainstream Hip-Hop's Rhymes and Resistance Lyrics**

### **5.1. Hip-Hop's Lyrics Reign Supreme**

McLeod (1999) ultimately argues that authenticity claims are a way of establishing in-group/out-group distinctions. By invoking authenticity claims, hip-hop community members affirm that the genre's core remains tied to its historical past amidst mainstream success. Further, by organizing the expressions used in hip-hop authenticity discourse into semantic dimensions, identity talk can be understood as “structured, meaningful, and a way of comprehending central elements of hip-hop culture from a native's point of view” (p. 146). In summary, the semantic dimensions McLeod identified in US hip-hop are as follows:

Being authentic, or keepin' it real, means staying true to yourself (by identifying oneself as both hard and Black), representing the underground and the street, and remembering hip-hop's cultural legacy, which is the old school. To be inauthentic, or fake, means being soft, following mass trends by listening to commercial rap music, and identifying oneself with White, mainstream culture that is geographically located in the suburbs (see Appendix 1).

Conversely, the semantic dimensions I inductively derived from the discourse of the hip-hop community members in this project is more reflective of how authenticity is defined in Canada. While being authentic, or “keeping it real” also means staying true to yourself, it is not defined in racial or gender-sexual terms; rather, by identifying oneself with a local community and Canada; representing the underground (described as hip-hop that is creative or original), and the suburbs or rural community (not “the streets”) are attributes of a “real” rapper – there is also the necessity to pay homage not so much to hip-hop's cultural legacy but to the genre's creative legacy (specifically its lyrics). To be

inauthentic, or “fake” means trying to replicate US hip-hop’s “street” bravado, following US commercial hip-hop trends, and identifying oneself with mainstream hip-hop that is geographically located in an urban context (see Appendix 2).

The aforementioned represents the opinions of lesser known, largely independent artists and more importantly, non-Black (and female) hip-hop community members. As evidenced by Jelleestone and Thrust’s comments, the above semantic dimensions do not wholeheartedly reflect their conceptualization of “real” versus “fake” hip-hop. Both of these Toronto-based, Black hip-hop community members describe “real” hip-hop as not having to necessarily represent a specific locale, and as being more a mirror reflection of US hip-hop, including the Black (male) identity. As such, while this chapter attempts to explore the extent of Canadian hip-hop’s “cultural reterritorialization”, it also serves to further explain how (and why) the rhetoric of Black, Toronto-based mainstream artists, and the conceptualization of their identities diverge from the key cultural symbols used by the non-Black (and female) participants in this project to maintain an authentic hip-hop identity.

Importantly, this chapter also examines the extent of hip-hop’s hybridization through a content analysis of the genre’s (mainstream) lyrical content. In order to understand this project’s focus on hip-hop’s lyrics, it is necessary to also explain why a rapper’s rhymes are of paramount significance to its community members.

As Keyes (2002) writes, “In constructing a rhyme, MCs must remain cognisant of their communities’ concerns about everyday issues and life in the hood.... MCs compose rhymes on topics ranging from lyrical dexterity, comical satire, and sexually risqué stories to socio-political concerns such as police brutality (most common in the West

Coast style), drug addiction, feminist issues, and nationalist themes” (p. 139). For example, on “Book of Rhymes,”<sup>62</sup> US rapper Nas’ lyrics are a form of text that are deeply interwoven with his lived experience inasmuch as the lyrics are a form of cathartic expression: “Rarely y’all come in contact with the real/Since Pun passed he was the last shine of sun I could feel/Yo, said there’s a few left since music’s expressions of life/Damn I wish I took more time to write in my book of rhymes.” Although hip-hop’s lyrics are often the brunt of the genre’s criticism wherein people take the position that its content is negative, misogynistic and sexist, it is not the only genre guilty of perpetuating negative depictions of women and glamorizing violence. On “Get Your Gunn,”<sup>63</sup> rocker Marilyn Manson chants: “Goddamn your righteous hand/I eat innocent meat/The housewife I will beat/The prolife I will kill.” However, the difference between other genres of music and hip-hop is that the latter is expected to speak to a community, as opposed to being an individual form of artistic expression, which is why its misogyny and nihilism are more criticized than other genres. Further, even if an artist achieves commercial success, such as Kanye West and his debut album, *College Dropout* (2004), his lyrics are still construed as being directed at a specific group (White, mainstream culture), and reflective of a collective (Black) community geographically located in “the hood”. On “All Falls Down”<sup>64</sup> he raps:

I say fuck the police, that’s how I treat em  
 We buy our way out of jail, but we can’t buy freedom  
 We’ll buy a lot of clothes when we don’t really need em  
 Things we buy to cover up what’s inside  
 Cause they make us hate ourself and love they wealth  
 That’s why shortys hollering “where the ballas’ at?”

---

<sup>62</sup> Nas. (2003). *God’s Son*. [CD]. USA: Sony.

<sup>63</sup> Manson, M. (1999). *Live*. [CD]. USA: Interscope Records.

<sup>64</sup> West, K. (2004). *College Dropout* [CD]. USA: Roc-A-Fella Records.

Drug dealer buy Jordans, crackhead buy crack  
And a white man get paid off of all of that

Second, because rappers do not play instruments and often they are accompanied by a synthetic beat provided by a DJ, as Aldridge and Carlin (1993) explain, hip-hop audiences are conditioned to pay more attention to an artist's lyrics, as such, "given the lack of development in the musical element, the emphasis of rap songs is on the lyrics" (p. 105). Further, Roach (1992) argues that "the main focus on rap itself seems more poetry than music because the audience is saturated with bombardments of verbiage" (cited in Aldridge and Carlin, p. 105). On "Fear Not For Man"<sup>65</sup> and "Too Late,"<sup>66</sup> Mos Def and Talib Kweli affirm why and how a rapper's lyrics are interconnected with a worldview, and how hip-hop is in a perpetual state of confliction:

Listen.. people be askin me all the time,  
"Yo Mos, what's gettin ready to happen with hip-hop?"  
(Where do you think hip-hop is goin?)  
I tell em, "You know what's gonna happen with hip-hop?  
Whatever's happening with us"...  
People talk about hip-hop like it's some giant livin in the hillside  
comin down to visit the townspeople  
We (are) hip-hop  
Me, you, everybody, we are hip-hop  
So hip-hop is goin where we goin  
So the next time you ask yourself where hip-hop is goin  
ask yourself... Where am I goin? How am I doin?

Nowadays rap artists coming half-hearted  
Commercial like pop, or underground like black markets  
Where were you the day hip-hop died?

Ultimately, lyrics provide the foundation for hip-hop's meaning, and because the genre is expected to "represent" a people, a rapper's identity must extend beyond his or her performance and speak to and for a collective audience.

---

<sup>65</sup> Mos Def. (1999). *Black On Both Sides*. [CD]. USA: Priority Records.

<sup>66</sup> Kweli, T. (2000). *Reflection Eternal*. [CD]. USA: Priority Records.



## 5.2. Lyrical Expressions of One's Location

It is difficult to define Canadian hip-hop, but when you hear a track by a Canadian artist, be it the Rascalz, Jellestone or Kardinal, there is something distinctly Canadian that sets it apart from our neighbours south of the border (Frank, 2002).

Given Toronto's close proximity to the US, it would be unrealistic for Toronto-based artists not to credit African-Americans for showing them their brand of hip-hop before they even imagined their own. In an interview with *Manhunt*, Kardinal talks about the US invasion of Toronto in the early eighties: "Buffalo was not too far away and they had their own urban radio station, WBLK. We grew up on BLK, the funk, the Hip-Hop.... When I was a little kid everybody used to come through. LL Cool J, Public Enemy, Kool G. Rap, Shante... All these people used to come through" ("Kardinal," 2001). According to Maestro: "When I first started out, Toronto was like a younger brother to New York City....Everyone came to Toronto...We've been doing it since '78, '79" (Henley, 2006).

While these artists acknowledge hip-hop's New York roots, they also try to legitimize their own (local) hip-hop. Offishall also told *Manhunt*, "For a while, people weren't really trying to hear much outside of New York ... but, the dope thing about being from T-dot is when people hear the tracks and realize it's from the T-dot they flip" ("Kardinal," 2001). Similarly, Maestro told a popular US Magazine the following: "My *Symphony in Effect* and *The Black Tie Affair*. Kardi's (Offishall) first album, K-OS' last joint (*Joyful Rebellion*). The Rascalz and Swollen Members did their thing. The *Cash Crop* album 'cause [The Rascalz] came to Toronto and unified Canada" (Henley, 2006). Further, Chocclair told *Wordmag.com*: "This is my city. I was born here, I represent this

city. Before it was cool to represent this city, we were representing this city. Toronto is our city, and I'm representing this city" (Penrose, 2003). Finally, Rascalz assert how they feel about being from Vancouver: "Things were always moving and it was always happening in Vancouver. We never really felt like we had to make that switch or that move ... We're trying to build up the Canadian foundation and put it down" (Joyner, 1999). It is interesting to note that K-OS' interview comments more closely resemble the other hip-hop community members in this project. Like them, he refuses to revere and associate himself with New York hip-hop by acknowledging the lack of "street" credibility Canadians have as compared to US rappers, since we do not have "real" ghettos and as a result, our music should sound different: "When you grow up in Mississauga and have nothing to struggle for, you want all your beats to be hard. But when you grow up in a real ghetto, you want to feel good" (Berman, 2004).

Conversely, in their lyrics, the other Black rappers try to appear as "hard" as their New York counterparts. On "Bare Witness"<sup>67</sup> Chocclair raps: "Fucking with Toronto, get your pink slip you're fired/Kicked out the Thompson Hall through Apollo doors" and on "Can't Relate"<sup>68</sup> Rascalz attempt to assert their superiority over New York: "Vancity/That's how we do it/...And when we stepping to New York, we the ultimate." Similarly, while Offishall's "Ol' Time Killin'"<sup>69</sup> references US hip-hop activities and slang, which is similar to French and Italian rappers whose songs also "refer to major topics and activities of ... hip-hop, for example 'freestyle,' 'flow,' 'diss,' 'funk,' and 'skills' at the same time, drawing on American-derived slang, including terms such as

---

<sup>67</sup> Chocclair. (1999). *Ice Cold*. [CD]. Canada: Priority Records.

<sup>68</sup> Rascalz. (1999). *Global Warning*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.

<sup>69</sup> Offishall, K. (2001). *Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.

‘bitch,’ ‘blunt’ (joint), or ‘shit’ in their speech” (Androutsopoulos and Scholz, 2002, p. 473), he is also trying to legitimize Toronto’s hip-hop scene:

So hype the Source should give us 5 mics and 2 turntables  
We spitting this with beats so ridiculous ...  
Now for the people who don’t know what a gwaning  
They sleeping on the whole city, stretching in your heart  
Not knowing that T-dot’s about to shake your ass out your dreams

Importantly, the aforementioned phraseology is illustrative of Lull’s (2002) concept of “cultural reterritorialization” where “active cultural selection and synthesis draws from the familiar and the new” (p. 161). Offishall, for example, draws on the same cultural symbols as his African-American contemporaries. On “Husslin”<sup>70</sup> he raps: “We husslin’ to stay alive, my peeps don’t wanna live off them government checks,” an act that is quite similar to US rappers Peter Gunz and Lord Tariq on their song “Déjà vu (Uptown Baby)”<sup>71</sup>:

New York to the heart, but got love for all  
Lie and die in the fire, where I learned to ball  
Uptown is the place where I lay my dome  
On the streets of the Bronx where my fa-mi-ly roam

Then, he later states, “I’m representing for the T-Dot/B-Boys from west to east,” which places his hip-hop in a specific (new) location. These rapper’s lyrics reflect “a distinctive form of ‘lived’ ethnicity, which demands its own localized and particularized mode of expression” (Gilroy cited in Bennett, p. 81) but similar to Jelleestone and Thrust’s arguments that while it is important to “represent” where you are from, their lyrics also suggest that talk about one’s local community should be juxtaposed with references US listeners will interpret as being “real” hip-hop.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Gunz, P., & Tariq, L. (1998). *Make It Reign*. [CD]. USA: Sony.

Unlike east coast and west coast participants who point to their location as a means of building and affirming group solidarity amongst their (rural) audience, the aforementioned artists are more reflective of US (New York) hip-hop where one's location is ghettoized as a means of authentication. While it is easy to write off the inclusion of US references and talk of poverty as attempts to mimic US hip-hop, it could also be a result of the role New York played in the development of Toronto's hip-hop community, and the shared Afro-Diasporic identity of its artists. Unlike east and west coast participants who had to "seek" out hip-hop, US rappers brought their hip-hop directly to Toronto; as a result, their lyrics (and interview comments) show that they conceptualize their location as having been approved by hip-hop's creators as such talk about "the streets" makes perfect sense to them.

### **5.3. Use of Slang Vernacular**

African-American rappers, as Russell A. Potter argues, "Have looked more towards the language and consciousness of the ghetto in search of a more authentically Black identity" (cited in Mitchell, 2000, p. 41). As such, "street talk" is considered to be an inseparable part of the African American experience; that is, slang (ebonics) is not demonized as improper speech rather it is valorized for its embodiment of what Spaulding (1981) describes as "a Black urban language" (cited in Keyes, p. 30). Similarly, in South London, cockney slang and the use of Jamaican patois connoted fixed positions of class and race. As Gilroy (1986) explains, "both were illegitimate and unofficial, and each marked out a minority cultural and political community with an historically-grounded collective identity" (p. 194).

For Black Canadian rappers, like other Afro-Diasporic cultures, the use of slang vernacular is one of the strategies employed to symbolize and consolidate their multi-ethnic, multi-national identities. It also illustrates Gilroy's argument that the use of counter-culture vernacular is reflective of a contradictory unity. On the one hand, with the exception of K-OS, all of these artists were born in Canada and have lived here their entire lives. On the other hand, their West Indian affiliation, as first generation Canadians can not be denied. For example, Rascalz' "Gunfinga"<sup>72</sup> is illustrative the above: "Cause my glock's not enough, sometimes a man fi get cuffed/ ...Bout respect due, yo respect ah fi earn." However, similar to groups like The brothers Ndlouvuvu from Zimbabwe, who openly criticize African-American rappers who assimilate African fashions such as hair braiding (Mitchell, 2000), the juxtaposition of African-American slang with West Indian patois is also a strategy of resistance against the perceived universality of African-American "street talk". For example, in "BaKardi Slang,"<sup>73</sup> Offishall overtly attacks African-Americans for assuming Black Canadians say things the same way they do:

We don't say you know what I'm sayin  
T-dot says ya dun know  
We don't say 'hey that's the breaks'  
We say 'yo, a so it go'  
A shoe is called a "crep"  
A big party is called a "fete"...  
You talkin' about 'yeah son!'  
We talkin' about 'yo, lock it off!'  
Wheel that and tek it from de top

Like in Italy where rappers experiment in their native language by "Italianizing" US hip hop with expressions like '*rappare*,' and '*scratchare*,' and '*slenghare*' (to use

---

<sup>72</sup> Rascalz. (1999). *Global Warning*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.

<sup>73</sup> Offishall, K. (2001). *Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol 1*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.

slang) and rap in their regional dialects” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 46), when these rappers combine cultural practices from their West Indian roots with US slang, they are recognizing hip-hop’s American roots while finding and extending new patterns of communication that give their community substance and a “unique” collective sense of identity. Thus, the juxtaposition of US slang, patois and slang derived from the urban centres of Toronto and Vancouver, is a response to the fundamental contradiction of being Black, Canadian and West Indian. Similar to their lyrical commentary on location, the combining of US slang and patois ultimately pays homage to hip-hop’s roots as it challenges the status of African-Americans as the only creators of hip-hop’s lexicon.

#### **5.4. Tensions and Resistance Strategies**

Undoubtedly, race matters in America. As Cornel West (1993) writes, “Black people in the United States differ from all other modern people owing to the unprecedented levels of unregulated and unrestrained violence directed against them. No other people have been taught systematically to hate themselves ... reinforced by the powers of state and civic coercion” (p. vii).<sup>74</sup> Further, African-American rappers loudly proclaim that despite its level of popularity and commerciality, hip-hop is first and foremost a Black cultural expression. Importantly, McLeod (1999) notes that “Explicit anti-White sentiments are rarely made in hip-hop. Instead, pro-Black statements are more typical” (p. 141). For example, in “Real People”<sup>75</sup> African-American rapper Common rhymes: “Black men walking wit white girls on they arms/I be mad at em as if I know

---

<sup>74</sup> While West’s comments are certainly true when placed in context – Jim Crow laws and lynching – he neglects to consider the experience of Blacks in South Africa during Apartheid, as well, the fact that Black slavery also existed in countries outside the continental United States – Canada and the West Indies – in which people similarly endured “assaults on Black humanity” (p. vii).

<sup>75</sup> Common. (2005). *Be*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.

they moms ... When we lessen our women our condition seems to worsen.” The lyrics of Mos Def’s (1999) song, “Mr. Nigga,”<sup>76</sup> also highlights the racial tension that still exists within contemporary American society:

You can laugh and criticize Michael Jackson if you wanna  
Woody Allen, molested and married his step-daughter  
Same press kickin’ dirt on Michael's name  
Show Woody and Soon-Yi at the playoff game, holdin’ hands...  
Would he get that type of dap if his name was Woody Black?

Race not only defines the boundaries of ownership, it also acts as a form of resistance against perceived White domination. Just like in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where “the choice of local indigenous ‘resistance vernaculars’ is an act of cultural resistance and preservation of ethnic autonomy” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 53), African-Americans have used hip-hop as their vehicle to question inequality within American society and to preserve a collective cultural voice. Do Black Canadian rappers do the same thing? What dichotomies of race and class permeate within their hip-hop, and what similarities can be drawn between the experience of these five Black artists and other hip-hop artists of colour in other parts of the world?

In his research, James Lull (2000) found that “the adoption of an international Black identity by New Zealand’s Maori youth ... compensates in part for a lack of knowledge of Maori culture” (p. 248). Further, Tony Mitchell (2000) argued that when Maori combined traditional *waiata* (song) and popular music forms from the US, it was “part of a cultural project of self-assertion and self-preservation which is linked with a global Diaspora of musical expressions of ... ethnic minorities’ social struggles” (p. 50). Meanwhile, in Germany, “hip-hip is being used as a medium for the expression of issues relating to racism and the problem of national identity” (Bennett, 1999, p. 77), and in

---

<sup>76</sup> Mos Def. (1999). *Black on Both Sides*. [CD]. USA: Priority Records.

Cape Town, South Africa hip-hop “emerged mainly as a platform for articulating resistance to the apartheid regime” (p. 124). Do the lyrics of these five rappers compensate for the lack of a Black (Canadian) identity? When they combine patois with US slang, is it a strategic plan to preserve their “differentness” while declaring their sameness as part of the African-Diaspora? Like in South Africa and across Europe, do these artists tackle issues related to racism and political sovereignty?

In Canada, there has been little commentary on the interrelations of race, identity and hip-hop. Most recently, Awad Ibrahim (2004) in his study of a group of immigrant and refugee African youth attending a French-language high school in southwestern Ontario found that identifying with Black Americans influenced what and how they learned, linguistically and culturally. Ibrahim argued that the Black youths learned Black (read: American) English, “which they accessed in and through hip-hop culture and rap lyrical/linguistic styles” (p. 78). However, for the five Black rappers in this project, English is not a second language. As a result, the ways in which they identify with Black Americans is multi-layered and complicated. They identify and acknowledge their status as Black men in Canada, yet at the same time, they show allegiance to the global struggles of Black people (and other ethnic minorities) – albeit predominately favouring African-American mores. Appendix 3<sup>77</sup> is a classification and catalogue of the ways these five Black rappers affirm their racial identity in their songs in terms of their indexical and symbolic representative character. Each example validates how these rappers conceptualize their Afro-Diasporic identities by focusing on their race, racism (both in Canada and the US) and West Indian cultural practises.

---

<sup>77</sup> Similar methods were used in Edward Armstrong’s (2004) study of rapper Eminem.



Inasmuch as these rappers are proud to be Black and are cognisant of their history, they also perpetuate negative practices, such as using the N-word with as much virulence and gratuitousness as their African-American hip-hop counterparts. However, African-American scholars would disagree with the aforementioned assertion that using the N-word in hip-hop is negative. According to Robin D.G. Kelley (1994), “rappers commonly use ‘nigga’ to describe a condition rather than skin color or culture ... because it reflects a new identity in which the specific class, race ... experiences in late-capitalist urban centers coalesce” (cited in Armstrong, 2005, p. 346). Further, Randall Kennedy (2002) contends that “Blacks ... like to use nigger because it is a shorthand way of reminding themselves and everyone else precisely where they perceive themselves as standing” (p. 48-49), and “‘nigga’ has also become a synonym not only for the oppressed but also for the strong, streetwise men that fight to overcome oppression” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 346). Meanwhile, African-American rapper, Tupac Shakur has said: “nigga stood for ‘Never Ignorant, Gets Goals Accomplished’” (cited in Kennedy, 2002, p. 44). Appendix 4<sup>78</sup> summarizes and categorizes how each of the rappers use the N-word and how it mirrors African-American rappers use of the word.

As it relates to authenticity, the dominant way these rappers use the N-word is when referring to “the streets” and their masculinity as men. Interestingly enough, out of the 50 times the word “nigga” is used in this category, Offishall and Chocclair account for 17 and 22 of that number respectively, while K-QS (who grew up in the suburbs of Toronto) does not use the word at all. In “Skunk”<sup>79</sup> for example, Chocclair raps: “Hun,

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Chocclair. (2002). *Memoirs of Black Savage*. [CD]. Canada: Virgin Music.

niggas tried to rob my nigga/Two semi's change his mind, my nigga,” and Offishall says, “My nigga them street cats will hustle you.”<sup>80</sup>

While on the surface it might appear that these rappers are imitating American rappers – based on the assumption that the racial divide in Canada is not as salient and that our history is not marked by racism – I contend that this is not the case. On the contrary, they are somehow able to compartmentalize their race and their citizenship as two mutually exclusive states of being. There are 47 instances where the N-word is used by these rappers to describe the social condition of racism, an act that, irrespective of location, transcends citizenship as part of the Afro-Diasporic experience. In “Man By Choice,”<sup>81</sup> for example, Offishall’s (he uses the N-word more so than any other Canadian rapper) lyrics are illustrative of same:

From an African, straight to a nigger, you know what I’m  
saying...  
Then it was on some Afro-American stuff  
Afro-Canadian what have you, but guess what  
It don’t matter what you call yourself  
It’s what they call you behind your back  
Nigga, straight up...  
Walkin’ through London a black man (nigga)  
Walkin’ through Rexdale a black man (nigga)  
Strollin’ through Decatur a black man (nigga)

Although race is an important element of these rappers’ rhetoric as reflected in their articulation of the African-American and Afro-Diasporic identity, they assert their “differentness” when they refer to elements of Rastafarian culture, and the principles of its followers. Earlier, I quoted Gilroy (1986), who argued that [African-American] rappers draw on many of the oppositional themes associated with Rastafari culture;

---

<sup>80</sup> Offishall, K. (1999). Husslin. On *Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

however, for these five rappers, it is not simply a matter of connotatively drawing upon contestations or tensions within contemporary capitalist production like their American counterparts, instead, their connection to the Rastafarian movement is denotatively expressed.

The Rastafarian movement began in Jamaica in 1930, according to Stephen King (1999), the movement “attempted to reverse the damaging effects of European colonialism by promoting Africa as Jamaica’s spiritual homeland” (p. 93).<sup>82</sup> Vivien Goldman (2006), in her book entitled, *The Book of Exodus: The Making and Meaning of Bob Marley & The Wailers’ Album of the Century*, recalls the spirituality of the movement, as explained to her by singer, Bob Marley:

“When you say Rastafari, it’s Jesus Christ, just [with] a new name, just like reggae used to be ska. So it really is the official thing for earth,” he explained to me, “reggae is the music the Bible speak of.”.... By writing his Rasta anthem, Bob was consciously taking his place in a chain of creation drawn from the Bible’s Book of Exodus (p. 133).

Since these rappers prioritize their West Indian – primarily Jamaican – roots, they similarly elevate the spiritual beliefs of Rastafari culture into their hip-hop, drawing upon its insistence that music should transcend the self and is one’s link to a higher place.

Maestro, Chocclair and Offishall relegate talk about their spirituality to a few verses. In “Dats My Nigga” Maestro says: “I’m easy like a spliff, I shoot the gift to Jimmy Cliff ...Like Moses I separate seas” (Jimmy Cliff is a Jamaican Rasta reggae

---

<sup>82</sup> Specifically, the movement promoted its cultural identity through its religious practices (belief that Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie is the living Black god), clothing (Ethiopian colours of red, green, and gold), hairstyle (wearing dreadlocks like Ethiopian warriors), and speech patterns (patois combines both English and African language) (King, 1999).

singer and a “spliff” is patois for marijuana).<sup>83</sup> On “Bare Witness,” Chocclair raps: “Guru be the bredren” and on “Husslin” Offishall chants: “Yo, running from Babylon/... When ya hussle do it for the I and I” (Rastafarians call each other “Bredren” in reference to brotherhood within the movement, and for believers, Babylon is not meant to mean a place of tranquility; rather it refers to a belief that the social system is corrupt, and “I and I” is Rasta speech for me, myself, and I – the unity of Black people). Meanwhile, dreadlock-wearing K-OS and Rascalz’ outwardly align themselves with the Rastafarian movement in their lyrics. On nine of the 11 tracks on K-OS’ *Exit* and on every track of *Joyful Rebellion* he talks about his spirituality, which includes his Christian beliefs in a God from above and Rastafarian beliefs in a living god – Haile Selassie aka (Jah) Ras Tafari. For instance, he raps: “So, let your light shine far, and praise God/...If you free them (uh huh) they will start revolution and Babylon can not defeat them” (in “Heaven Only Knows”) and “Somebody save us and take us to God who made us” (in “One Blood”). Similarly, on nearly every song on The Rascalz’ albums (*Cash Crop*, *Global Warning*, *Reloaded*) a spiritual reference to Rastafari is made: “The dreaded brothas from the northwest” (in “Dreaded Fist), “Lick a bo! That’s for Babylon pon patrol” (in “Gunfinga), and “We ain’t across the battle, whether to choose God to the devil/I live it up revolutionary as a rebel” (in “Crazy World”).

These five rappers’ lyrics indicate a very clear political agenda. While their resistance is not quite voiced on the level of South African hip-hop where “rap represented a vital part of the struggle against apartheid ... rappers mobilized and informed the oppressed, and their songs reflected immediate concerns” (Watkins, 2004,

---

<sup>83</sup> For a Rasta, smoking a spliff or ganja means more than getting high; it is a spiritual practice believed to bring a follower closer to Jah (God).

p. 125), the dominant voice throughout their hip-hop is authoritative and in protest against political injustices. For example, on “Check My Vernacular”<sup>84</sup> Maestro raps: “No discussion, I’m crushing walls of Berlin”; on “G Walkin”<sup>85</sup> Offishall raps: “Free from government, politics, lies, plus the Pope/The 5.0. sells dope, police make nuff sales”; on “Commandate”<sup>86</sup> K-OS raps: “Leading a revolution/Solution is seeing the mind as it rotates/...To the people, masses, lower classes”; and on “Priceless”<sup>87</sup> Rascalz rap: “Drafted to war for arrogant wicked men/But it’s all unity, one world community.”

Ultimately, the lyrics of these rappers do not reflect the kind of divisiveness circulating within some European countries where as Bennett (1999) writes, “if Germany rap has come to signify the voice of the second-generation immigrant attempting to integrate into German society, then Turkish rap works to a broadly opposite effect ... translating into a single, defiant message aimed at the Turk’s white German hosts” (p. 85), rather, the ways they conceptualize their identities are more closely reflective of Blacks in England, who are similarly multi-ethnic and Afro-Diasporic. As Gilroy (1986) concludes, “Black British cultures have been created from diverse and contradictory elements apprehended through discontinuous histories.... Their bi-lingual character expresses these origins and dislocates the languages of sometimes antagonistic political formations – black and white, slave and slaveholder, class, people, nation and locality into new meanings” (p. 218). Importantly, with the exception of Jelleestone and Thrust, race was not mentioned by any of the other participants in this project.

---

<sup>84</sup> Maestro. (1994). *Naah, Dis Kid Can’t be From Canada*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.

<sup>85</sup> Offishall, K. (2002). *Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.

<sup>86</sup> K-OS. (2004). *Joyful Rebellion*. [CD]. USA: Virgin Music.

<sup>87</sup> Rascalz. (1999). *Global Warning*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.

## 5.5. Authenticity Claims

As previously mentioned, McLeod (1999) found that an authentic US rapper is one who does not dissociate himself or herself from “the streets” wherein “if hip-hop artists are perceived as distancing themselves from their roots, they are considered a sell-out” (p. 143). For instance, in the song, “I Ain’t Mad at Cha,”<sup>88</sup> Tupac was forced to address allegations that his change in social location diluted his authenticity: “So many questions, and they ask me if I’m still down/I moved up out of the ghetto, so I ain’t real now?” Further, in “It’s Still Bigger Than Hip-Hop”<sup>89</sup> Dead Prez gain credibility by proclaiming their allegiance to a Black audience, and by describing exactly what it means to be “real”:

One thing bout music when it’s real they get scared  
Got us slavin’ for the welfare  
Ain’t no food, clothes, or healthcare  
I’m down for guerilla warfare...  
Hip hop means sayin’ what I want never bite my tongue  
Hip hop means teaching the young  
If you feelin’ what I’m feelin’ then you hearin’ what I’m sayin  
Cause these fake fake records just keep on playin’...  
Hip hop means throw up your rag, soldier flag...  
Will they play it on the radio  
Maybe not, maybe so we g’on keep it pumpin’ though

Importantly, while Black rappers, like Dead Prez, are viewed as lyrical ethnographers of the violent life of Black men in the ghetto, White artists with similar lyrical content are not viewed the same way. Armstrong (2004) found that although Eminem’s lyrics may contain a similar message of life from the margins, his violent lyrics are not characterized as typifications of his race, class, or neighbourhood. For instance, in the song “Lose

---

<sup>88</sup> Shakur, T. (1996). *All Eyez on Me*. [CD]. USA: Death Row Records.

<sup>89</sup> Dead Prez. (2000). *Let’s Get Free*. [CD]. USA: Loud Records.

Yourself,”<sup>90</sup> Eminem’s lyrics echo a familiar tale of poverty and suffering: “All the pain inside amplified by the fact/That I can’t get by with my 9 to 5/And I can’t provide the right type of life for my family/Cuz man, these goddam food stamps don’t buy diapers ... And these times are so hard and it’s getting even harder.” In response to such lyrics however, Fuchs (2000) argues: “He is white [and] white boys don’t have to represent” (cited in Armstrong, 2004, p. 348).

Claims of authenticity in other parts of the world are similar to claims in both the US and Canada. In Turkey, Thomas Solomon (2005) found that “rappers often point to their music’s not having been commercially released ... as an indication of their dedication to the music and to the hip-hop movement” (p. 5). Turkish hip-hop parallels African-American rapper KRS-ONE’s song “H.I.P.H.O.P.”<sup>91</sup>: “Dead, two in the head before some A&R can tell me/I must give up the street so that the record company can sell me.” Further, Maxwell (1997) found that Australian rappers also struggled with maintaining authentic once they achieved a higher socio-economic rank, as one’s upward mobility was criticized as an implied disassociation with the “real” hip-hop. Generally speaking, European hip-hop parallels the participants in this project who assert that having an appreciation for the historical development of hip-hop is a key factor that separates “real” hip-hop from “fake” hip-hop. What claims of authenticity exist within the rhetoric of these five Black rappers? What community do they feel they must remain “real” to? Do they attempt to outdo their African-American counterparts with their violent lyrical content? Is commercial success a signifier for an inauthentic hip-hop?

---

<sup>90</sup> Eminem. (2005). *Curtain Call*. [CD]. USA: Aftermath Entertainment.

<sup>91</sup> KRS-ONE. (1997). *I Got Next*. [CD]. USA: Jive.

Finally, are there divisions circulating within the rhetoric of these five rappers around “old school” versus mainstream hip-hop?

Undeniably, Toronto’s close proximity to the US has been its biggest asset (in terms of each rapper’s reception of the genre) as it has been its main liability. For example, in an interview with *XXL Magazine*, Maestro explains:

You could be so talented, but if a Kanye West album comes out – even if it is really, really dope – they’re going to have a multimillion dollar marketing strategy behind it. And K-OS or Red-1 or whoever can’t compete with that....People need to know about Canadian hip-hop and about our history. We could never be New York, because we are not New York artists, or California. But our skills are just as good or better than anybody (Henley, 2006).

Despite Maestro’s complaints, his comments do not speak to a distinctly Canadian hip-hop rather he is implicitly affirming US claims of authenticity without explaining what makes the hip-hop of Canada’s Black rappers different. How do these black rappers “keep it real” as compared to hip-hop community members in both the US and Canada? Further, the lack of support for hip-hop in Canada is an issue that resonates with everyone who participated in this project, however, why do these Black rappers feel more of a need to authenticate what they are doing by positioning themselves against American artists?

For each of these Black rappers, remaining true to hip-hop’s legacy of battling (“toasting”) as opposed to rapping about riches and material possessions is how they assert their claim of being “real”. While this act is similar to hip-hop community members from coast to coast, it is slightly different in that America is often the categorical “other” in such songs. For instance, in “Crazy World” Rascalz raps: “Before you cross the border/Betta have your shit in order” and in “On the Run” they assert superiority over commercial artists who appear to be “real” but are lyrically removed



from authentic hip-hop, which is geared towards an underground (described by participants as hip-hop that is original or creative): “You looking like a clown (clown), with your droopy frown (frown)/Wishing you had my crown (crown) for wrecking the underground.” Then, on “Priceless”<sup>92</sup> and “Dreaded Fist”<sup>93</sup> they blatantly make the distinction between “real” hip-hop and “fake” hip-hop as being hip-hop that is not blatantly garnered towards a mainstream audience:

Today you could be mislead, by the facade of video life  
And what a wack rapper said  
But understand, this thing is priceless  
'Cause it enables one to see both side of the coin kid  
Cause even if you got to lie, the best thing in life you might not  
buy

The niggas compromise they own integrity to get it  
Now maybe that's the price to be paid for riches  
Sell your fucking soul to the Devil  
Now those suns a bitches  
Are trying to tell me that my rhymes is to abrasive and aggressive  
My street warrior attitude ain't impressive

While the rhetoric of these rappers supports the opinions of participants in this project that “real” hip-hop requires one resist being “distorted by capital or otherwise constituted hegemonic interests” (Maxwell, 2003, p. 42-41), K-OS is the most obvious example of hip-hop’s most salient contradiction – being a part of the mainstream one so vehemently opposes. In addition to his condemnation of rappers who pursue money over substance, K-OS’ lyrics also reflect the pressure he feels to remain “real” despite commercial successes. On *Joyful Rebellion*, he raps: “Ya, it’s so hard to remain authentic/Everything is round me is changin” (“B-Boy Stance”) and “I’m just a fool playing with the masters tools/Learning how to break the rules of this record company coup” (“The Love Song”).

---

<sup>92</sup> Rascalz. (1999). *Global Warning*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.

<sup>93</sup> Rascalz. (1997). *Cash Crop*. [CD]. Canada: Figure IV Records.

Similar to McLeod's (1999) argument that "hip-hop remains strongly tied to Black cultural expression" (p. 140), the lyrics of the remaining Black rappers affirm his US findings. For instance, on "Stick To Your Vision" Maestro aligns himself with African-American rappers in order to authenticate his hip-hop: "Remember when you labels wasn't feelin' me/Next year changed the scenery, gave birth to your energy/Toured with Ice-T and Public Enemy" and on "MIC T.H.U.G." Offishall also talks about being validated by US hip-hop's Black community members: "Even on BET, ask Tigga<sup>94</sup> about them niggas with that Northern Touch beat they was playing." It is interesting to note that more so than any other artist, K-OS (and the other participants in this project) is the most outward in his condemnation of Canadian rappers who use US slang and street rhetoric in order to be "hard". On *Exit*, he raps: "I keep it raw, cross the city just like gore/Rappers are claimin' to be hardcore" ("Fastastique), "Real MC's are universal entities" ("Freeze"), and on "Follow Me":

My method is wild, original style  
Acoustic, some'll refuse it  
'Cause they don't know the real  
The Seventh Seal, is broken so I be smokin'  
On these whack rappers, cause they never knew the time

Further, in interviews, K-OS describes what he calls a "pseudo African-Canadian complex" in Toronto's hip-hop scene and why he considers such rappers to be inauthentic:

I was asked where I lived, instead of Trinidad, I must've spent a year or two living in [Toronto's] Flemingdon Park..... These guys were like 'He's not from my area! If I was from the area and sounded like Mobb Deep<sup>95</sup> it would've worked, but at that time, I was so positive that I felt like I was bringing too much of a

---

<sup>94</sup> Tigga is the host of BET's *Rap City*, a hip-hop show known for its unrehearsed freestyle competitions.

<sup>95</sup> Mobb Deep (Havoc and Prodigy) hail from Queensbridge, a notorious New York neighbourhood. They are also considered to be one of hip-hop's hardcore rap groups.

happiness to the area.... I gave myself over to the fact that I'm not American. The fact that in Toronto, we're all first generation something and we're kind of awkward, and we don't really have a slang or way of speaking... (Cowie, 2002).

However, not all rappers agree with K-OS. For Offishall, the struggle to maintain an authentic hip-hop is complicated by his hybridity, an act that mirrors the contradictions that exist in South Africa where the language of hip-hop is "a code with multiple forms of representations, and it is at times difficult for the outsider ... to understand, especially when combined with ebonics, the ghetto-inspired hip-hop language from the USA" (Watkins, 2004, p. 136). For instance, he explains:

Me and my whole clique are of West Indian descent, know what I'm saying? It's just something that comes out naturally. I look at myself as a hip-hop MC, but I have to represent for my family and my peoples. I t'row da dancehall in there to let people know the beauty of the culture and where I'm coming from ("Kardinal," 2001).

Ironically, K-OS and Offishall's differing opinions on what community reflects an authentic form of hip-hop became one of the first "real" hip-hop beefs in Canadian history.

In 2005, hip-hop mogul Marc Ecko organized "The Getting Up Festival," an event that paired American hip-hop artists – Fat Joe, Mos Def, Nas, Busta Rhymes, Lil Jon, Kanye West – with Canadian hip-hop artists – Offishall, Bless, Swollen Members, Thrust, Rascalz, and Jelleestone – in a two-day hip-hop festival. I attended the event and witnessed what the Canadian media later labelled as a direct attack against K-OS' guitar playing kind of hip-hop, and lyrics like: "I mean this I guarantee you never seen this before/Rappin' over guitars and finger snaps" ("Follow Me"). During his performance, Offishall smashed a guitar and made a few comments about his hip-hop being "real" and

as a result, he did not have to include guitar riffs to sell his albums. Coincidentally, K-OS did not perform at the festival.

A few months later, I spoke with Offishall and he told me:

It was more a comment on current radio. It had nothing to do with him [K-OS] or what he's doing. I can't be K-OS. Smashing that guitar was a statement, yes, but not at K-OS" (Thompson, 2005).

While his actions were likely not a direct attack at K-OS, I contend that smashing that guitar and his subsequent retorts were his attempt to define "real" Canadian hip-hop. American artists like Run DMC, who paired up with Aerosmith on "Walk this Way" and most recently, Mos Def on his last album, *New Danger* have incorporated the use of guitar and elements of rock into their music without it taking away from their authenticity as artists, but prior to K-OS, no Black Canadian rapper had fused their music with folk and rock. Despite his downplaying of the situation, Offishall's actions, in retrospect, could be construed as an attempt to position K-OS as a "sell-out" because of his inclusion of rock and folk – known to appeal to a wider mainstream Canadian audience.

It is my opinion that Black Canadian rappers are not mere mimics of duos like Mobb Deep, as K-OS previously suggested. On the contrary, as first generation Canadians, their identity is not fixed in any particular location; instead, "realness" is a constant web and flow process between their influences (American), their West Indian cultural roots, and the "uniqueness" of their locale. When K-OS says he's "gotten over the American thing" or that he "doesn't really use slang"<sup>96</sup> it could be a result of him not being rooted in a specific (and urban) locale (this accounts for earlier criticisms he faced when claiming to represent Flemingdon Park); an act that underscores why hip-hop

---

<sup>96</sup> "T-Dot" is considered to be slang that originated in Toronto.

community members from across the country also opine that Toronto rappers are knockoff US rappers.

There is evidence to support the fact that unlike the other Black rappers, K-OS is most caught in a contradictory position. His record sales, live performances, and marketing campaigns have been on the level of US artists, projecting him into the mainstream. On the other hand, Offishall was dropped from MCA Records in 2003, in large part due to the company's lack of interest in him but also because being a Canadian hip-hop outsider having to fight for priority positioning against rappers like The Roots and Talib Kweli proved to be a hurdle he could not overcome. He told me: "Basically, the label wasn't set up for lesser known artists. They just weren't ready to give other projects, like mine, more push. I didn't fit with the scenario" (*Chartattack.com*, 2005). Thus, because K-OS has managed to remain on a US label, he is more a part of the corporate mainstream that "real" hip-hop is so counter-posed to, but does that unequivocally make his hip-hop "fake"?

While McLeod (1999) found that inauthentic hip-hop is "identifying oneself with White, mainstream culture that is geographically located in the suburbs" (p. 145), for Canada's hip-hop community members, inauthentic hip-hop is identifying oneself with Black, US culture that is geographically located in an urban context. In order to test the saliency of both of these findings for Black rappers in Canada, it is important to understand the implications of hip-hop's commercialization on the Black (Afro-Diasporic) identity.

As Foreman (2002) explains, in America, Black cultural activists mindful of the role that music played in earlier social struggles (e.g. The Civil Rights Movement),

“warned that major labels’ commercial imperatives could diminish the music’s capacity to mobilize political awareness or to provide cultural adhesion across generations” (p. 157). The term “crossover” stems from the constraints placed on artists once signed on a major label. During hip-hop’s “Message” phase, Black artists who signed big record contracts were simultaneously also coerced into altering “their sound and style to make it more “palatable” – less Black – in order to accommodate the tastes of a wider audience” (p. 159-160) and to maximize commercial exposure. Thus, “keeping it real” became a matter of identifying with, and representing the “underground” (Black) and never losing sight of hip-hop’s roots – the streets.

Even in Turkey, as Solomon (2005) writes, the word *yeraliti*, which literally means “underground” in Turkish, constantly appears throughout the recordings he listened to; however, people had differing interpretations of its meaning. Some people defined “underground” in negative terms – as music not released for a commercial purpose – other rappers, “while acknowledging the lack of support by the Turkish music industry for Turkish rap, define “underground” more in terms of style and attitude. These rappers tend to value a Turkish version of what they think of as “hardcore” style, including a more liberal use of swear words” (p. 6).

The commercial-authenticity divide in Canadian hip-hop has a lot to do with the practice of “representing.” On the commercial side, it is not that these artists believe that staying true to who they are means wholeheartedly shying away from commercial success preferring to remain underground. On the contrary, commercial fame and fortune is exactly what they are all trying to attain but just not at the expense of paying homage to hip-hop’s cultural legacy. While the pursuits of White Canadian artists are complicated

by a music industry that does not appreciate the locality of their lyrical content, Black artists must overcome constant comparisons to African-American artists.

Ten years after Rascalz first voiced their disdain for the lack of support for hip-hop in Canada, very little appears to have changed. Most recently, Offishall also reiterated similar concerns:

Unfortunately, a lot of top 40 stations are set in old ways of thinking. Stations just like the Black Eyed Peas of the world because they think that that kind of music delivers, for the most part, to that 18 to 34 demographic and they aren't too interested in my music (Thompson, 2005).

Further, in an interview for *Hiphopcanada.com*, Red-1 echoed Offishall's concerns but also included his interpretation of "remaining true to yourself":

...it's [hip-hop] the number one selling music in the world. That's why I feel like they really want to have us in a position where we have to beg for everything and they just give us what they want. We're supposed to be happy and satisfied with that. People actually called us brats because we weren't trying to accept our Juno and shit.... We're trying to make it in this industry. I am just going to keep sticking to my guns making good music, because I know we make good music (Thompson, 2006).

Importantly, there are instances where Rascalz, Offishall and Choclaire are most guilty of following US trends of "identifying oneself as both hard and Black, representing ... the street" (McLeod, 1999). In *Cash Crop*, *Global Warning*, and *Reloaded*, 11 of the 17 songs depict either street life, being "hardcore" or depictions of violent acts. In *Firestarter, Vol. 1*, 11 of the 15 songs contain similar lyrics, while the same was found on 10 of the 17 tracks on *My Demo*, *Memoirs of Black Savage*, *Ice Cold*, and *Flagrant* (See Appendix 5). Black rappers are more compelled to represent the agreed upon (US) reality that "real" rappers, irrespective of location, are "hard" and are physically willing and able to use violence, if necessary, either against political injustices or for personal reasons.

Unlike in Turkish rap where as Solomon (2005) writes, “interconnections between locality and authenticity that more explicitly focus on boundary drawing (between *our* place/authenticity and *their* place/inauthenticity)” (p. 18) resonate, these rappers have not yet reached a point of transcendence where they are able to draw upon their own definitions of what being “hardcore” really means in a Canadian context. For example, Chocclair continues to compare himself to American hip-hop icons to legitimize his hip-hop as being “real”: “People ... go back to the old N.W.A. records when they talk about gangsta rap. In Canada, they gonna go back to *Memoirs of Blake Savage* when they’re like, ‘what was the first record that had shit like that going on’” (Penrose, 2003).

On the whole, Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003) found that “hardcore” or “gangsta” rap did not really catch on in Europe due to a fundamentally different social base of hip-hop culture. While European rappers listen to (and are influenced by) US hip-hip, “their own lyrics are expected to represent their own social environment” (p. 472). South African rappers Black Noise in “Hip-hop Won’t Stop”<sup>97</sup> criticize anyone who imitates a “hardcore” US persona because it does not reflect their lived experience:

I’m going kinda crazy, hip-hoppers nowadays are so damned lazy  
Posturing, wannabes, sound like you come from America  
Nobody wanting to respect Azania  
Tell me what the hell is happening here  
Oh no, never will you support the local  
Americanize the vocal, but you’re a local too

Meanwhile, “Blackness” is the marker for authenticity in the predominately White Sydney, Australia hip-hop scene, but White artists remain able to authenticate their hip-hop by staying true to who they are. As Maxwell (2003) writes, “it is okay to be White and into hip-hop as long as you don’t *misrepresent* who you are, as long as you do not

---

<sup>97</sup> Lyrics are cited in Watkins, 2004, p. 142.



simulate Blackness” (p. 161). Finally, hip-hop in Zimbabwe, Greenland, and Aotearoa/New Zealand are not clear appropriations of a US or African-American cultural forms; rather, Mitchell (2000) found that their hip-hop represented “linguistically, socially, and politically dynamic processes which results in complex modes of indigenization and syncretism” (p. 52).

When compared to the authenticity debates that circulate around the world, K-OS’ individuality should be applauded. He listens to US hip-hop and relies upon US-derived vernacular (e.g saying “yo” or “dope”), like his contemporaries, but for him, being authentic is not about identifying with US hip-hop’s “hardcore” image but representing his own social environment. If an essential aspect of hip-hop is to “emphasize one’s ties to the community” (McLeod, 1999, p. 142), since he spent the majority of his life outside an urban centre, simply copying an imported narrative would be “fake.” However, as a middle-class Black rapper, like Will Smith, who “has been lambasted by hip-hop community members because of his success among White audiences” (p. 144), K-OS’ earlier comments about using US slang and “pseudo African-Canadians” can be construed as his internal struggle for belonging. Paraphrasing McLeod, those who resist the agreed upon US standard tend to be located in opposition to what is deemed authentic by the most vocal hip-hop community members. In Canada, Offishall, Choclaire, Rascalz and Maestro have been the most vocal in trying to assert their brand of hip-hop; an act that parallel’s the British dichotomy of difference and equivalence, where difference is manifest in the demand for *authentic* enunciation rather than a home-grown simulacra. First, Offishall essentially admits that Canadian hip-hop is grounded on the same tenets

of US hip-hop, but the way he thinks and how he feels about things is where difference can be found:

A lot of Americans think that Canadians follow and don't originate their own music. They see us as followers rather than leaders ... Maybe in earlier years when we weren't aware of our identity or our strengths this was the case, but right now a lot of (Canadian) artists are realizing that one of our strengths is in being different (Ross, 2001).

Second, Red-1 (Rascalz) explains the importance of locality: "Everyone represents where they're from and it sounds different. Take ten Toronto emcees for example; they're all representing the same city, yet they all sound different" (Thompson, 2006). Importantly, like the other hip-hop community members, authenticity for Red1 is also rooted in one's discursive association between hip-hop's roots and one's location:

I love Classified because he just comes across as real. He isn't trying to front, he's just doing him. He came out with that Maritimes song because he's from the Maritimes and I just love how he comes across ... (Thompson, 2006).

Third, Maestro affirms the constant struggle apparent in the rhetoric and interview comments of the Black rappers in this project: "if there was an industry supporting and promoting Canadian hip-hop artists, cats like K-OS and Kardinal (Offishall) would have been way bigger by now" (Wright, 2005).

These five rappers are caught in a double-bind. While Offishall is smashing guitars, K-OS is conflicted by his commercial success, Rascalz are complaining about being ignored by the Juno Awards, Choclaire is drawing comparisons between his hip-hop and US hip-hop, and Maestro is criticizing the Canadian music industry. Ultimately, their internal conflicts are proof positive of Spivak's "strategic essentialism" (cited in Hall, 1996, p. 472). Despite the fact that Canadians tend not to look at race in rigid binaries of

Black versus White, as Yousman (2003) astutely points out, “many Americans, Black, White, Latino/a, Asian, Native American, and so on, would say that they know Black popular culture when they see it, and they know when White kids are trying to be Black” (p. 372), similarly, I contend that Black Canadian rappers implicitly ascribe to this same sort of thinking, which is the reason why they incorporate US symbols into their hip-hop. To them, “keeping it real” means they must protect America’s legacy while combating the perception by outsiders that Black Canadians do not know how to “represent”. To his credit, K-OS understands that by being different, opportunities exist for him to create a *real* authentic – home grown – kind of hip-hop (like his White contemporaries across Canada), but like Eminem’s song “White America,”<sup>98</sup> where he raps: “Let’s do the math, if I was Black, I would not have sold half,” he could face criticism for selling more records and garnering more radio play because let’s do the math, if he did not merge his rock and folk influences with his hip-hop, would he be as popular as he is today?

In summary, White (and female) hip-hop community members (and K-OS) define being authentic, or “keeping it real” as staying true to yourself (by identifying with one’s local community and Canada) and aligning one’s self with hip-hop geographically located in the suburbs or rural communities. These Black rappers define an authentic hip-hop as staying true to yourself (by identifying with one’s local community, the US and the global Afro-Diaspora), identifying oneself as both hard and Black, and aligning one’s self with an underground and “the streets”, in addition, they look more to hip-hop’s cultural legacy than its creative legacy (although also an important factor). To be inauthentic, or fake, for these Black rappers means following mass (US) trends by listening to commercial rap music, and identifying oneself with White, mainstream

---

<sup>98</sup> Eminem. (2002). *The Eminem Show*. [CD]. USA: Aftermath Entertainment.

culture that is geographically located in the suburbs. This differs drastically from the participants in this project who opined that being inauthentic or “fake” means identifying with US hip-hop’s articulation of “the streets”, and identifying oneself with mainstream hip-hop that is geographically located in an urban context (see Appendix 6).

## 5.6. What About Women?

Black women rappers ... are integral and resistant voices in rap music and in popular music in general who sustain an ongoing dialogue with their audiences and with male rappers about sexual promiscuity, emotional commitment, infidelity, the drug trade, racial politics, and black cultural history. – Tricia Rose (1994)

Hip-hop culture has been marked by its attitude of male centeredness wherein “being a real man doesn’t merely entail having the proper sex organ; it means acting in a masculine manner” (McLeod, 1999, p. 142). For instance, McLeod notes how Tupac’s song, “Heartz of Men,”<sup>99</sup> is an explicit contrasting of being real against those who are “pussies,” that is, those whom he labels as feminine (which is something a “real” rapper should not be): “Now me and Quik gonna show you niggas what it’s like on this side/The real side/Now, on this ride there’s gonna be some real motherfuckers/and there’s gonna be some pussies.” Within the context of US hip-hop, “selling out” is also associated with being soft, which McLeod further describes as “representing feminine attributes and hard as representing masculine attributes” (p. 142). Further, Jeannine Amber (2005) suggests that as hip-hop enters its third decade, the sexually promiscuous Black female has “captured the imagination of the current crop of rappers as nothing has before” (p. 164). hooks’ (1992) also argues that hip-hop has “passively absorbed narrow representations of

---

<sup>99</sup> Tupac. *All Eyez On Me*. [CD]. USA: Death Row Records.

black masculinity, perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and offered one-dimensional accounts” (p. 89). 50 Cent’s “P.I.M.P.,”<sup>100</sup> is one of the best examples of hooks’ argument:

I'm bout my money you see, girl you can holla at me  
If you fucking with me, I'm a P-I-M-P  
Not what you see on TV, no Cadillac, no greasy  
Head full of hair, bitch I'm a P-I-M-P

If Black male US rappers who reflect feminine attributes (e.g. talking about romantic love as opposed to sex) are construed as being “fake” (given the likelihood they will then attract a larger percentage of female fans), Black male rappers continue to perpetuate stereotypes and one-dimensional accounts of Black masculinity; and, as discussed previously, women rappers during hip-hop’s “message” phase had to deny their sexuality to gain entry into the genre’s male-dominated world, an act that has largely been usurped by the video vixen, do Canada’s Black male rappers similarly follow their American counterparts lead, and how do female rappers in Canada negotiate their sexuality?

With the exception of K-OS, who rarely talks about women or his own sexuality, the lyrics of the remaining four Black rappers indicate no deviations from the above trends that circulate within US hip-hop. When talking about women, they refer to them as part of their sexual conquests, being a “tease” or for their physical attributes. They also position themselves as being a “real” man because they are able to define themselves “not just in terms of gender, but also sexuality” (McLeod, 1999, p. 142), an act that further separates K-OS from his (Black) male peers. For instance, Rascalz, on their critically and

---

<sup>100</sup> 50 Cent. (2003). *Get Rick or Die Tryin’*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Interscope Records.

commercially successful song “Northern Touch,”<sup>101</sup> which featured, Choclaire, Offishall and Thurst rap:

All with my dick in they mouth  
They swallowin’  
Talking bout they need oxygen...  
Girl you got a shape, simply you got a figure  
Can I zoom zoom lick a hot you pull the trigger  
Club seeing honey I’ll show you something much bigger  
When it’s said and done you’ll be like ooh that’s my nigga

On “Can’t Relate,”<sup>102</sup> the hyper-masculine, eroticizing continues:

You know dem big batty girls with the ill physics  
Nymphoes ready to blow from head to toe  
Get handled, dismantled from all angles  
Let it tango because I dangle  
Don one, I don’t hit if it don’t wear thongs

Meanwhile, Maestro (both in his earlier recordings and most recent) is slightly different in his approach; rather than asserting his masculinity by talking about his sexual exploits with women, he places himself in the position of victim by positioning women as sexually promiscuous victimizers on the prowl. On “Just Swingin’”<sup>103</sup> he raps:

Well I was walking downtown and I saw this whore  
She had a body like a two by four  
She came on over, asked for my number  
I said, no ho, all you want is my lumber

Then, on “416/905 (T.O. Party Anthem)”<sup>104</sup> he even goes so far as to exploit female rap group Salt ‘N’ Pepa, whom Rose (1994) describes as a group who contested “public sphere discourses, particularly those pertaining to race and gender ... constituting an important and resistant voice in rap and contemporary black women’s cultural production

---

<sup>101</sup> Rascalz. (1997). *Cash Crop*. [CD]. Canada: Figure IV Records.

<sup>102</sup> Rascalz. (1999). *Global Warning*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.

<sup>103</sup> Maestro. (1989). *Symphony in Effect*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.

<sup>104</sup> Maestro. (1998). *Built To Last*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.

in general” (p. 182). He raps: “Female rappers wanna hump me/Salt jumped me, I made Pepa wanna bungee.”

Offishall and Chocclair are most guilty of only talking about a woman’s body parts as it relates to engaging (or not) in sex and their perception that women are “gold-diggers.” On *Firestarter, Vol. 1* Offishall raps, “Coca-cola body while he bobbin’ like Motorola/38-32-46 my my my/Only problem was she wouldn’t spread her thighs” (in “On Wit Da Show”), “Bet if I flash this watch my nigga, that hoe be back” (on “Gotta Get It”) and Chocclair raps: “Her ass built like hard doe bread” (in “Tell Em”) and “Bitches getting mad when they call me/’You didn’t return my page?/’Bitch, I been on the road for 4 weeks, cool off/When I get there, I’mma break you off” (in “Fresh”).

It is interesting to note that when K-OS makes reference to women, his lyrics are not related to his sexually but romantic love. On “Crucial” he asks: “Would I come back to love you girl?” and on “Dirty Water” he raps: “Took that girl down to Puerto Rico/Now I find out that we’re not amigos/Treated her foul never as an equal/Now I’m all sad just because my ego.” In addition to criticisms K-OS might face because of his use of acoustic guitar in his music, talk about love could also make him appear to be “soft”. In the US, McLeod (1999) suggests that one of the reasons why rapper LL Cool J has been repeatedly criticized for “selling out” is because “he has made many loves songs that attracted a large female audience, he sells millions of records, and he has incorporated pop styles into his hip-hop music” (p. 142). For example, in the opinion of a hip-hop newsgroup writer, LL Cool J’s “soft ass song sucks big time. How ‘bout keeping it real!?!?” (Driss cited in McLeod, 1999, p. 142). Since the four other Black mainstream artists also categorize “real” hip-hop as being “hard” and K-OS does not, it would be

interesting to conduct a content analysis of the lyrics of White hip-hop community members who participated in this project – they did not make any sexual specific comments during their interviews<sup>105</sup> – to validate how closely his hip-hop is more aligned with theirs and in opposition to the other Black rappers.

Finally, at the same time African-American scholars opine that while there has always been a certain amount of negativity towards women in hip-hop, the problem today is that there are no longer female rappers<sup>106</sup> who strategically resist “patterns of sexual objectification at the hands of Black men and of cultural invisibility at the hands of dominant American culture” (Rose, 1994, p. 170), the female participants in this project similarly attempt to navigate within this dominant tenet by denying their gender difference. As noted earlier, Eekwol told me: “I don’t want to be a female rapper, I want to be a rapper” and Tara Chase (the only Black female participant in this project) said, “Personally, from my own personal point of view ... I never saw myself as a female MC it wasn’t until people starting saying “female MC”... that I really didn’t dawn on me that I was a female. I just saw myself as an MC.” Because hip-hop continues to be male-dominated and Black male rappers (US and Canada) continue to degrade the female body as “eyed primarily to satisfy the male sexual appetite” (Dyson, 2001, p.187), while these female rappers appear inclined to work within those parameters, there are undeniable industry forces at play to ensure their music appeals to the male audience (and gaze). Where male rappers have to appear “hard” as a means of being “real”, female rappers have to appear “soft” not as a means of being “real” (amongst female rappers, denying

---

<sup>105</sup> Their lack of commentary on hip-hop’s sexually explicit lyrics could also be a result of my gender, as a female interviewer.

<sup>106</sup> It is important to recognize that the female rappers who resist patterns of sexual objectification still exist but they are often marginalized, and are not afforded the opportunity to reach a wider audience.



one's sexuality and being "hard" is seen as a strategy to navigate within hip-hop's male world), but in order to sell records. As Chase explains further, "Nowadays if I'm looking at a video I can't even distinguish the video girl from the MC from the female MC ... you know, I'm guilty but I'm not that guilty obviously I'm a lot more feminine than I was when I was younger.... The females that are actually good they don't get glorified until they seem to compromise some of their sexuality."

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### 6.1. Situating and Authenticating Canadian Hip-Hop

Rap music and hip-hop culture's ongoing and bewildering love/hate relationship with American society requires a fresh evaluation of the role street culture plays in the continuing evolution of American popular culture. – William Eric Perkins (1996)

Canadian hip-hop has come a long way over the past twenty years. Maestro, Michie Mee, and groups like Dream Warriors<sup>107</sup> were once the only nationally recognized male and female rappers. However, as this project has shown, in addition to Maestro, Kardinal Offishall, K-OS, Rascalz, and Chocclair, who have firmly become the “faces” of Canadian hip-hop, there are several other rappers who are poised to take the genre's domestic popularity and international notoriety even further, like Saukrates (Toronto), Swollen Members (Vancouver), Moka Only (Vancouver), Masia One (female emcee), K'naan (Toronto), and Mood Ruff (Winnipeg) to name a few.

The dominant question underpinning this project has been my quest to articulate whether Canadian hip-hop is merely standing in the shadows of America or developing its own brand of music. Second, I sought to explore whether hip-hop in Canada, as in the US and around the world, has a collective hip-hop voice. And finally, the question that I did not anticipate would play such an integral part in this deconstruction of Canadian hip-hop is, why are the “faces” of hip-hop in Canada predominately Black and male, when its

---

<sup>107</sup> This group predated Rascalz as one of Canada's most successful hip-hop crews in the early nineties. "My Definition of a Boombastic Jazz Style" (1990) was their most critically and commercially successful song.

rhymes and lyrics are geographically and culturally varied; and, its audiences are multi-ethnic and multi-lingual?

Similar to other cultures that have appropriated US hip-hop, the genre has undeniably undergone a process of reterritorialization, becoming a hybridized form of music. As Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003) found in Europe, in a content analysis of the lyrics from Kardinal Offishall, K-OS, Maestro, Choclaire, and Rascalz, I similarly found the use of local citations, as well as the placing of regional and national realities next to US ones, to be an important component of hybridization in Canadian hip-hop. In terms of language, the use of regional dialects (Jamaican patois) corresponded with appropriated hip-hop in other parts of the world; however, since such slang is neither indigenous to Canada nor collectively used, it is quite specific to the Black artists. Overall, these findings confirm that for Canada's Black mainstream rappers, being a local representative of a global cultural discourse is most fundamental to their self-understanding and discursive action (as opposed to focusing specifically on regional cultural locators like the White participants in this project) in large part to create an indigenized form of hip-hop.

In terms of authenticity and expressions of a collective hip-hop voice, McLeod's (1999) findings that being authentic in the US means staying true to yourself (by identifying oneself as both hard and Black), representing the underground and "the streets", and remembering hip-hop's cultural roots; while inauthentic means being soft, following mass trends by listening to commercial rap music, and identifying oneself with White, mainstream culture that is geographically located in the suburbs, proved to be the perfect measure for articulating how Canadian hip-hop authenticates itself.

Since hip-hop's cultural roots and its current stars are predominantly African-American, it is interesting to note that for the most part, Canada's hip-hop scene has similarly followed suit. However, after speaking with hip-hop community members from coast to coast, the reasons for that appear to be two fold – one's introduction and subsequent involvement in hip-hop, and two, external industry forces.

More so than any other group, Black male rappers (except K-OS) attempt to align their identities with their US counterparts by either minimizing their "Canadian-ness" or incorporating a high percentage of American-derived symbols in their songs. Being authentic, or "keeping it real" for these rappers means identifying with US hip-hop's requirement that one portray one's self as both hard and Black and that one represent (as authentically as possible) a sense of struggle that is comparable to "the streets" in US hip-hop. But, one of the ways these rappers refute accusations that they are "aping an American style" is by acknowledging that unlike other Canadian hip-hop community members, their reception of hip-hop was direct and further, the development of their local hip-hop scene coincided with America's development of the genre in the late seventies.

For White hip-hop community members on the east and west coast, and multi-ethnic, multi-lingual artists in Quebec, authenticity is defined differently, which appears to have to do with their lack of a direct connection to US hip-hop. Because their reception of hip-hop was mediated and removed from the urban context, they have been afforded the opportunity to develop a brand of hip-hop (which marginally resembles US hip-hop in its use of beats and sound production) that is more geared towards their local community. These hip-hop community members similarly defined authenticity in Canadian hip-hop as identifying with a community of likeminded peers (not racially

defined or attributed to one's gender or sexuality), representing hip-hop's roots, the underground (defined as hip-hop's cultural legacy of toasting, wordplay and battling), and trying to be original (by deviating from US rhyme structures and lyrical content). For these participants, being inauthentic or fake has nothing to do with appearing to be "soft", rather, one's pursuit of money and commercial success, and identifying oneself with Black, mainstream US rappers that are geographically located in urban settings.

Of all the semantic dimensions of authenticity, the underground has the most saliency in Canadian hip-hop. Where McLeod argues that US rappers gain authenticity from aligning one's self with the underground, defined as "an independently owned network of distribution ... as opposed to repositioning oneself within a music business culture dominated by ... multinational corporations that control the US music industry" (p. 141), it is not similarly defined in Canada. White hip-hop community members agree that authenticity in Canadian hip-hop is a matter of aligning one's self with an underground (independently owned network of distribution or multinational US music industry forces) that refuses to conform to US defined notions of "real" hip-hop. Specifically, "selling-out" is based on portraying an American urban aesthetic or incorporating a large amount of Black (American) lyrical content as opposed to something that is distinctly Canadian (e.g. Swollen Members, Classified, Epic or Buck 65 as mentioned by participants). Meanwhile, although Black mainstream artists similarly defined the underground as not necessarily an independently owned network of distribution, "real" hip-hop is ultimately about aligning one's self with "the streets". Because these rapper are located in an urban setting, while their environment may not be reflective of a "real" US ghetto, there is more of an ability to assert a passable amount of

“street” credibility the White hip-hop community members (and K-OS, who resides in the suburbs) are not able to, and if they did, would be construed as being “fake” given their location.

With respect to the female participants in this project, while they have much in common with their male counterparts in terms of their invocation of authenticity, there were some differences. Where the male participants agreed that one’s pursuit of wealth (or mainstream, commercial success) is what makes a rapper inauthentic, female participants opined that being inauthentic in Canadian hip-hop is defined by one’s appearance of wealth (despite the obvious lack of). Second, the status of the female rapper is further complicated by industry pressures to appear “soft” (feminine) despite the fact that “real” hip-hop is considered to be “hard” (masculine). As Chase explained, “When was the last time a female emcee went on a big tour not a small tour like Eternia, she works it hard and Masia One you know, they work really hard ... but when was the last time I seen flippin’ Eternia getting invited to open for 50 Cent?” In this respect, Canada’s mainstream artists continue to perpetuate US hip-hop’s misogyny; a reality the female rappers in this project attempt to negotiate by denying their gender (e.g. refusing to be referred to as a female emcee).

Ultimately, “keeping it real” in Canadian hip-hop is often thwarted by music industry market forces. More often than not, US hip-hop takes precedence over Canadian hip-hop, as such, the opportunity to, as US rapper MC Eiht argued “make records that the people on the street appeal to” (cited in McLeod, 1999, p. 145) is often not a viable option since people – on “the street” – often do not even know that the music they are listening to is Canadian. But, why is it so important to name hip-hop in Canada?

As previously discussed, naming is an essential part of hip-hop. Thus, it is an important step in Canadian hip-hop's ultimate emancipation. Similar to Timothy Taylor's (1997) description of "strategic inauthenticity" with respect to the categorization of African artists where:

Despite eclecticism and hybridity, the success of such performers as Youssou N'Dour or the Benin singer Angelina Kidjo required that they remain musically and otherwise premodern ... culturally "natural" – because of racism and western demands for authenticity (cited in Connell & Gibson, 2004, p. 351).

Even though Canadian hip-hop is eclectic and a hybrid genre of music, Black rappers are limited in the scope of their hip-hop. With the exception of K-OS (who is uniquely different given his location and lack of "street" credibility), there are measures in place to thwart attempts by Black rappers to be more like non-Black hip-hop community members because the closer their music is to US (African-American) hip-hop, the more saleable and marketable it becomes (e.g. everyone knows who 50 Cent is, but can the same be said about Thrust?). During a recent conversation about the industry, Red1 articulated the contradictory position I believe is collectively shared by these Black artists:

I'm in a business ... I realize that even though it's just music and I love it, it's also a business and I know I have to make songs that are going to appeal to the masses but I also want to make songs that are also going to appeal to me and to that little niche crowd of people that you know bring me into this life now you know so I never want to forget them (Red1, personal communication, February 12, 2007).

Meanwhile, non-Black hip-hop community members are relegated to regional acclaim, despite the fact that their hip-hop is most reflective of their local and (potentially) national audiences. Finally, female rappers are constantly pitted against their male

counterparts, required to mimic US female rappers, and are pressured to exaggerate their feminine attributes.

In conclusion, where McLeod (1999) argues that “when faced with the very real threat of erasure via misrepresentation by outsiders like ... major label executives, and out-of-touch advertising agencies, (US) hip-hop community members attempt to protect their culture by distinguishing authentic and inauthentic expression” (p. 148), this project has shown that conversely, Canada’s hip-hop community members attempt to protect their culture by distinguishing authentic and inauthentic expression not when faced with the threat of erasure by outsiders, but as a result of erasure by such economic forces. If major labels and advertising agencies celebrated the uniqueness and differentness of Canada’s artists by affording Black artists the opportunity to divert from following US trends; giving White artists access to a national audience; acknowledging the presence of Black artists outside Canada’s largest urban centres; and, allowing female rappers to challenge US hip-hop’s misogyny on a scale where they will be noticed, our indigenized brand of hip-hop could become more a part of a collective consciousness, rather than being something “real” hip-hoppers can identify with and differentiate from US hip-hop.

## **6.2. Future Research**

This project focused on Canadian hip-hop’s lyrics. However, hip-hop culture has always been inclusive of video production and wider discussions of Black feminism. It would be useful to conduct further research on the aforementioned as they proved to be two points of resonance among participants in this project.



In 2005, Madd Russian, released a 65-minute DVD entitled *The Real Toronto*, in which he visited nine Toronto neighbourhoods known for their gang affiliations. As I watched the film, I was struck by its images of young, predominantly Black men, smoking marijuana, flashing gang signs, sporting bandanas and carrying guns, all under the banner of representing the “real” hip-hop. It would be valuable to conduct an ethnographic study of Black males in Toronto and how closely violent and misogynistic hip-hop is intertwined with their identities.

Second, women in Canadian hip-hop are marginally represented. As such, it would also be useful to conduct further ethnographic work speaking directly to female rappers, dancers, DJs and hip-hop fans, to gain an understanding of how women feel about how they are represented in hip-hop today, and how gender is negotiated. Rana Emerson (2002), in her analysis of Black American women in music videos found that popular entertainment serves as a space for the proliferation of controlling images of Black womanhood but also, “Black women are able to articulate other key themes of self-valuation, self-determination, and a critique of the interlocking nature of oppression” (p. 133). Would female members of Canada’s hip-hop community affirm Emerson’s findings?

Third, Aboriginal Canadians and recent immigrant rappers like K’naan, add further dimensions and complexity to Canada’s hip-hop scene. In addition to Eekwol, there are several artists in western Canada, like War Party, Tru Rez Crew, 7<sup>th</sup> Generation, and Reddnation to name a few, who have been producing hip-hop albums since the nineties, yet to the rest of Canada, they remain in relative obscurity. What is Aboriginal hip-hop saying? What does the genre represent for Aboriginal people? Finally, Somali-

born K'naan, who fled the war-torn country in the early nineties relocating to Toronto's Rexdale area, would make an interesting case study on hip-hop's global reception and authenticity within Canadian hip-hop. In an article with Matthew McKinnon, K'naan said of his childhood in Somalia, "None of the kids in my neighbourhood understood English, but we knew what hip-hop was" (*CBC.ca*, 2005), which speaks directly to the power of hip-hop to transcend borders. Further, on "What's Hardcore"<sup>108</sup> off his debut album, *The Dusty Foot Philosopher* (2005) K'naan raps the following verse:

I'ma spit these verses because I feel annoyed  
And I'm not going to quite until I fill the void  
If I rhymed about home and got descriptive  
I'd make 50 Cent look like Limp Bizkit

Not only is K'naan expressing a distain for hip-hop in general, the juxtaposition of his style of rap with the violence of his homeland and that which his "hard" American counterparts proclaim to have lived through would be an insightful area to explore for its latent claim of indigenization and emancipation from hip-hop's cultural roots.

---

<sup>108</sup> K'naan. (2006). *The Dusty Foot Philosopher*. [CD]. USA: BMG.

## Appendix 1:

### US hip-hop community members' claims of authenticity

<b>Semantic Dimensions</b>	<b>Real</b>	<b>Fake</b>
Social-Psychological	staying true to yourself	following mass trends
Racial	Black	White
Political-Economic	the underground	commercial
Gender-Sexual	hard	soft
Social Locational	the street	the suburbs
Cultural	the old school	the mainstream

## Appendix 2:

### Non-Black hip-hop community members' claims of authenticity

<b>Semantic Dimensions</b>	<b>Real</b>	<b>Fake</b>
Social-Locational	rural (the suburbs)	urban (the streets)
Social-Psychological	staying true to your community	following US trends
Language	references to Canada	references to US
Political-Economic	the underground	commercial
Cultural	the old school	mainstream

### Appendix 3:

#### Black Canadian rappers' affirmation of racial identity

Class	Action	Example	Source
<b>Indexical</b>			
Colour	Rappers announce their race	"Black is for black, they can't understand that"	"Powerfull," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol 1.</i>
		"I got my act down pat, proud of being black"	"Brown Sugar," Maestro, <i>Naah, Dis Kid Can't be From Canada</i>
Trait	Talk about skin colour	"Dark skin with curly hair unlike Curly Neal"	"Conductin' Thangs," Maestro, <i>The Black Tie Affair</i>
		It's Fresh Wes with the brown complexion"	"Dat's My Nigga," Maestro, <i>Naah, Dis Kid Can't be From Canada</i>
	References about Black women	"She looks like a movie star/like a chocolate candy bar"	"Movie Star," Rascalz, <i>Reloaded</i>
		"Fuck Lois Lane, keep on passing me on to Karyn White"	"Dat's My Nigga," Maestro, <i>Naah, Dis Kid Can't be From Canada</i>
		"Take Tyra to the bank, make Stacey wanna dash"	"416/905 (T.O. Party Anthem), Maestro, <i>Built To Last</i>
Criticism	Talk about "selling-out" one's race	"Rappers are acting like mantan"	"Man I Used to Be," K-OS, <i>Joyful Rebellion</i>
		"Hip-hop used to be black, but now it laxed"	"Fantastique," K-OS, <i>Exit</i>
		"Show you what ya missing, listen I hope for black love without washing/...For these record labels nuff rap cats is Benson"	"Quest for Fire," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>
	References to the history of Black slavery	"What can we be?/Can we be free?/Where can we go?"	"Call Me," K-OS, <i>Exit</i>
		"Blood brother ever since the slave	"Man By Choice,"

		ships/...The slave masters with the devil in their eye/Saw nothin' but a nigga when you walked by"	Kardinal Offishall, <i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>
		"Enslave us, lining up our anuses and bust"	"FitnFedi," Rascalz, <i>Cash Crop</i>
	Talk about racism in Canada	"When Ben clocked bronze, they weren't bragging/But when he clocked gold, they started tagging/Jump on the bandwagon, grinning and smiling/"3 days later" he's from the islands"	"The Maestro," Maestro, <i>Symphony in Effect</i>
	Talk about Black crime	"Yo, they won't hire my brothers to work a 9-5/So instead of suicide/We husslin' to stay alive"	"Husslin'," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>
		"In every black home, and in every jail cell"	"G Walkin'," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>
		"Not another brother dies, another in handcuffs"	"Twenty One Year," Chocclair, <i>My Demo</i>
		"They think we're drug dealers, and some of us maybe are"	"Bare Witness," Chocclair, <i>Ice Cold</i>
<b>Symbolic</b>			
America	Sports references	"I don't play ball cause I can't throw it down/But my rhymes make it sweeter than Sweet Georgia Brown"	"Conductin' Thangs," Maestro, <i>The Black Tie Affair</i>
		"Who be the brother with the harder rap, sippin' coniac/... I'm takin' over the game, like black quarterbacks"	"416/905 (T.O. Party Anthem), Maestro, <i>Built to Last</i>
	Talk about racism in US	"If it was up to them they would have us ridin' in the back of the bus/In handcuffs and other shackles (yo) check Mr. Bush"	"Powerfull," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>
Global	Talk about ethnic minorities	"My raps straight to your head, like turbans to a Sheik/...No doubt like orientals with the essentials"	"On the Run," Rascalz, <i>Global Warning</i>
		"Retreat to the bush where the Indians live/To survive off the land, recuperating/Yo, walk the warpath like a brave Mohican"	"High Noon," Rascalz, <i>Global Warning</i>
	Talk about West Indians	"I'm complex from my station I flex heads like a Hatian"	"Clockwork," Rascalz, <i>Cash Crop</i>

		"I'm funkier than a group of Jamaicans after sun splash"	"Cert Wit Out Da Restyn," Maestro, <i>Naah, Dis Kid Can't be From Canada</i>
		"Are serving rounds like my granny used to serve provisions"	"The Love Song," K-OS, <i>Joyful Rebellion</i>
		"You think we all Jamaican, when nuff man are Trini's, Bajans, Grenadians and a hole heap of Hatians/Guyanese and all of the West Indies combined"	"BaKardi Slang," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>
		"We got them sucking the bowl like they speaking Portuguese"	"Gotta Get It," Kardinal Offishall, <i>Firestarter, Vol. 1</i>

## Appendix 4:

### Black Canadian rappers' use of the N-word

Album/ Artist	N	Symbolic condition	State of mind	Social standing	The "streets"/ being a fighter
<i>Global Warning</i> , Rascalz	12	5	1	1	5
<i>Cash Crop</i> , Rascalz	5	2	1	1	1
<i>Symphony in Effect</i> , Maestro	3	1		1	1
<i>Naah, Dis Kid Can't be From Canada</i> , Maestro	12	2	3	3	4
<i>Built To Last</i> , Maestro	1	0	0	1	0
<i>Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1</i> , Kardinal Offishall	67	20	12	18	17
<i>My Demo</i> , Choclaire	4	0	3	1	0
<i>Memoirs of Black Savage</i> , Choclaire	22	3	2	6	11
<i>Ice Cold</i> , Choclaire	44	12	13	8	11
<i>Flagrant</i> , Choclaire	4	1	2	1	0
<i>Joyful Rebellion</i> , K-OS	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Exit</i> , K-OS	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b> <sup>109</sup>	174	46	37	41	50

<sup>109</sup> I agree with a book reviewer for Black Entertainment Television (BET) who suggests that one can find a manifestation of the word "nigger" in virtually any hip-hop song made in the last five years (Armstrong, 2004, p. 346), therefore, comparing these numbers with US statistics would likely be an exercise in futility.



## Appendix 5:

### Black Canadian rappers' expression of "hard"

<b>Rascalz</b>	<b>Offishall</b>	<b>Chocclair</b>
Being a "street" warrior ("Dreaded Fist")	Using Toronto slang in the streets ("BaKardi Slang")	Imprisonment and the struggles of ghetto life ("Twenty One Years")
Gun violence (reference to wearing a bulletproof vest) ("FitnFedi")	Being a gangster ("G Walkin")	Gun violence ("What It Takes")
Following a "street" code of behaviour ("On The Run")	Justifying criminal behaviour ("Go Ahead Den")	Shooting (a gun) ("Skunk")
Living in the ghetto ("Gunfinga")	Gun violence and living in government housing ("Gotta Get It")	Shooting and Stabbing ("Twenty One Years")
Trigger "happy" police violence ("High Noon")	Hustling and imprisonment ("Husslin")	Living in poverty and being a "thug" ("Love 'Em All")
Being "raw" in the streets ("Sharpshooter")	Being ready to shoot a gun ("Man By Choice")	Being in jail and shootings ("Let's Ride")
The ills of pursuing money versus staying true to the ghetto ("Priceless")	Acting like a "thug" ("MIC T.H.U.G.")	Being a gangster and shooting (a gun) ("Situation 9")
Stabbing (a woman) ("Can't Relate")	Death by gun violence ("Ol Time Killin")	Shooting (a gun) ("Young Gunz")
Lacking money ("Top of the World")	Love for the ghetto ("Powerfulll")	Gun violence ("Skyline")
Having a criminal mind ("Where You At")	Stabbing and murder ("Quest for Fire")	Being in jail ("Tell 'Em")
Being poor and on welfare ("Crazy World")	Being in jail ("U R Ghetto 2002")	

## Appendix 6:

### Black Canadian hip-hop community members' claims of authenticity

<b>Semantic Dimensions</b>	<b>Real</b>	<b>Fake</b>
Social-Locational	the streets	the suburbs
Social-Psychological	staying true to yourself	following mass trends
Language	references to Canada, US and Caribbean	references to Canada only
Political-Economic	the underground	commercial
Cultural	the old school	mainstream
Racial	Black	White
Gender-Sexual	hard	soft

## Bibliography:

- Acosta-Alzuru, C., & Roushanzamir, E.P.L. (2003). "Everything We Do Is A Celebration of You!": Pleasant Company Constructs American Girlhood. *The Communication Review*, 6, 45-69.
- Aldridge, H. & Carlin, D. (1993). The Rap on Violence: A Rhetorical Analysis of Rapper KRS-One. *Communication Studies*, 44, 2, 102-116.
- Amber, J. (2005, March). Dirty Dancing. *Essence*, 162-165, 203.
- Androutsopoulos, J., & Scholz, A. (2003). Spaghetti Funk: Appropriations of Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music In Europe. *Popular Music and Society*, 26, 4, 463-479.
- Armstrong, E. G. (2004). Eminem's Construction of Authenticity. *Popular Music and Society*, 27, 3, 335-355.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. (S. F. Glaser, Trans.). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1981).
- Bennett, A. (1999). Hip hop am Main: the localization of rap music and hip hop culture. *Media, Culture & Society*, 21, 1, 77-91.
- Berland, J. (1991). Free Trade and Canadian Music: Level Playing Field or Scorched Earth? *Cultural Studies*, 5, 3, 317-325.
- Berman, S. (2004, October 28). K-OS Theory: Toronto MC masters the art of selling records without selling his soul. *Eye Magazine*. Retrieved June 28, 2006, from [http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue\\_10.28.04/beat/k-os.php](http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_10.28.04/beat/k-os.php).
- Briggs, A., & Copley, P. (1999). 'I Like My Shit Sagged': Fashion, 'Black Musics' and Subcultures. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2, 3, 337-352.
- Brodribb, S. (1992). *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company.
- Brophy, A. (2006, April 3). Kardinal Offishall To Boycott Future Junos. *Chartattack.com*. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://chartattack.com/DAMN/2006/04/0307.cfm>.
- Brown, D.J., & Schulze, L. (1990). The Effects of Race, Gender, and Fandom on Audience Interpretations of Madonna's Music Videos. *Journal of Communication*, 40, 2, 88-102.
- Burke, K. (1973). *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Great Britain: Routledge.
- Chideya, F. (2000). Homophobia: Hip-Hop's Black Eye. In K. Powell (Ed.), *Step into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature* (pp. 95-100). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Clay, A. (2007). "I used to be scared of the dick": Queer women of color and hip-hop masculinity. In G.D. Pough and E. Richardson, et al. (Eds.), *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology* (pp. 148-165). Mira Loma: Parker Publishing.
- Coleman, R.M. (2003). Elmo is Black! Black Popular Communication and the Marking and Marketing of Black Identity. *Popular Communication*, 1, 1, 51-64.
- Collin, P.H. (1991). *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge.

- Connell, J., & Gibson, C. (2004). World music: deterritorializing place and identity. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28, 3, 342-361.
- Cowie, D. F. (1999, November 1). Eyes On the Prize: Turning Northern Touch Into Midas Touch. *Exclaim! Magazine*. Retrieved June 26, 2006, from <http://www.exclaim.ca>.
- Cowie, D.F. (2002, January 31). Organized K-OS. *Exclaim! Magazine*. Retrieved June 26, 2006, from <http://www.exclaim.ca>.
- Cummings, M., & Roy, R. (2002). Manifestations of Afrocentricity in Rap Music. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 13, 59-76.
- Decker, J.L. (1994). The State of Rap: Time and Place in Hip Hop Nationalism. In A. Ross and T. Rose (Eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture* (pp. 99-121). New York: Routledge.
- Del Barco, M. (1996). Rap's Latino Sabor. In E.P. Williams (Ed.), *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture* (pp. 63-84). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Diehl, M. (2003). Pop Rap. In J. Green, *Rap and hip-hop*, (pp. 57-67). Michigan: Greenhaven Press.
- Dunlevy, T. (2006, January 19). The Cuban connection. *The Gazette*. Retrieved January 20, 2006, from <http://www.canada.com>.
- Dyson, E.M. (2001). *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Emerson, R. (2002). "Where My Girls At?" Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos. *Gender & Society*, 16, 1, 115-135.
- Famuyiwa, R. (Director). (2002). *Brown Sugar*. [Motion Picture]. Century City, CA: Twentieth Century Fox.
- Farrugia, R. (2004). *Sisterdjs* in the House: Electronic/Dance Music and Women-Centered Spaces on the Net. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 27, 2, 236-262.
- Flax, J. (1990). Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory. In L.J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (pp. 39-62). New York: Routledge.
- Flores, J. (1994). Puerto Rican and Proud, Boyee!: Rap Roots and Amnesia. In A. Ross and T. Rose (Eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture* (pp. 89-98). New York: Routledge.
- Foreman, M. (2002). *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Frank, N. (2002, October 10). K-OS. *The Silhouette*. Retrieved July 25, 2006, from <http://sil.mcmaster.ca/archives/021010/andy/021010kos.html>.
- Francesconi, R. (1986). Free Jazz and Black Nationalism: A Rhetoric of Musical Styles. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 3, 36-49.
- Fraser, N. and Nicholson, L.J. (1990). Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism. In L.J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (pp. 19-38). New York: Routledge.
- Frith, S. (1996). Music and identity. In S. Hall and P. Du Guy (Eds). *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 108-127). London: Sage.
- Fuss, D. (1989). *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge.

- Galloway, M. (2001, March 29). Firebrand MC takes T-dot message to the masses. *Now Magazine*. Retrieved June 28, 2006, from <http://www.nowtoronto.com>.
- Gilroy, P. (1987). *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. London: Hutchison.
- Goldman, V. (2006). *The Book of Exodus: The Making & Meaning of Bob Marley & The Wailers' Album of the Century*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Goodall, N. (1994). Depend On Myself: T.L.C. and The Evolution of Black Female Rap. *Journal of Negro History*, 79, 85-94.
- Gottlieb, J., & Wald, G. (1994). Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock. In A. Ross and T. Rose (Eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture* (pp. 250-274). New York: Routledge.
- Grimwood, S. (2003). Iconography and Postmodernity. *Literature & Theology*, 17, 1, 76-97.
- Guevara, N. (1996). Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'. In E.P. Williams (Ed.), *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture* (pp. 49-62). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations & Signifying Practices*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Haines, R. J. (1999). Break north: Rap music and hip-hop culture in Canada. In H. Troper & M. Weinfeld (Eds.), *Politics and public policy: Case studies in Canadian diversity* (pp. 54-88). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hansen, A., et al. (1998). *Mass Communication Research Methods*. New York: New York University Press.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Haywood, P. (2005). Nurturing the Canadian Urban Scene. *Soulshine*. Retrieved: January 17, 2007, from <http://www.soulshine.ca/features/featuresarticle.php?fid=149>.
- Heinz, B., & Lee, R. (1998). Getting Down to the Meat: The Symbolic Construction of Meat Consumption. *Communication Studies*, 49, 1, 86-99.
- Henley, T. (2006 May 4). Maestro Fresh West on hip-hop up top. *Xxlmag.com*. Retrieved January 17, 2007, from <http://www.xxlmag.com>.
- Herman, A., & Sloop, J.M. (1998). The Politics of Authenticity in Postmodern Rock Culture: The Case of Negativland and *The Letter 'U' and the Numeral '2'*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 15, 1, 1-20.
- Heywood, L.L. (Ed.). (2006). *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third Wave Feminism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- hooks, B. (1990). *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- hooks, B. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Hope, C. (2005, January 6). K-OS Talks Canadian Hip-Hop, Bob Marley. *AllHipHop.com*. Retrieved August 18, 2006, from <http://www.allhiphop.com>.
- Humann, H.E. (2007). Feminist and Material Concerns: Lil' Kim, Destiny's Child, and Questions of Consciousness. In G.D. Pough and E. Richardson, et al. (Eds.), *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology* (pp. 94-105). Mira Loma: Parker Publishing.
- Ibrahim, A. (2003). Marking the Unmarked: Hip-hop, the Gaze & the African Body in North America. *Critical Arts*, 17, 1/2, 52-70.

- Jameson, F. (1984). Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. In M.G. Durham and D.M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (pp. 550-587). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Jeffries, M. (2007). Re: Definitions: The name and game of hip-hop feminism. In G.D. Pough and E. Richardson, et al. (Eds.), *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology* (pp. 208-227). Mira Loma: Parker Publishing.
- Jones, S.H. (1999). Women, Musics, Bodies, and Texts: The Gesture of Women's Music. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19, 217-235.
- Joyner, S. (1999). Rascalz. Retrieved: October 29, 2006, from *Urbnet.com* <http://www.urbnet.com/Editorial-print.asp?ueid=155>.
- Kardinal Offishall. (2001). *Manhunt*. Retrieved November 25, 2004, from <http://www.eurweb.com/>.
- Kelly, J. R. (2001). *"Borrowed Blackness": A Case Study of Black Identity and Cultural Formation among a Group of African Canadian High School Students*. Dissertation Abstracts International, A: The Humanities and Social Sciences.
- Kelly, R.D.G. (1996). *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kennedy, J.K. (1992). *Reclaiming the Mainstream: Individualist Feminism Rediscovered*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.
- Kennedy, R. (2002). *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Keyes, C.L. (2002). *Rap music and street consciousness*. United States: University of Illinois.
- King, A. S. (1999). The Co-optation of a "Revolution": Rastafari, Reggae, and The Rhetoric of social control. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 10, 77-95.
- Kitwana, B. (2002). Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture: The Hip Hop Generation. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Kopano, B.N. (2002). Rap Music as an Extension of the Black Rhetorical Tradition: "Keepin' it Real". *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 26, 4, 204-214.
- Lull, J. (1995). *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lyotard, J.F. (1986). *Defining The Postmodern*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://qcpages.qc.edu/ENGLISH/Staff/richter/Lyotard.htm>.
- Maxwell, I. (1997). Hip Hop Aesthetics and the Will to Culture. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 8, 1, 50-70.
- Maxwell, I. (2003). *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip-Hop Down Under Comin' Upper*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- McClary, S. (1991). *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- McKinnon, M. (2005, June 30). Kicking Up Dust: The remarkable hip-hop odyssey of Toronto's K'naan. *CBC.ca*. Retrieved March 8, 2007, from <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/knaan.html>.
- McKinnon, M. (2006, February 6). Hang the MC: A view to a kill: Toronto's 50 Cent show. *CBC.ca*. Retrieved March 3, 2007, from <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/hangthemc.html>.

- McKinnon, M. (2006, February 9). Hang the MC: When keeping it real goes wrong: rap's influence on the mean streets of Toronto the Good. *CBC.ca*. Retrieved March 3, 2007, from <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/hangthemcday4.html>.
- McLeod, K. (1999). Authenticity within hip-hop and other cultures threatened with assimilation. *Journal of Communication*, 49, 134-150.
- McRobbie, A. (1981). *Feminism and Youth Culture*. Houndsmills and London: Macmillan.
- Mitchell, T. (2000). Doin' Damage in My Native Language: The Use of "Resistance Vernaculars" in Hip Hop in France, Italy, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Popular Music and Society*, 24, 3, 41-54.
- Morgan, J. (1999). *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist*. New York: Touchstone.
- Neal, M.A. (1997). Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music. *Popular Music and Society*, 21, 3, 117-135.
- Newman, M. (2001). "I represent me": Identity Construction in a Teenage Rap Crew. *Texas Linguistic Forum*, 44, 2, 388-400.
- Penrose, C. (2003, June-July). Back to the Early Years. *Wordmag.com*. Retrieved March 3, 2007, from [http://www.wordmag.com/Music/Music\\_2003-jun-july\\_Chocclair.HTM](http://www.wordmag.com/Music/Music_2003-jun-july_Chocclair.HTM).
- Perkins, E.W. (Ed). (1996). *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Perry, I. (2003). WHO(SE) AM I? The Identity and Image of Women in Hip-Hop. In G. Dines and J.M. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race, and class in media: a text-reader* (pp. 136-148). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Powell, K. (Ed). (2000). *Step into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Pritchard, E.D. and Bibbs, M.L. (2007). Sista' Outsider: Queer Women of Color and Hip Hop. In G.D. Pough and E. Richardson, et al. (Eds.), *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology* (pp. 19-40). Mira Loma: Parker Publishing.
- Quinlan, T. (2000, April 27). Halifax Hip-Hop: Anticipates the Big Bang. *Exclaim.ca*. Retrieved March 4 2007, from <http://www.exclaim.ca>.
- Radford-Hill, S. (2002). Keepin' It Real: A Generational Commentary on Kimberly Springer's "Third Wave Black Feminism?". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27, 4, 1083-1094.
- Riordan, E. (2001). Commodified Agents and Empowered Girls: Consuming and Producing Feminism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 25, 3, 279-297.
- Roberts, R. (1991). Music Videos, Performance and Resistance: Feminist Rappers. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 125, 2, 141-152.
- Rose, T. (1994). *Black Noise: Rap Music & Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
- Ross, A., et al (Eds.). (1994). *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*, New York: Routledge.
- Ross, M. (1998, June 5). Rascalz: band on a mission. *Canoe JAM!* Retrieved November 19, 2006, from <http://jam.canoe.ca/Music/Artists/R/Rascalz/1998/06/05/pf-749168.html>.

- Ross, M. (2001). An Offishall Interview. *Caffimage Magazine*. Retrieved November 25, 2004, from [http://www.caffimage.com/interviews/interview-mr\\_040519-p1.php](http://www.caffimage.com/interviews/interview-mr_040519-p1.php).
- Saddik, A. J. (2003). Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage. *The Drama Review*, 47, 4, 110-127.
- Scott, J. (1992). Experience. In J. Butler and J. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (pp. 22-40). New York: Routledge.
- Simons, J. (2006, October 4). Classified Hustles In His Own Way. *Chartattack.com*. Retrieved October 5, 2006, from <http://www.chartattack.com/DAMN/2006/10/0437.cfm>.
- Slomanson, P., & Newman, M. (2004). Peer group identification and variation in New York Latino English laterals. *English World-Wide*, 25, 2, 199-216.
- Solomon, T. (2005). 'Living underground is tough': authenticity and locality in the hip-hop community of Istanbul, Turkey. *Popular Music*, 21, 1, 1-20.
- Smith, A. (1970). Socio-Historical Perspectives of Black Oratory. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 56, 3, 264-269.
- Thompson, C. (2005 November 22). Kardinal Offishall: Smashed Guitar Not About K-OS. *Chartattack.com*. Retrieved March 12, 2006, from <http://www.chartattack.com>.
- Thompson, C. (2006, February). Kardinal Offishall: Canada's Hip-Hop Ambassador. *Chart Magazine*, 16.
- Thompson, C. (2006, January 9). K-OS: On Hip-Hop and His Future. *Chartattack.com*. Retrieved January 10, 2006, from <http://www.chartattack.com>.
- Thompson, C. (2006, November 26). Red1. *Hiphopcanada.com*. Retrieved November 27, 2006, from <http://www.hiphopcanada.com>.
- Walcott, R. (1995). *Performing the postmodern: black Atlantic rap and identity in North America*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, OISE: University of Toronto.
- Warner, R. (2006). Hip-hop with a Northern Touch!? Diasporic Wanderings/Wonderings on Canadian Blackness. *Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15, 45-68.
- Watkins, C.S. (2001). A Nation of Millions: Hip Hop Culture and the Legacy of Black Nationalism. *The Communication Review*, 4, 373-398.
- Watkins, L. (2004). Rapp 'in' the Cape: style and memory, power in community. In S. Whiteley and A. Bennett, et al (Eds.), *Music, space and place: popular music and cultural identity*, (pp. 124-148). Vermont: Ashgate Publishing.
- Watts, K.E., & Orbe, M. P. (2002). The Spectacular Consumption of "True" African American Culture: "Whassup" with the Budweiser Guys? *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19, 1, 1-20.
- West, C. (1994). *Race matters*. New York: Vintage Books
- Woldu, G.H. (2003). Contextualizing Rap: A Brief History of African American Music. In J. Green, *Rap and hip-hop*, (pp. 25-35). Michigan: Greenhaven Press.
- Wright, L. (2005, August 27). Hip hop bows to Maestro. *Toronto Star*, p. H10.
- Yousman, B. (2003). Blackphilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music and White Supremacy. *Communication Theory*, 13, 4, 366-392.



## Discography:

- 50 Cent. (2005). *2050: Before the Massacre* [CD]. Mixtape.
- 50 Cent. (2005). *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* [CD]. Santa Monica: Interscope Records.
- Blow, K. (1980). *Kurtis Blow*. [CD]. USA: Mercury Records.
- Cash Money Millionaires. (2000). *Baller Blockin*. [CD]. USA: Cash Money Records.
- Chocclair. (1999). *Ice Cold* [CD]. Canada: Priority Records.
- Chocclair. (2002). *Memoirs of Black Savage* [CD]. Canada: Virgin Music.
- Chocclair. (2003). *Flagrant* [CD]. Canada: Greenhouse Music.
- Chocclair. (2003). *My Demo*. [CD]. Canada: Greenhouse Music.
- Classified. (2005). *Boy-Cott in the Industry*. [CD]. Canada: Urbnet Records.
- Common. (2005). *Be*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.
- Dead Prez. (2000). *Let's Get Free*. [CD]. USA: Loud Records.
- DMX. (2003). *Grand Champ*. [CD]. New York: Def Jam Records.
- Eminem. (2002). *The Eminem Show*. [CD]. USA: Aftermath Entertainment.
- Eminem. (2005). *Curtain Call*. [CD]. USA: Aftermath Entertainment.
- EPMD. (1992). *Business Never Personal*. [CD]. New York: Def Jam Recordings.
- Eve. (2002). *Eve-Olution*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Interscope Records.
- Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five. (1982). *The Message*. [CD]. New York: Sugar Hill Records.
- Gunz, P., & Tariq, L. (1998). *Make It Reign*. [CD]. USA: Sony.
- Jelleestone. (2006). *The Hood Is Here*. [CD]. Canada: Blacksmith Records.
- Lil' Kim. (2003). *La Bella Mafia*. [CD]. USA: Atlantic.
- K'naan. (2006). *The Dusty Foot Philosopher*. [CD]. USA: BMG.
- K-OS. (2002). *Exit*. [CD]. UK: EMI.
- K-OS. (2004). *Joyful Rebellion*. [CD]. USA: Virgin Music.
- KRS-ONE. (1997). *I Got Next*. [CD]. USA: Jive.
- Kweli, T. (2000). *Reflection Eternal*. [CD]. USA: Priority Records.
- Maestro. (1989). *Symphony in Effect*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.
- Maestro. (1991). *The Black Tie Affair*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.
- Maestro. (1994). *Naah, Dis Kid Can't be From Canada*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.
- Maestro. (1998). *Built To Last*. [CD]. Canada: Attic Records.
- Manson, M. (1999). *Live*. [CD]. USA: Interscope Records.
- MC Lyte. (1988). *Lyte as a Rock*. [CD]. USA: First Priority Records.
- Mos Def. (1999). *Black On Both Sides*. [CD]. USA: Priority Records.
- Nas. (2003). *God's Son*. [CD]. USA: Sony.
- Naughty By Nature. (1991). *Naughty By Nature*. [CD]. USA: Tommy Boy Records.
- Offishall, K. (2001). *Quest for Fire: Firestarter, Vol. 1*. [CD]. Santa Monica: Geffen Records.
- Public Enemy. (1989). *Fear of a Black Planet*. [CD]. New York: Def Jam Recordings.
- Queen Latifah. (1989). *All Hail the Queen*. [CD]. USA: Tommy Boy Records.
- Rascalz. (1997). *Cash Crop*. [CD]. Canada: Figure IV Records.
- Rascalz. (1999). *Global Warning*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.
- Rascalz. (2002). *Reloaded*. [CD]. Canada: ViK Recordings.
- Salt 'N' Pepa. (1986). *Cool, Hot and Vicious*. [CD]. USA: Next Plateau Records.
- Salt 'N' Pepa. (1988). *A Salt with a Deadly Pepa*. [CD]. USA: Next Plateau Records.

Shakur, T. (1993). *2 Pac Strickly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* [CD]. Atlanta: Amaru Entertainment.

Shakur, T. (1996). *All Eyez on Me.* [CD]. USA: Death Row Records.

West, K. (2004). *College Dropout.* [CD]. USA: Roc-A-Fella Records.

02-10-05