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BLACK GIRLHOOD CELEBRATION: THE POLITICAL COURAGE OF BLACK GIRLS AND WOMEN IN  
EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES

BY

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THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Bridging critical pedagogy, hip-hop and education, hip-hop feminism, and literature on Black girlhood, this thesis shows how Black girls in Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), a community of girls and women in Illinois, make sense of the images they receive through hip-hop. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the girls, who range from 11 to 42, are more than spectators of hip-hop but participants who make critical judgments beyond just good or bad critiques using the hip-hop influenced SOLHOT ritual 'Check-In'. Based on analysis of 'Check In,' I developed the concept of 'Flow-Storytelling' to explain Black girls' usage of hip-hop to (re) create and tell their own story or narrative in any way they so choose.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I wish to live because life has within it

that which is LOVE, that which is good, that which is BEAUTIFUL.

Therefore, since I have known all these things, I have found them REASON ENOUGH

And I...

Wish ...

To ...

LIVE.

So what happens when the hope to live is taken or threatened?

By a photo?

Person?

Video?

Word or song?

You see I was just showing love to boys *who don't wanna be loved who don't wanna be loved*<sup>1</sup>

But then again I guess We should have known better because Weezy F. Baby did tell us “yeah f these bitches I swear I care about EVERYTHING BUT these bitches”<sup>2</sup>

Momma's telling me everything, but not enough.

So I will figure life out on my own with the help of friends who know half-truths and others who know half of that.

In the end I thought it was never suppose to be for sale and that love was what I was giving and getting.

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel Quickie (2010)

<sup>2</sup> Lil Wayne featuring Gucci Mane We Be Steady Mobbin (2009)

And

I

“Check-In”

The performance text above is a combination of words spoken by Lorraine Hansberry (1969), and truths lived by Black women and girls as recalled and documented from my work with them in the Midwest. This original text serves as an example of how Black girls and women (re)create stories based on their lived experiences. Sometimes these lived experiences are pleasant memories and others are times, they are memories that help mold them into the individual they have become or are becoming. No matter what the memory, Black women and girls develop stories that reflect the truths they live or truths they wish to live.

At the core of my research project are performance texts created by way of participant observation in SOLHOT, a space dedicated to Black girlhood celebration. These performance texts are “tales from the field”, spoken aloud in an effort to bear witness and say “I was there,” to bring my analysis back to the girls in a way they can appreciate and understand. I take my cue from hooks (1994) who testifies that there is value in the talking out of ideas. Performance allows for a space to wrestle with the assumptions about whether theory contributes to our understanding of Black girlhood or if the lived realities of Black girls should make for our understanding of theory. This challenge is put forth by Jones (1997) when she states, “[p]erformance may be theorized about, but the theory of the performance is imbedded in the performance itself, ‘flaws’ and all. The provocative question is not ‘What theory created this performance?’ but ‘What theory is revealed through this performance?’” (p.55).

In this thesis, I examine how Black girls speak and perform these truths through the use of storytelling, poetry, writing, and dance. More specifically, I focus on how Black girls use hip-

hop as a means of story telling in Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) to further investigate the truths and lived experience of Black women and girls. Ultimately, truths revealed and shared in the space of SOLHOT better inform my understanding of the ways in which Black girls interact collectively with hip-hop.

I chose the genre of hip-hop as a context for this thesis because music holds a meaningful place in the lives of youth. Music provides youth with socialization and satisfies their emotional needs (Miranda & Claes, 2004). Historically, hip-hop culture provided a space for youth of color, both boys and girls, to resist oppression (Rose, 1994). However, despite hip-hop being a means of resistance, criticism suggests that mainstream rap and R&B music and videos are also the source of sexism and misogynist sexual scripts for Black women and girls (Stokes, 2007). Stokes states, “concerned parents, scholars, colleges/universities, girl-serving organizations, magazines, filmmakers, rap artist, and Black women and girls have raised questions about the potential influence of derogatory sexual messages in hip-hop-influenced popular culture on the sexual and psychological development of Black adolescent girls” (2007, p. 170). More commercialized hip-hop has been criticized for its hypersexual and deviant representations of Black women and girls (Stokes & Gant, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Pough, 2004; Bullock, 2006; Stokes, 2007). However, concerns of scholars and stakeholders surrounding the ways in which hip-hop music acts as socialization and a space of resistance for youth are needed. Redirecting the concern to explore how Black girls make sense of these images, allows for Black girls to use music as a creative expression to (re)create stories regarding their lived experience. These are the concerns that I am most interested in exploring.

Bridging critical pedagogy, hip-hop and education, hip-hop feminism, and literature on Black girlhood, I seek to provide a narrative that shows how Black girls in SOLHOT make sense

of the images they receive through hip-hop. Specifically, I claim that Black girls in SOLHOT are more than spectators of hip-hop but become participants who make critical judgments beyond good or bad critiques, by using the hip-hop-influenced SOLHOT ritual ‘Check-In’. To support this argument I analyze responses of Black girls provided by way of ‘Check-In’. Through this analysis I demonstrate how Black girls utilize hip-hop to share and navigate their experiences. I therefore locate hip-hop as a form of expression that can be applied to other spaces and institutions such as schools and/or prisons.

The observations presented in this project are significant because the most popular and commonsense narratives about Black girls, in relation to hip-hop, assumes that hip-hop has ruined this 21<sup>st</sup> century generation of Black girls (Pough, 2004). However my argument shifts our assumptions about Black girls as victims to thinking through the ways they actively use and contribute to hip-hop’s culture and creative expressions. Furthermore, Black girls hold the most significant answers about hip-hop and the influence it has on their lives (Gaunt, 2006; Brown, 2009; Stokes, 2007). Thus, creating spaces where Black women and girls are able to have these necessary conversations about their lives and hip-hop is the work of SOLHOT (Brown, 2009). This project gives a deeper look into SOLHOT and how this space is created through practices such as ‘Check-In’.

## **Overview**

This project is organized into 5 sections. In the section that follows I first explain my participation in SOLHOT as a researcher and co-organizer. Second, I provide an in-depth thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the SOLHOT ritual known as “Check-In” and explain its relevance to this project. Third, I review the research literature on critical pedagogy, hip-hop in education, Black girlhood, and hip-hop feminism from which I write and challenge, for the

purpose of providing a history of the ways Black girls and women have interacted with hip-hop. In section four, I outline the method used for this analysis, ethnography, defining it for the reader in order to fully comprehend my analysis of how Black girls utilize hip-hop by telling their story with a Black girls' flow. Lastly, I conclude this project with an extensive discussion of my primary research findings; Black girls are not just consumers, but active participants in hip-hop culture and politics, therefore, stating the implications of this research for SOLHOT, Black girls and hip-hop culture.

### **SAVING OUR LIVES HEAR OUR TRUTHS-SOLHOT**

Defining the space of SOLHOT is critical to this project because it allows for a better understanding of the operations of SOLHOT without the reader being in the physical space. In addition, defining the SOLHOT space provides context as to why it differs from other programs and why it truly values and celebrates the ideas and voices of Black girls. SOLHOT sets out to not only provide a space for Black girls, but also welcomes and hears Black girls truths and interpretations of the world through its pedagogical practices.

SOLHOT began in September 2006 after Regina Crider, then a Program Director at the local Boys and Girls Club, encouraged Ruth Nicole Brown, to create her own program. Six years later, SOLHOT mainly operates in schools, two high schools and two middle schools in three Champaign County Cities. Brown states, "The goal is to create a space that facilitates collective action, and then to organize that space so the girl with so much to say can say it, the girl with nothing to say can dance it, and the girl who wants to say it, but cannot write, will learn" (2009, p. 22). In SOLHOT I along with the other home girls<sup>3</sup> use arts based practices such as dancing, singing, drawing, and painting to express ourselves and share with one another. As

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<sup>3</sup> "home girls" are adults who take an interest in Black girls through the SOLHOT program. Typically, Home girls are University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign undergraduate and graduate students. The term "Home girl" is a term of endearment that was created as a way to define the volunteers as more than just traditional volunteers but as apart of the SOLHOT group.

home girls, we describe SOLHOT as a space because spaces can be claimed and (re)created anywhere. Unlike the common term program, “space” allows us to take SOLHOT with us long after the session has ended. Using the term “space” allows for creativity to happen however the girls see fit, and it allows for ultimate autonomy. Brown (2009) defines “space” using John Jackson Jr.’s definition stating “spaces can be real and imagined, spaces can tell stories or unfold histories, spaces to be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (p. 136). By maintaining this understanding of space SOLHOT builds relationship between women and girls and encourages everyone who is a part of the space to contribute in the best way that they know how. The creation of spaces that are not structured to create one type of girl or woman, privileges differences among women and girls whether they have a lot to say or nothing at all.

SOLHOT challenges the ideology that loud Blacks girls need to learn how to be ladies. Morris (2007) supports SOLHOT in that there exist institutions such as schools that wish to teach loud Black girls to be ladies. In his two-year ethnographic study Morris found that Black girls are subjected to disciplinary action due to their behavior. This disciplinary action stemmed from the teachers perception of them [Black girls] as challenging to authority, loud, and not ladylike (Morris, 2007, p. 507). This desire to (re) create Black girls as ladies is furthermore, rooted in politics of respectability. When Black girls act differently than the expectation of their white counterparts, for example if they ask questions and are not passive, they are seen as aggressive and too assertive. SOLHOT nurtures the voices of Black girls-loud, soft, and in between. In SOLHOT, there is no particular expectation of performance of Black girlhood. This sets SOLHOT apart as a space and not just a program. In SOLHOT there is no expectation of

how Black girls should respond. This further makes SOLHOT not just a program, but a space that celebrates Black girlhood.

SOLHOT is rooted in the practices of Black girlhood. Brown (2009) defines Black girlhood as “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (p. 1). Brown goes on to state that Black girlhood is not marked by age or physical ability; Black girlhood is fluid across generations. Brown’s definition of Black girlhood is very important for the ideas presented within this paper because it allows me to make a direct connection between Black girlhood and Black feminism or Hip-hop feminism when the literature is more specific to Black women. It is this ability to bridge the voices and ideas of Black girls and women together that allows for the work of SOLHOT to happen. Additionally, when bridging the voices and ideas of Black girls and women SOLHOT allows for a more bi-directional teaching and contributing to occur, which enhances the experience of SOLHOT. This pedagogical practice differs from mentoring programs that take a top-down approach as similarly encouraged in public schools. Traditional pedagogy of schools relies heavily on the banking method of education as stated by Paulo Freire (2003). Banking education resembles a top down approach to education in that the teacher is seen to have all the knowledge, which s/he gives to the students (Freire, 2003). As an alternative to banking education, Freire calls for more of a problem posing method to education. He states:

“The problem posing method does not dichotomize the activity of the teacher-student: he is not “cognitive” at one point and “narratives” at another. He is always “cognitive” whether preparing a project or engaging in dialogue with the students. He does not regard cognizable objects as his private property, but as the object of reflection by himself and the students” (Freire, 2003, p. 57).

Accordingly, SOLHOT is a form of critical pedagogy that promotes and centralizes the critical engagement of the girls and women who participate through artistic expressions such as dance, song, drawing, etc. In SOLHOT the women who volunteer are not seen as those having the most knowledge, but knowledge is shared and owned by both the girls and volunteers. Furthermore, SOLHOT operates as a critical pedagogy because critical pedagogy as defined by Patti Lather is “positioned as that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression (Luke and Gore, 1992, p. 121). In traditional schools and programs many voices, narratives, and histories are excluded or included in such a way that it diminishes the facts, whereas in SOLHOT these truths are welcomed, valued, and privileged.

Overall, SOLHOT is a unique space that not only privileges Black girls, but also bridges girls and women together. The creative and imaginative use of the word “space” permits for the girls and women who participate in SOLHOT to take its practices and values beyond the organized space. In bridging Black girls and women together SOLHOT takes on more of a problem posing method that promotes the engagement and celebration of all types of girls and women. While creativity and engagement of girls and women happens in the space of SOLHOT overall, specific practices and rituals have been implemented within the space of SOLHOT that encourages sharing in many ways. In the section that follows I explain how we share in SOLHOT through the ritual of “Check-In”.

#### **A RITUAL: “Check-In”**

“Check-In” is a welcoming ritual that occurs at the beginning of every SOLHOT and was initiated by Sheri K. Lewis, a home girl of SOLHOT, in 2007. “Check-In” allows lil

homies<sup>4</sup> and home girls to provide a personal narrative of what took place since the last time the group met. Responses gained by way of “Check-In” often range from the particulars of a day or weekend, relationships issues, parental issues, to simply “I don’t know”. The process of “Check-In” resembles free styling in a “cipher”: narratives are built off of other narratives; there is a call and response type of structure to it. Hip-hop lyricists often refer to “the cipher” as a conceptual space in which heightened consciousness exists. Those inside the cipher are central, so it casts an insider rather than outsider consciousness. The best way to describe the term, one popularized by the Five Percent Nation, is that it indicates a mystical and transcendent yet human state, that it creates a vibe amidst community, as well as enacts a spirit of artistic production or intellectual/spiritual discursive moments (Perry, 2004, p. 107). Pough also defines a cipher as “a place where people gather to create knowledge and exchange information” (2004, p. 41). Pough goes on to state on page 42,

“The cipher is both a space that Black woman create for themselves and a space in which they question themselves about what it means to be Black and woman in the larger U.S. public sphere. Black women have historically found ways to make their voices heard and to claim a space for themselves in the public sphere.”

Pough’s definition and explanation is relevant to “Check-In” and how the cipher operates in SOLHOT. “Check-In” as a cipher allows the girls to exchange information about themselves and create and re-create knowledge. Ciphored knowledge is raw, unscripted, and uncut.

Furthermore, Black girls are known to “bring wreck” in the SOLHOT cipher defined by Pough as “reshaping the public’s gaze in such a way as to be recognized as human beings-as

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<sup>4</sup> Lil' Homies" is a term developed by the girls ages 11-13, as an act of naming themselves for the purpose of SOLHOT and their participation. In SOLHOT we respect the thoughts and ideas of the little homies as they are the reason for SOLHOT, therefore we coined the term Lil Homie in acceptance of their request.

functioning and worthwhile members of society-and not to be shut out of or pushed away from the public sphere” (2004, p.17). This concept of “bringing wreck” is the way in which Black women respond or “talk back” to oppression (Pough, 2004). It is through the simple and indirect conversations that girls hold amongst themselves and during “Check-In” that I am able to better understand how Black girls interpret, read, and ‘talk back’ to the images presented to them through hip-hop. ‘Check-In’ not only works as a cipher but is also one of the many rituals performed in SOLHOT.

McConachie restates anthropologist Stomberg reference to ritual in *An Evolutionary Perspective on Play, Performance, and Ritual*,

Ritual may refer to a Catholic Mass, a greeting routine, a formulaic courtship dance undertaken by certain species of bird, the obsessive hand washing of a person suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder, and so on. The potential application of the term is so broad and so open to interpretation that pinning down the essential nature of ritual is unlikely (2009, p. 101) .

‘Check-In’ as a greeting routine fits into Stomberg’s ideology of ritual, but also as he points out applying the term ritual is not definitive because the interpretation of ritual can be so broad.

Lankshear (1999) defines ritual in the forward of noted scholar, McLaren’s book, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward A Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures*, as “‘forms of enacted meaning’ which enable ‘social actors to frame, negotiate, and articulate their...existence as social, cultural, and moral beings’. Rituals, in other words, are components of ideology, helping shape our perceptions of daily life and how we live it” (1999, xiii). This definition can be used to described “‘Check-In’” because the ritual of “‘Check-In’” allows for the ‘social actors’, in this case girls and women in SOLHOT, to “frame, negotiate, and articulate

their existence” and lived experience. Noted scholar McLaren (1999) provides more depth to the term ritual as being a necessity and not exclusively linked or motivated by religious practices. He goes on to hinge his argument on ritual being rooted in culture and cultural practices. McLaren states, “Notably, rituals are both of the natural order of things ...and the consequences of human action...The way we ritualize our lives is culture somaticized-culture incarnated in and through our bodily acts and gestures” (1999, p.38). Consequently, “Check-In”, as more than a greeting that happens at the beginning of SOLHOT, embodies ritualistic behavior as described by McLaren. “Check-In” relies and is dependent on the sharing culture of girls or gossip. Historically, gossip was known as a positive form of sharing between both men and women (McDonald, Putallaz, Grimes, Kupersmidt, & Coie, 2007). McDonald et al, ultimately found in their study of fourth grade girls and gossip that gossip is an “important and complex interpersonal process, one serving both positive and negative functions” (2007, p. 408). Gossip then allows girls and women the ability to be free in their sharing and participation in “Check-In”. Furthermore, “Check-In” embodies culture as suggested by McLaren through the stories or gossip that is shared.

Davis also talks about her experience of ritual practices in the academy in her article *A Visitation from the Foremothers: Black Women’s Healing Through a Performance of Care’- From African Diaspora to the American Academy*. She states, “the role of ritual is central to navigating the sacred and the secular in the performance of everyday life experiences of Black women in the Academy” (2008, p. 177). In that same article Davis draws on the work of Benston to further develop her idea of ritual. She quotes Benston stating “ritual gestures, once subordinated by dominant culture, were retrieved from the vernacular rhythms of traditional folk to illuminate the culturally specific aspects of social experience that reaffirmed the presence of

“durable human spirit struggling to overcome the conditions of oppression and dignify existence” ([1987, p. 62] 2008, p. 178). “Check-In” consequently, allows the Black girls and women who attend SOLHOT to express and navigate their daily experiences in school, the academy, and home. Furthermore, in this practice of ritual that happens at SOLHOT girls and women are able to navigate their performance in these spaces together. Dillard (2012) also echoes the sentiments of Benston when she speaks about ritual as “a way of life” and extends ritual beyond spirituality. She states,

So ritual does not simply refer to a particular or singular act like saying a prayer, a reciprocal sacrifice or mysteriously speaking in tongues: That is too often the common understanding in contemporary popular culture. Rather, from an African spiritual perspective, it describes the necessity of a deeper recognition of everyday acts as life affirming, lived in honor of the inheritance of the ancestors and the legacy of which we are a part as African ascendant people. So while ritual may certainly include offering prayer, engaging in meditation, eating together, enacting sacrifice, or redemptive acts, I use it here to describe *a way of living* that is fundamentally about making space for consistent recognition of our spiritual and cultural inheritance as African people (p. 43).

In SOLHOT the girls create this space through ‘Check-In.’ It is through ‘Check-In’ that the girls call into practices their culture and their understanding of this culture as well.

It is during the ritual of “Check-In” that the girls express cultural influences like that of hip-hop. Hip-hop culture influences how the girls in SOLHOT articulate their lived experience. Building on how ritual has been said to work, Black girls and women in SOLHOT tell their lived experience through the greeting of ‘Check-In’. The girls in SOLHOT use the ritual of ‘Check-In’ as a site of resistance to talk back to oppression that happen in their everyday lives. The girls not

only embody ritual practices, but also hip-hop culture when participating in 'Check-In'. While some scholars argue that Black girls and women do not have a place in hip-hop, 'Check-In' reaffirms that Black girls have always been apart of hip-hop. Moreover, tracing the history of hip-hop will prove that Black girls and women have always been apart of this cultural movement as participants and not just spectators. Because Black girls have always been present in hip-hop culture they are aware of the images being presented within the culture. Black girls are able to read through the images and messages and make sense of them beyond simple good or bad critiques. Black girls and women find a story and sometimes create their own within hip-hop and (re)tell it. Black girls' ability to make sense of hip-hop does not just begin when they are adults, rather it begins in their youth. The games that Black girls play and the stories they tell amongst each other are all rooted in hip-hop. Hip-hop and storytelling are apart of who Black girls are, thus they are able to claim hip-hop as their own and not just live up to the expectations and stereotypes that adults have of them. Through their participation in 'Check-In' Black girls claim their space within hip-hop reminding others that historically they have always been apart of the hip-hop culture movement as participants and not just spectators.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review surveys and synthesizes literature that explores critical pedagogies, hip-hop as pedagogy, and how the Black female body is situated within hip-hop. Additionally, this review explores the literature of critical pedagogy; hip-hop pedagogy, hip-hop history, and hip-hop feminism. Journals that focus on classroom strategies included but are not limited to *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *Urban Education*, *Journal of Negro Education*, so on and so forth. I decided to focus the timeline of literature mostly from 1990 to present. I used these parameters because most of the literature was concentrated within this timeframe.

In doing this literature review, I have also found many useful books and book chapters. For example, *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* by Marc Lamont Hill gives a brief but detailed introduction to scholars within the field of critical pedagogy and hip-hop as critical pedagogy. Hill also details his success and experience with hip-hop in the classroom. I also reviewed articles and books that speak to the ways women and girls use their experiences with hip-hop to insert their narratives into the male dominated field of hip-hop. Pough (2004), Durham (2007), Morgan (1999), and Brown's (2009) works are contributions to this field of knowledge. I have organized this literature review in three sections a) critical pedagogy b) hip-hop and education and c) black women and girls in hip-hop.

To ground critical pedagogy, education, and black girls and women within the context of hip-hop I first begin with a historical overview of hip-hop. Next I introduce critical pedagogy and how it is used to further hip-hop in education. Lastly I discuss the role(s) black girls and women within in hip-hop and their influence on the culture.

## **Historical Overview of Hip-hop**

In 1970, hip-hop made its appearance in the predominately Black and Brown neighborhoods in the South and West Bronx (Hess, 2010; Pough, 2004; Rose 1999; Sharpley-Whiting 2007). This introduction was sparked in response to the Postindustrial era in which factories left the more urban neighborhoods, taking with them jobs opportunities (Kelley 1997; Rose 1994). Furthermore, with this postindustrial era, there was also white flight, where white families left urban communities and made homes in the suburbs. With the untimely leaving of these industries and opportunities, African Americans and Latinos, in particular youth, and those who populated these neighborhoods were left without jobs. There was also a decline in city services, parks, and youth programs, and an increase in abandoned buildings. Consequently, responses to these conditions and alternatives to the nine to five workdays came into existence (Kelley, 1997).

“Hip-hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished” (Rose, 1999, p. 34). With this alternative identity the concept of play was also introduced (Kelley, 1997). Play ultimately became know as the “expression of stylistic innovation, gender identities, and/or racial and class anger viewed as a way to survive economic crisis of a means to upward mobility” (Kelley, 1997, p. 45). This new nine to five or “play” involved creating a way in which to provide for yourself as well as your family. Youth found this within the four elements of hip-hop.

The four elements of hip-hop include graffiti, break dancing, rap music, and djing. These facets acted as an outlet in which individuals could express themselves within the culture of hip-hop (Rose 1994;Pough, 2004; Hess, 2010). Graffiti during the hip-hop era no longer consisted of

simple tagging, but elaborate designs, themes, and techniques designed to increase visibility, individual identity, and status (Rose 1994; Pough, 2004; Hess, 2010). To incorporate all these styles was good but graffiti ultimately was concerned with where you chose to place your art. The bigger the art, difficulty, and strategic placing of the art gained the most respect in the streets. With the introduction of the hip-hop culture, there also developed gendered roles and stereotypes.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Darder Baltodano, & Torres (2009) state that critical pedagogy was founded on

“philosophical traditions that critically interrogate the pedagogical interrelationships between culture, economics, ideology, and power...[thus] critical educational approaches [seek to] cultivate a process of teaching and learning that deeply nurtures the development of critical consciousness among students and teachers” (p.23).

Darder et al continue on to explain that the foundation of critical pedagogy is found in multiple disciplines and traditions, however what connects these traditions has been their “uncompromising allegiance to the liberation of oppressed populations” (p. 23). Through these foundations critical pedagogy seeks to provide a breath of fresh air to student’s learning in the classroom that complements and welcomes the knowledge they bring to the classroom.

Critical pedagogy defined is “that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression” (Lather, 1992, p. 121). In traditional schools and pedagogy many voices, narratives, and histories are excluded or included in such a way that it diminishes and devalues the contributions students bring to the classroom. In providing an overview of major concepts used within critical pedagogy McLaren states critical pedagogy asks “how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how

and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominate culture while others are clearly not” (McLaren, 2009, p. 62). It is through valuing the complexities of students that critical pedagogy dismantles systems of oppression. Hill (2006) uses the work of Giroux (1994) to express the relationship between students’ daily cultural practices and the politics of schooling. He states, “[i]n particular critical pedagogues have examined the ways in which formal schooling contexts not only operate as sites for transmitting disciplinary knowledge, but also as spaces within which particular formations of knowledge are constructed and legitimated” (Hill, 2009, p. 6).

In *Schooling, Popular Culture, and a Pedagogy of Possibility* Giroux and Simon argue for schools as “social forms that expand human capacities in order to enable people to intervene in the formation of their own subjectivities and to be able to exercise power in the interest of transforming the ideological and material conditions of domination into social practices which promote social empowerment and demonstrate democratic possibilities” (p.1541). Furthermore Giroux and Simon argue for critical pedagogy that considers how “the symbolic and material transactions of the everyday provide the basis for rethinking how people give meaning and ethical substance to their experiences and voices (p. 1541). Giroux and Simon hope that through doing this they will be able to develop a critical pedagogy “through and for the voices of those who are often silenced.” Relating popular culture critical pedagogies emphasizes the transformative abilities of critical pedagogy. According to the authors “popular culture represents not only a contradictory terrain of struggle, but also a significant pedagogical site that raises important questions about the elements that organize the basis of student subjectivity and experience” (Giroux & Simon, 2000, p. 1542). Furthermore as it relates to students voices popular culture authorizes student voice and experience (Giroux & Simon, 2000, p. 1542).

Giroux & Simon use Grossberg (1986) to articulate the similarities between popular culture and pedagogy. The two concepts are similar because both exist as subordinate discourses. Within dominant discourse pedagogy is devalued as a form of cultural production and also belittles popular culture within schools.

When individuals practice different pedagogies this is their attempt to create intentional experiences that will cause learning and unlearning what we know about the world to be true and false (Giroux & Simon, 2000). Morrell (2002) relies on theorists such as Adorno & Horkheimer, 1999; Docker, 1994, Hall, 1998, McCarthy, 1998, Storey, 1998, and Williams, 1995, 1998 to inform his definition of popular culture. These theorists saw popular culture as “ a site of struggle between the subordinate and the dominant groups in society” (Morrell, 2002, p. 73). Popular culture can be seen as music, film, mass media artifacts, language, customs, and values. Pedagogy through these various mediums offers a pedagogy that addresses societal problems and gives voice to the silenced (Morrell, 2002; Giroux & Simon, 1989). Infusing popular culture with critical pedagogy creates an agenda for “pedagogy of possibility” (Simon, 1987).

**Hip-hop education and pedagogy.** In *Towards a Pedagogy of Hip-hop in Urban Teacher Education*, Thurman Bridges speaks about the effectiveness of connecting hip hop culture to the social and academic needs of Black boys. Bridges believed that, given the state of hip-hop and how much of a glorified commodity it has become, hip-hop would be a great opportunity for “teacher education to capitalize on the relationship between Black men, urban youth, and hip-hop culture to attract Black male teachers and to captivate the minds of students from all cultures” (2011, p. 325). For the sake of his article, Bridges defines hip-hop and hip pedagogy “as more than an educational tool or a segment of popular culture that Black and Latino youth predominate, but as a critical epistemology or a theoretical framework that

challenges our beliefs about teaching, shapes our conception of the function of schooling, and informs our understandings of the qualities of effective educators (2011, p. 327). The ten Black males educators who participated in this qualitative study often spoke to the healing power of hip-hop and its ability to give voice to the pain Black males experience in the U.S. Using their responses Bridges informs this healing process through bell hooks' argument of healing as engage pedagogy. He quotes her saying:

To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin...that means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (hooks, 1994, p. 13-15).

Bridges believes hip-hop is included in this process that hooks argues for. By the end of Bridge's study three organizing principals emerge that outline the intersections between hip-hop music, critical pedagogy, and the teaching orientations of Black male educators. These three include a call to service, commitment to self-awareness, and resistance to social injustice. It is through these three principals Bridges believes more Black male educators can be drawn to the field and provided with more environments that support Black male teachers.

Morrell (2004) believed critical teaching of popular culture could help students acquire and develop the literacies needed to navigate "new century" schools and popular culture could help students "deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society" (p. 72). In his study Morrell situated literacy learning in the critical study of popular culture. He believed that "any pedagogy of popular culture has to be a critical pedagogy where students and teachers learn from and with one another

while engaging in authentic dialogue that is centered on the experiences of urban youth as participants in and creators of popular culture” ((2002, p. 73) Freire, 1970, Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1989).

Within his study Morrell (2004) includes data collected from his 8 eight-years as a teaching urban teens. He focuses on three manifestations of popular culture (hip-hop, film and mass media) but for the sake of this review I will focus on the manifestation of hip-hop culture. Morrell incorporated hip-hop music and culture into his high school senior’s poetry curriculum. In the first part of the unit Morrell provided a historical context of poetry and an overview of the eras and genres the class would cover. The second portion of the unit the student presented as groups a poem and a rap song. The poem and song they created had to be justified with specific historical and literary period and to analyze the links between the two. The seniors in Morrell’s English class were able to generate quality and critical interpretations and critiques of the poems and songs present in the course. Students were able to move beyond the “critical reading of literary texts to become cultural producers themselves, creating and presenting poems that provided critical social commentary and encouraged action for social justice” (2004, p. 74). This unit engaged critical pedagogy according to Morrell because “it was situated in the experiences of the students, called for critical dialogue and a critical engagement of the text and related the texts to larger social and political issues” (2004, p. 74).

Paul (2000) also uses hip-hop pedagogy within the classroom. Paul focuses on the usage of rap in the classroom as “a site of critical inquiry.” Similar to other studies done in the field of popular culture and pedagogy, Paul states that her study is significant because it shows rap as a vehicle that “privileges student voices, especially those of Black and Latino urban-centered youth, while simultaneously teaching them to interrogate those voices” (p. 247; Giroux; 1990;

Giroux & Simon, 1989). Through using her own experiences with rap in the classroom, Paul seeks to introduce instructional strategy focused on “rap and critical interrogations to secondary school teachers” (2000, p. 247). To help teachers facilitate the use of hip-hop in the classroom, Paul lead a group of teachers through an exercise that they could replicate in their classrooms. For her activity Paul broke the teachers in groups and they either watched a rap music video or listened to lyrics from a song. The teachers then interpreted their songs and presented their findings. Through this exercise, participants were able to “ascertain that there are different genres of rap” (p. 251).

In *We Can Relate: Hip-hop Culture, Critical Pedagogy, and the Secondary Classroom*, Stovall argues for the use of hip-hop and other elements of popular culture to be utilized to develop relevant curriculum. In this article the ways to rethink and remake the curriculum of social studies is investigated in six workshops with Black and Latino youth. For the workshops with the students songs were chosen and analysis were made from the songs chosen. Some of the themes the group developed to include in the future curriculum included dishonesty, perception and reality, and critical reflection. Because this project was small scale really assessing how effective it was for the youth was limited. Stovall did acknowledge this and suggest a possible longitudinal study in the future.

I have only included examples of a few of the ways that hip-hop pedagogy has been implemented into the class room and how teachers can implement popular culture into their pedagogy, but I believe Low (2010) brings up some compelling honest points in his article *The Tale of the Talent Night Rap: Hip-hop Culture in Schools and the Challenge of Interpretation*. In his article Bronwen, explored the difficulties encountered with the relationship between hip-hop

and school and the tensions between White administrators and teachers and African American youth.

Low argues that despite the calls for integrating popular culture many studies do not address the reluctance of teachers and administrators to build curriculum around popular culture texts for fear that being “hip” to popular culture will have insider knowledge, which could lead to a shift in authority within the classroom. She supports these claims by reviewing the growing literature on hip-hop pedagogies pointing out that this literature ignores hip-hop’s contradictory politics of representations (Low, 2010, p. 196). Ultimately, Low makes the case that “the very reasons teachers and administrators might shy away from ‘rap pedagogies’ are the reasons that Hip-Hop is pedagogically valuable” (Low, 2010, p. 196).

In her review of the literature Low provides somewhat of a working definition to hip-hop pedagogies when she states “[h]ip hop pedagogies in which the culture is used as a tool to teach skills such as writing, poetry, grammar, and critical language awareness are principally justified on the basis of Hip-Hop’s cultural relevance to contemporary urban youth and links between students’ interests and self-esteem” (Low, 2010, p. 196).

### **Presence Of Women In Hip-hop**

The presence of women and their roles in hip-hop has been diminished because of the hyper masculinity of hip-hop (Emerson, 2002; Forman, 1994; Pough, 2004; Skeggs, 1993; Hunter, 2011). Pough argues, “Women have always been a part of hip-hop culture and a significant part of rap music” (2004, p. 9). Gaunt agrees with Pough when she argues that the games Black girls play are often used within hip-hop but Black girls are not recognized as authors or creators (2006). Hip-hop feminism further addresses hip-hop and its relationship to women. Durham (2007) defines hip-hop feminism as a

“Socio-cultural, intellectual and political movement grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color from the Post-Civil Rights generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for political intervention to challenge, resist and mobilize collectives to dismantle systems of exploitation” (p. 306).

In this sense hip-hop feminism makes visible the ways in which Black women are able to interpret and use hip-hop in their own agency. Pough (2004) poses the question “What does it mean to be a woman in the hip-hop generation, attempting to claim a space in a culture that constantly tries to deny women voice?” (2004, p. 11). To answer this question she hopes that her text *Check It While I Wreck It* will call attention to the ways in which the [Hip-hop] culture inhibits their growth, denigrates Black womanhood, and endangers the lives of Black girls (2004, p. 11). Pough goes on to state that she hopes “Black feminism will take up the cause and utilize the space that hip-hop culture provides in order to intervene in the lives of young girls” (2004, p.11). While Pough speaks to the responsibility of Black feminism I do believe there is a connection that can be made between Black feminism, and hip-hop feminism. This connection is made using Durham’s definition of hip-hop feminism and Pough’s ‘bringing wreck’. Recall that Pough defines ‘bringing wreck’ as reshaping the public’s gaze in such a way as to be recognized as human beings-as functioning and worthwhile members of society-and not to be shut out of or pushed away from the public sphere” (Pough, 2004, p.17). Both hip-hop feminism and bringing wreck speak to the ways in which Black women react, claim, and use hip-hop to define and re-define who they are while changing how others see them. But how does this specifically relate to Black girls?

Using Brown’s (2009) ideology expressing the fluidity of Black girlhood and womanhood Pough and Durham’s definitions then can be applied to Black girls and Black

girlhood. Pough's answers specifically mention Black girls, but I am unsure of her intention. While I do agree that the culture of hip-hop exploits Black girls and commodifies their lives, I am apprehensive of the ways in which Pough believes Black feminism should "intervene in the lives of Black girls" (2004, p. 11). I am apprehensive because of the ways Pough goes on to talk about Black womanhood and young women in the remainder of her text. She discusses the ways in which she and other feminist like Joan Morgan "should be accountable to young Black women, saving their lives, and widening their worldview and choices they feel they can make" (1999, p. 192). Here it seems to be a disconnect in the relationship between Black women and Black girls or more of top-down banking approach in that Black women have agency over their bodies and the messages that they receive through hip-hop. However, this is not the same case for Black girls. Pough seems to believe that Black girls must be saved from the messages they receive and it is the responsibility of Black feminism to do so. If the goal of Pough's text is to ensure that Black girls do not suffer at the hands of patriarchy, sexism, and exploitation that is appropriate. However, Black girlhood, Black feminism, and Hip-hop feminism as presented by Durham (2007) should all be in conversation with one another. 'Check-in' allows for these three frameworks to be bridged.

**Black girls' role in hip-hop.** Gaunt (2006) wrote, "Male folklorists and cultural anthropologies have had a tendency to write about Black verbal conflict, or dueling, as a male preoccupation... girls share in this tradition regularly through their daily performances of hand clapping games, cheers, and double dutch" (p. 132) As Gaunt points out Black girls are present in hip-hop even when they are not credited as being there. It is through language and everyday play that Black girls engage in hip-hop. Elaine Richardson claims that hip-hoppers rely heavily on African American language tradition "to signal the intense tension between African American

discourse and dominant discourse and to connect to their core culture audience members” (2003, p. 71). Rappers are able to command attention through “the delivery of the lyrics, the personal style of the performer, the beat, and the sonic quality of the music are equally important” (2003, p. 7). Since Black girls are creators of hip-hop and have always been present in the culture, should there be a fear when Black girls listen and enjoy hip-hop music?

In the article *Still on the Auction Block: The (S)exploitation of Black Adolescent Girls in Rap(e) Music and Hip-Hop Culture* written by West, she outlines the ways Black girls are influenced through hip-hop by the sexual scripts available to them. West states,

“However, for many girls, exposure to hip-hop culture and rap music videos and lyrics has been associated with poor body image, the normalization of using sexuality as a commodity, confusion about gender roles, the development of adversarial male-female relationships, greater acceptance of teen dating violence, and sexual risk taking.”-Carolyn West 2009 p. 94.

West argues that exposure to these negative scripts over time will influence the ways Black girls see themselves and their relationships with others. Furthermore, she believed these scripts overtime would also lead to risky sexual behavior. These findings are relevant, however, they are the most accessible way to read Black girls interactions with hip-hop. While hip-hop’s negative influence is most accessible, and since music and hip-hop culture will remain a seminal part of Black girls lives, it would be more productive to think about the complex ways Black girls engage with hip-hop music and culture.

Similar to Brown (2009) I argue that nothing happens to the girls who listen to the music that is popular among their age group. Because Black girls are co-creators of hip-hop, Black girls

think about hip-hop in complicated ways other than positive and negative evaluations. A present day example of this would be *Imma Dog* (2009) a song by rap artist Gucci Mane. The lyrics state

*I'm a dog, I'm a dog, I'm a dog, I'm a dog,*

*I'm a dog, I'm a dog I'm a dog, I'm a dog*

*I'm a treat ha like a dog*

*Feed ha like a dog(Gucci)*

*Beat ha like a dog*

*Then pass ha to my dog*

This song has a rhythmic tone and melodic beat. The bass is heavy and gets the crowd at any party jumping. Black girls and women alike go into a dance that only they know and understand complete with the lyrics and attitude. Yes, the lyrics talk of the misogynistic ways men use women for physical gratification, but in the moment when one is listening and “jamming” to the this song, or one similar to this, the context or ramifications behind the song are not being thought about or considered. When forced to think about and consider the true meaning behind the song, even I can admit that the lyrics are distasteful and degrading, however, I can be found enjoying the songs just like the girls that I work with. Does this make us a “bad” person or does this discredit the research that I do for Black girls? The answer is no! Joan Morgan in her text, *When Chicken Heads Come Home to Roast* raises a similar question as she describes her coming into her own feminism. She states “And how come no one ever admits that part of the reason women love hip-hop-as sexist as it is-is ‘cuz all that in-yo-face testosterone makes our nipples hard?” (Morgan, 1999, p. 58) While Morgan later situates her answer in relation to the differences that exist in feminism, I think that her question and response are valid and support my argument. Morgan (1999) answers that women who enjoy hip-hop music are not any less of a

woman, but the real debate should be one that addresses the fact that women are often times seen as victims and not simply women. Morgan had the desire to explore the complexities of being a Black woman, including those who love patriarchal hip-hop culture.

Morgan (1999) writes what she describes as a gray area in hip-hop where contrary women artist like, Lil'Kim and Queen Latifah, exist as being the "truth"(Morgan, p.62). That "truth" is that Black women and girls are complex and take on different roles but each are equally important even in hip-hop. Consequently, there is no singular cut-out-pattern of a real Black woman or girl. Women can participate in the movement of hip-hop without being the victim or a "passive dupe" (Brown, 2009). Whatever role Black girls decide to take on, rather if be that similar to a Queen Latifah or Lil Kim, their opinions and ideas are still very much valid in all spaces. Black women and girls do not just consume hip-hop they "do hip-hop" in their everyday lives and the stories that they tell.

Artist Gucci Mane has another popular song entitled I think I Love Her (2009) that can be used as a rebuttal for women and show how women in the industry are capable of "doing hip-hop". The lyrics are:

*Well, my name is Susie and Gucci think I love him*

*That sucka think I'm loyal but I fucks with all the hustlas*

*I be wit all the ballas,*

*I be at all the spots*

*I might be in yo' kitchen nigga cooking with yo' pops.*

Previous to these lyrics Gucci Mane has verses that refer to Susie as a bitch and liar, however, Susie provides this rebuttal in her above verse. When the hook comes on Gucci Mane states "I think I love her" and Susie gives a resounding "Nigga you don't love me". When this song

comes on in social settings women sing loud and boldly even replacing Susie's name with their own name. Susie's verses and chorus tells Gucci and men in particular that while they may believe that they have the last laugh it is critical to realize that women are potentially playing them. While the most important message is not that women should join men by retaliating, but that women should not be taken for granted or thought of as believing the conditions that men present them with. Now the flaw in this particular argument is that in the song Susie is really cocaine. So it is not that Susie is the female that Gucci can trust, Susie is Gucci's profit and moneymaker. Susie has access to all the spaces of "balla's and hustler's" because she is what they are distributing. This double meaning and alternative interpretation can be referred to as polysemic interpretation.

Polysemic interpretation states that there are multiple meanings that exist for a text and which can be interpreted differently for different audiences (Durham, 1999). Polysemy is seen by some scholars as a tool used by the "oppressors"; however, those who are meant to be oppressed resist the dominant meanings and draw on meanings that fit their needs and desires (Durham, 1999). Now rewind back to the social scene and women are still singing this song with conviction despite what the real meaning of the song. These women have resisted the intended message for the song and created their own. One that would empower and elevate them. Moreover, Gucci Mane's song and the reaction it gets from women shows that women love hip-hop, but really want to hear and find their voice within hip-hop.

Much like polysemic interpretation, "Check-In" provides Black girls who participate in SOLHOT to hear their voice in hip-hop through the stories they tell about their lived experience. "Check-In" privileges the voices of Black girls and acknowledges their role as creators in hip-hop. Black girls are not only influenced negatively by hip-hop, but they engage and interpret the

images presented through hip-hop in complex evaluations beyond bad and good. The Black girls and women in SOLHOT embody and live hip-hop in their everyday lives. It is hip-hop that is embodied when Black girls correct someone who mispronounces their name by stating, “get it right, get it tight”, as retold in Brown’s book *Black Girlhood Celebration* (2009). Additionally, hip-hop is embodied when Black girls create fictitious stories as a resistance to stereotypes adults may have of them. For this project ethnography was the best methodological method to collect the stories that Black girls create.

### CHAPTER 3 METHODS

I used an ethnographic interview approach in order to collect data. Ethnography is a common practice used amongst the social sciences and works through participation in the subject(s) lives. Ethnographers work to convince the reader through authenticity, plausibility, and criticality (Biddle & Locke 1993). According to Ortiz, “Ethnographic interviews give researchers unique insight into the lives and experiences of the individuals most affected by the educational problems and issues under study” (Ortiz, 2003, p. 35). It is through this participation that researchers are able to get a deep “immersion” (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995, p.2). Immersion is being with others to experience the space to see how they respond and experience the space for one’s self (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995, p.1). “First, the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it; usually the setting is not previously known in an intimate way. The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on” (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995, p.1). Consequently, using this approach one cannot be solely an observer or researcher in a setting.

This is very crucial in the work with youth and in this case Black girls. Black girls interact with so many people who wish to observe them microscopically, those who enter their space must be a participant first and their role as researcher must come secondary. I believe this in turn poses difficulty because you risk the chance of missing something. Because I wanted make sure I was engaged in the space during my time there I did not want to write field notes as if I was a researcher. In stead I relied on memory and wrote my field notes when the session ended. I recorded as much as I remembered, but there could have been details that I could have missed. This is one of the drawbacks and difficulties of ethnography.

I collected data Summer 2008 during the Ronald E. McNair Research Program. The Ronald E. McNair Research Program is an opportunity available to students of color who desire to obtain jobs as faculty members at a University or college. Through McNair I worked with Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown who is a professor in Gender and Women's Studies and Educational Policy Studies and SOLHOT. I spent 27 hours in the field and each session of SOLHOT we had approximately 17 participants.

The context in which I studied Black girlhood, and worked with Black girl participants in this study was Saving Our Lives Hearing Our Truths (SOLHOT). In SOLHOT participants included Black girls and women living in Champaign, Urbana, and Rantoul ranging from 11 to 42 years in age. Workshops and week-long groups were hosted over the course of two months and took place at a local public non-profit institution. I created (or co-facilitated) several prompts, which allowed participants to speak on the subject of hip-hop and Black girlhood. These prompts included "Contemporary Clark and Clark Doll Study", "What's the Script", and "I Am Not My Hair or Am I".

Data Collection and Discussion Prompts

**Prompt #1: Contemporary Clark and Clark Doll Study**

To engage the girls in conversation regarding hip-hop and beauty I created a more contemporary Clarke and Clarke doll study to present to the girls. First the girls were asked how they defined hip-hop. Second, the girls were asked to listen and view the music videos of female hip-hop artist which included Missy Elliot- *Pussy Cat*, Queen Latifah-U-N-I-T-Y, Lil Kim- How Many Licks, and Mc Lyte- Lyte as a Rock. Then, after each song the girls were asked several questions including: What is your interpretation of the songs? How did the song make you feel? Do you know or have you ever heard of the artist and/or song before? What is the song about? I

then presented the girls with a power point presentation of random images of famous Hip-hopartists, mainly those Hip-hopartists who received the benefits of mainstream air-play and promotion. Lastly, girls were then asked about their personal music selection and preferences.

### **Prompt #2: What's the Script?**

The next prompt I created led to a discussion of age and sexuality. In small groups, girls were asked to analyze the lyrics to "16 at War" by Karina Parisan. Based off this activity the girls went into a discussion that led into a conversation about sexuality and sexual scripts which stemmed from the article *Representin' in cyberspace: Sexual scripts, self definition, and Hip-hopculture in Black American adolescent girls' home pages* by Carla Stokes. To prevent the girls from exposing personal accounts in groups the girls were given scenarios and asked to label the women in the scenarios. Afterward, the girls were faced with the task of coming to a group consensus of definitions of the sexual scripts Virgin, Freak, Hoe, Pimpette, and Down Ass Bitch as documented by Stokes as functionally significant categories to Black girls' identity.

### **Prompt #3: I Am Not My Hair or Am I?**

The last prompt included an activity entitled "I am not my hair, or am I?" also allowed the girls to discuss the elements of beauty. The girls were given a worksheet to complete that asked them "What is beauty? What attributes make someone "beautiful"?, describe/draw what good hair looks like, describe/ draw what bad hair looks like, describe their own hair and share a memory about your hair, who or what do you think informs how we define beauty? In other words, who decides what counts as being pretty or beautiful?." In the session the documentary film "A Girl Like Me" by Kiri Davis was also watched and discussed.

During my summer research the information collected was received formally through the aforementioned prompts. I gained significant insight through informal conversations and

knowledge shared unrelated to the primary task. I also used this information as evidence to support my analysis. It is important to note that while many of the initial questions posed to participants were grounded in themes such as identity, socialization, and beauty, it was only after making hip-hop central that the context became conducive to learning about their lives and life experiences.

While the context of the summer research paper was rooted in the responses gained through the prompt activities, the storytelling that I focus on for this paper was grounded in the responses gained from “Check-In”. It is through this thesis that I focus specifically on the storytelling of Black girls and how this can be brought into the classroom and pedagogical practices.

## CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS

Throughout this paper I have discussed how “‘Check-In’” allows Black girls to find and express their voice through the movement of hip-hop.. Recall that ‘Check-In’ is a ritual done in SOLHOT at the beginning of every session. During ‘Check-In’ participants tell how their day went or share with the group what has taken place since the last time we met. ‘Check-In’ sets the tone of SOLHOT. It is ‘Check-In’ that allows the girls and women who participate to tell their stories and also (re)create stories as well. Since ‘Check-In’ operates like a cipher, the Black women and girls who participate not only create a space for themselves, but also challenge each other. Sometimes, based on my experience, this can be difficult because the space is very honest and so are the girls. If you try to mask who you really are the girls will call you out on it, resist and challenge you, in order to know your true intentions. Like hip-hop the girls speak back to what is said by others during ‘Check-In’ and they also tell stories of speaking to violence or racism that they encounter with parents, teachers, loved ones, and friends. Following are examples of ‘Check-Ins’ where girls chose to speak back to accounts that happened in SOLHOT and in their daily lives. The content and delivery of these stories highlight the girls as lyricist who simply tell it like it is.

*Stacey and Jordan*

*Stacey: Well for two weeks I was incarcerated in JDC with a whole bunch of fat people with braids. You gone eat your cornbread? Naw for real I wasn't going to say that um,*

*Jordan: (interrupts Jordan) I was going to say I got incarcerated for arson.*

*Stacey: Deadly! Deadly arson! I was lighting trees on fire and I was throwing...well really this isn't arson I was throwing the rocks in people's windows.*

*Jordan: I was going to say that we- me and friends, brought some Hennessey and then we put a match inside the bottle to see what it was going to do. Was it going to blow up? And then we accidentally sat one[bottle of Hennessey with lit match in it] too close to my friends house and then it like, it like burned the curtains off the wall*

*Stacey: and then I was going to go along with the story and see how many mean faces she was going to do until we said naw we was just playing.*

This example ‘Check In’ was a response of two girls to the presence of a home girl. With a vigilant eye they were aware of the body language and facial expressions of that home girl. Consequently, being the lyricist that they are, they developed a story to get a reaction from her as stated toward the end of the example. As Black girls, they resisted the stereotypes of how they are supposed to be and act and developed a very creative story to debunk these stereotypes and show that they are literarily inclined. This example depicts one ways Black girls in SOLHOT resist the opinions that others may have of them. So what does this mean that this happened in SOLHOT- a space you previously described as Frierien and not like public school (in the what is solhot section)

Given educational system’s failure to meet the need of students of color (cite or this readers like a generalization), finish sentence-be specific. It is through this assumption-name the assumption that Black girls learn to negotiate within these spaces. They are aware of story structure, providing not only an introduction, but also including a climax and resolution to the story. In “Check-In” this story line is delivered in the form of hip-hop. Hip-hop as an art is about captivating the audience with metaphors while telling a story about lived experiences or simply entertainment. The girls introduced their story above with something far-fetched like being incarcerated- how is that far fetched?, but go on to support it with even more details that

could potentially happen. While the girls provided this story for pure entertainment, it could possibly be the lived experience of some Black girls. In some respect the authors of the story are able to transpose lived experiences and fiction to reflect the life stories of Black girls across the spectrum, much like authors such as Sapphire. Sapphire in her text *Push* (1996) compiles various realities of Black girls into one master story to inform the audience of the struggles Black girls face and their resiliency. Additionally, Stacey and Jordan knew, given the past experience with this particular volunteer, that they would be judged and assumed to be very reckless-the most popular portrayal of Black girls. It is very interesting to see how the story builds but more so interesting to see how the girls determine when to end their story and how to use it in a beneficial way.

*Brittany*

*I'm here because my mom and my dad used to fight all the time and my mom used to get the crap smacked out of her sometime and just beat her and she started to fight back...*

Black girls like Brittany have stories to tell. With Brittany's proclamation during "Check-In" we are able to see her story and to see its resolution. While it is thought that children should not be exposed to certain situations such as abuse, Black girls are able to persevere and state, "I am here!!!" This statement alone holds the most power in the vignette above. I am here can be the beginning clause, ending clause, or complete sentence to a statement. For a Black girl to say I am here it means that despite all the adversity, trails, and stereotypes she still chooses to be present, seen, and heard. I am reminded of the statement "I am here...and what?!" Again the spirit of hip-hop resonates through these three words that could come as a challenge to an opponent. Much like in the other vignettes this vignette calls on an audience to

no longer disappear Black girls, but challenges these authorities by making them hear and understand their stories.

Again this vignette invokes the ideals of resistance much like the resistance Nina Simone (1991) talks about in her biography, *I Put a Spell on You*. Her resistance was discussed throughout the text and came through her music. As a classical trained musician when playing in certain venues she demanded the crowds undivided attention while playing. She resisted the disrespect of her craft and demanded respect for her music. Similarly Black girls demand respect for themselves within spaces by using their literary and verbal skills. Additionally, Nina showed her resistance through her revolutionary work “Mississippi Goddam.” Nina Simone had been going through life just existing until she realized how unfair and unjust the world was for her people. It was at that moment that Nina came to live and started her revolution. I believe Black girls also possess the power of the revolution; it just may take an experience like Brittany’s to realize it or a simple grooming of their talent.

Furthermore, “Check-In” can be seen as a forum that evokes accountability. When coming to “Check-In” you are to come with your honest self, like Brittany. Brittany felt comfortable telling the truth because no one would judge her and she trusted the people that were in the space. Other participants come to SOLHOT with these same expectations. It is in this same manner I believe others are able to excel and receive encouragement when they are not doing well. It is the “Check-In” that causes all participants to feel obligated to tell the truth so that it will not be a need to fabricate the truth. In SOLHOT there is no need to lie because it is thought they will all enter the space at the same level, being able and willing to learn from one another. “Check-In” celebrates Black girls in their entirety. We praise one another when we do well and encourage each other when we are not at our greatest potential. Through these ideals it only

make sense that participants say “SOLHOT saved my life”. Because SOLHOT holds each other accountability, the space is a lifesaver. It prevents some from making decisions that could be life altering and encourages others to keep up the good work.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Based on analysis of ‘Check In’ I developed the concept of ‘Flow-Storytelling’. ‘Flow-Storytelling’ is a theoretical concept that explains Black girls' usage of hip-hop to (re) create and tell their own story or narrative in any way they so choose. ‘Flow-storytelling’ is Black girls’ way of informing us, as the listeners, of the information that they deem crucial. Similar to hip-hop Black girls are able to rock the microphone with lyrical metaphors through the stories they tell or evoke emotions through dramatic dance and performances. Whatever it is, Black girls stay true to themselves and express the issues that are important to their communities and lives. It is through ‘Flow-storytelling’ that Black girls not only tell it how it is but they renounce judgment because after all it is their story and space. Not only is the performance “‘Check-In” from the introduction an example of ‘Flow-Storytelling’, but the reflections of Stacey, Jordan, and Brittany reflect that spaces like “‘Check-In” need to exist for Black girls to be actively participate and utilize hip-hop. Elaine Richardson states that “storytelling remains one of the most powerful language and literacy practices that Black women use to convey their special knowledge” (1993, p. 82). I would that Black girls also use story telling to engage this special knowledge, which happens in the cipher -“‘Check-In”

The scholarship of Elaine Richardson and Gwendolyn Pough helps ground the ideology behind ‘Flow-Storytelling’. I argue that ‘Flow-Storytelling’ acts as the framework that guides “‘Check-In” and ‘bringing wreck’ as presented by Pough. In this sense Black girls and women utilize ‘Flow-Storytelling’ in the way in which they tell the stories they tell. Furthermore, ‘bringing-wreck’ or “‘Check-In” are not independently exclusive to one group in that Black girls and women can both utilize “‘Check-In” as a space to share and they can also ‘bring-wreck’ in their deliverance of “‘Check-In”.

Elaine Richardson's work on African American literacies also informs the theoretical framework 'Flow-Storytelling'. She states in *African American Literacies*, "multiple consciousness plays a significant role in the development of African American female language and literacy practices" (1993, p. 82). She goes on to define these literacy practices as "storytelling, performative silence, strategic use of polite and assertive language, style shifting/code switching, indirection, steppin'/rhyming, and preaching" (1993, p. 82). Consequently, the ways that girls respond during their 'Check-in' are informed by their lived experience and shared amongst one another. Sharing their lived experience is very critical to the process of "Check-In" because it allows the girls to contribute their authentic voice and personal experiences. Their contribution to "Check-In" embodies the ways in which they are most comfortable.

Not only does 'Flow-storytelling' need to exist in spaces like SOLHOT, but 'Flow storytelling' can be a way to engage students in classrooms and a way in which Black girls and women will always be included in conversations about hip-hop. In classrooms teachers can use 'Flow Storytelling' as a way to gauge the thoughts of their students. Combining Richardson's ideology of African American literacies and allowing students to tell you how they are doing creates the cipher of "Check-In". For instance, in both middle school and high school at the beginning of class we would have to complete bell ringers or free writes. Perhaps those free writes and bell ringers, although about assigned topics, can be written in whatever form the student feels and presented during "Check-In". This practice then privileges what the student brings to the classroom. At the end of the year these free writes could be compiled into a booklet and the students would see how creative assigned topics could be. Of course students would be explained the concept of 'Flow Storytelling' and how it would be used at the end of the year, but

teachers may get a better response especially if students are able to see that the stories they create are valuable and recorded.

Furthermore, with the concept of 'Flow Storytelling' I believe that Black girls would not be excluded from the conversation of hip-hop. Much like polysemic interpretation 'Flow Storytelling' will allow Black women and voice to be heard, but also respond to hip-hop with their own stories, commentary, and interpretation. Black girls and women have always and will always matter and 'Flow Storytelling' provides the platform for them to ensure that others are aware of their significance as well

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Black girls do not just consume hip-hop they “do hip-hop” in how they tell stories, evaluate images, and create new images in their own words. The ‘Check-In’ example given in the analysis section of this project is a representation how Black women and girls (re)tell their own stories in ways in which everyone can contribute. While the ‘Check-In’ was initially one person’s account, others were able to chime in with their advice. It is through ways such as “Check-In” that Black girls “do hip-hop” by being able to grab the audience in ways in which only they know how. Black girls tell their own story and give their own opinion in this way and are not censored, they simple tell it how it is.

This thesis is important because it provides a more complicated way to view hip-hop and its affect and influence on Black girls. Music is central to the lives of youth and since it will remain long after time it would be more productive to spend energy investigating the ways youth, particularly Black girls, use hip-hop in their everyday lives positively and creatively. Although, hip-hop images are hypersexual Black girls see beyond this and use hip-hop to tell and (re)create stories. If we begin having conversations that ask Black girls how they use hip-hop and accept the response(s) they give we may find the good influences and readings Black girls have of hip-hop.

Future research that can grow from this project can take an in-depth look at the ways in which ‘Flow Storytelling’ informs pedagogical practices. How can rituals like ‘Check-In’ better inform institutions such as schools or prisons? Perhaps giving youth more spaces to express themselves without judgment or expectation may even reduce their likelihood to rebel. Expanding this research can also take in to consideration the role performance plays in the stories Black girls tell. This idea stems from how the girls draw on hip-hop to tell these stories

and how theatrical and animated the girls can be when delivering their 'Check-Ins' just like hip-hop artist.

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