"Can't Tote No Gun but I'm Strapped Right Now"

Hip-Hop as Language and Refuge Amongst Low-Income Black Youth

by

Gabrielle M. Sherba

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honors Degree in Major with Distinction
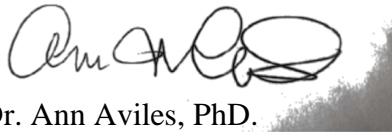
Spring 2022

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Approved:

Dr. Ann Aviles, PhD.
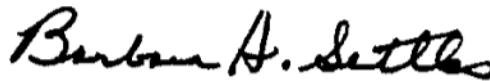Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Yasser A. Payne, Ph.D.

Approved:

Dr. Yasser Arafat Payne, PhD.
Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice/Africana Studies

Approved:

Dr. Barbra H. Settles, PhD.
Department of Human Development and Family Sciences

Approved:

Michael Chajes, Ph.D.
Dean, University Honors Program

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This project seeks to (1) highlight the importance of hip-hop/rap music in the lives of low-income Black youth, (2) trace low-income Black youths' internal processing of hip-hop/rap music and (3) demonstrate the communicative potential of hip-hop/rap in understanding the lived experiences of low-income Black youth. To gain insight on low-income Black youths' interaction with hip-hop, a select group of low-income Black youth from the Riverside neighborhood in Wilmington, DE participated in an online survey and semi-structured follow-up call pertaining to their hip-hop/rap listening. The youths' responses indicate that hip-hop is a vehicle for youth to (1) identify and process their lived experiences and (2) engage in healthy emotional regulation. In addition, lyrical hip-hop translations provided by youth, alongside contemporary sociolinguistic framings of hip-hop language, reveal phenomenological complexities in low-income Black youth's lived experiences that are otherwise ineffable. Centrally, the study connects the role of hip-hop among low-income Black youth to its linguistic potential and offers hip-hop as a valuable tool for youth-centered researchers and educators.

Keywords: Black youth, Hip-Hop, Hip-Hop Nation Language, Wilmington, DE, YPAR

Chapter 1

"CAN'T TOTE NO GUN BUT I'M STRAPPED RIGHT NOW" HIP-HOP AS

REFUGE AND LANGUAGE AMONGST LOW-INCOME BLACK YOUTH

I grew up going to the local rec center in Whitesboro, NJ on weekends and for summer camp. We played UNO on worn-in couches and dodgeball in the unairconditioned gym. My cousin, Bird Man, was a counselor and my Uncle Vince used to be the Program Director. My involvement in the Wilmington-based YPAR (youth participatory action research) Riverside Housing Program held at the Center for Structural Equity in Wilmington brought me back to that place - the worn-in couches and snack pack chips were just the same.[1] Though I was comfortable at the center, I was anxious about navigating my position with the youth. As a young Black girl, the community center was a lifeline for me, but as a student researcher I found it difficult to straddle the line between peer and mentor. My home and economic life is much more stable now than it was when I ran about the rec center myself. Even if I drive a hooptie, it is still a car with wheels.[2] And I may be in college on scholarship, but I am

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[1] Youth Participatory action research (YPAR) is a youth-centered methodology that engages youth in the research process to foster skills and knowledge and aide youth in developing critical consciousness (Ginwright, S., & James, T., 2002). The specifics of the YPAR program are included in Chapter 2.

[2] A "hooptie" is an African American Language (AAL) word that roughly translates to an old, slightly rusted, sedan vehicle; the car likely has a name.

still a University of Delaware student. But most pointedly, I may be Black, but my mom is white. The youth fairly perceived differences in me.

While designing curriculum for the YPAR Riverside Housing Program, I found passion in researching the role of Black arts in crafting shared identities and promoting critical consciousness among youth. As such, part of my role as a student researcher/mentor included engaging with youth in a three-week research unit comprised of identity development workshops. The goal of the workshops was to demonstrate how music, visual arts, and other creative means can be used to talk about community-level issues, and to offer these modes as options for their end-of-program projects. Though I was confident in the content, I really wanted to connect with the youth in a deeper way and my attempts prior to that point seemed to fall flat. The first activity I put together was entitled "The Music in You."[3] Prior, the youth were having a hard time connecting their own lives and neighborhoods to theoretical concepts, like structural racism and housing inequity, that we talked about in group, and I felt that music may provide an opportunity for them to identify broader social problems they relate to within an area of their expertise. Every day they filmed TikTok dances after the end of the program (and sometimes during); music brought out the joy, personality, and expressiveness in them. Some of the youth also had ties to local rap artists; it was clear that music played a central role in the youths' lives.

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[3] Included as Appendix C

For the activity, they were instructed to choose a song that they "vibe[d] with," pick out a few lines or a verse that resonated with them, play a clip of their selected song, and share-out connections between their lives and the songs they highlighted to the group. They were also asked about how the songs made them feel, who else may "like" the song, and if they saw topics covered in the YPAR group, including violence, housing, racism, and Blackness, reflected in the messages of the songs. We didn't mind that we had an issue with them talking over each other and getting frustrated because they all *wanted* to talk about their songs.

The youth presented hip-hop/rap songs including Coi Leray's (2021) "No More Parties" and Lil Durk's (2020) "248." They pointed to lines such as Leray's "Fuck everybody, I can't trust nobody/I ain't even really tryna party" and Durk's "I seen so many young niggas lose they lives/ That's why when I go to a funeral today, I don't even cry/ And that real shit run in my veins" (2021, 2020). From there, we engaged in an emotionally and educationally productive conversation, for both the youth and us researchers, on what experiences are most prevalent/impactful and what emotions these experiences produced. Talking directly about witnessing violence, mistreatment in school, and family incarceration is painful and taxing, especially for youth with little tangible agency. The use of hip-hop as a catalyst in these conversations helped ease the potentially isolating experience of trauma and narrating it.

Our conversation made obvious that standard English is culturally insufficient as a means of communication for Black youth and is largely inaccessible to them, as

low-income Black youth are disproportionately poorly taught (Startz, 2016). But I noticed that in the songs they chose, they tended to pick out lyrics that were connected to an identifiable feeling or specific experience. The music not only allowed them to identify with and find connections between the concepts and systems we were engaging within the group, but it also provided youth-relevant language to share intimate and vulnerable experiences related to violence, family instability, and trauma.

Concurrently, the youth vetted us, as researchers involved in the neighborhood/community but not living within it; By showing that we understood and connected with their selected songs and lived experiences, they chose to open and "claim" their lives. The youth's relationship with hip-hop, as a culture, genre, coping method, and language are the focus of this project. The inclusion of the line "can't tote no gun but I'm strapped right now," from NBA YoungBoy's "Heart & Soul," in the title offers a glimpse at the power hip-hop instills in youth and hints to its social function, which will be further elaborated upon in the literature review.

The presiding research questions explored in this project are as follows: What is the significance of hip-hop/rap music in the lives of Black youth residing in the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, DE? How do Black youth residing in the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, DE interact with and internalize lyrics of self-selected hip-hop-rap music? What can the relationship between Black youth residing in the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, DE and hip-hop/rap music tell researchers about low-income Black youths' hip-hop engagement? And what is the

possible value in endorsing hip-hop as an independent language, Hip-Hop Nation

Language (HHNL), for low-income Black youth?

Chapter 2

RELEVANT BACKGROUND

The Wilmington YPAR Riverside Housing Program

Participatory action research (PAR) developed from the critical questioning of traditional sociological research methods and is often attributed to, or considered as pioneered by, Paulo Freire (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). The methodology acknowledges that research is inherently exploitative, especially so when academic "experts" control the narrative, the conducting and distribution of how people under study live (Anyon et. al, 2018; LPC Consulting Associates, 2012). It is a radical approach in asking researchers to put studies, often systemically oppressed, communities and their voices before their own. PAR is built around four key tenets: (1) inclusion of communities at study in the research process – the development, conducting, and production of research, (2) authority over research is shared between community members and researchers with each recognizing the others' values and perspectives, (3) recognition of the value and legitimacy of the perspectives of the individuals and communities at study and (4) research develops into the enactment of positive social change guided by individuals representative of the community (Anyon et. al, 2018; LPC Consulting Associates, 2012).

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) evolved from the critical approach to research laid out by PAR but incorporates further critical questioning of traditional sociological research methods' prejudice against "unruly youth" and dismissal of youth perspectives (Anyon et. al, 2018; Stevens et al.). YPAR emphasizes the PAR

tenet of the enactment of positive social change in the community by encouraging youth to be civically engaged, to contribute to the health of their communities, develop critical consciousness, and learn research and educational skills largely withheld from youth (Ginwright, 2008). Ultimately, the goal of YPAR is to empower youth, particularly youth disproportionately exposed to and highly impacted by social toxins (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ginwright et al., 2002). The Wilmington YPAR Riverside Housing Project employed YPAR methodology, informed also by the specific qualifications of and considerations of Street PAR (Payne, 2013; Payne & Brown, 2010), as a means of engaging low-income Black youth from the inner-city Riverside neighborhood in Wilmington, DE as the neighborhood undergoes institutionally influenced community redevelopment.

Riverside is highly affected by local conditions of structural inequality; access to quality education, healthcare, social services, and employment is sparse (Payne, 2013; Kurz, 2021). REACH (Redevelopment, Education And Community Health) Riverside is a project that extends the national revitalization and reinvestment model of the Purpose Built Communities (PBC) network, which is meant to provide community leaders access to resources and local partner organizations (REACH Riverside, 2022; PBC, 2022). The process of community change under the PBC model is advertised as locally focused and guided by the neighborhood. However, given the historic tumultuous cycles of disinvestment the Riverside neighborhood has experienced, warranted mistrust and skepticism towards the REACH Riverside project could limit community influence over the direction of neighborhood change.

The Wilmington YPAR Riverside Housing Project, spearheaded by Dr. Ann Aviles as the primary investigator, was designed to equip youth of Riverside with the knowledge and research/civil engagement skills to be active and empowered community participants during this process. The group of around 10 Black youths met twice a week for two-hour sessions for roughly six months during which the youth were paid $10/hour in recognition of the youth's "experts" in their own lived experiences within the Riverside community, and their real need for employment and pay. Workshops on structural inequality, structural violence, youth participatory action research, redlining, restricted racial covenants, and various other housing topics such as local and national housing laws and regulations, and other related research topics were designed to support youth in their development of critical language, framings and analysis connected to their lived experiences within Riverside, especially during the REACH Riverside redevelopment process. As previously stated, identity development workshops emphasizing the utility of Black arts in social justice education were included in the youth's research background. In line with the YPAR methodology, the youth produced educational video clips on the social media platform TikTok to contribute to public education on housing inequality and demonstrate their developed research skills.[4] This current project was born from the interactions, noted in the introduction, this author had with the youth as part of the Wilmington YPAR program.

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[4] The full IRB proposal detailing the specifics of this program are included as Appendix C.

Historical Tracing of Hip-Hop/Rap Music

The purpose of this section is to dispel misconceptions concerning the history and value of hip-hop itself and provide relevant background information essential to hip-hop as a cultural tool. Black performance-based art forms, dating back to the earliest adaptations of African ritual performance and practice following the first landing of a slave ship on North American shores in 1619, have been forcibly cloaked and shackled to the bottom caste, dismantled, and dismissed as worthless, and, further, dangerous (Keyes, 2002). Each outcropping of Black music that has leaked into the mainstream has been condemned, and then enclosed upon by white opportunists following the money trail ripe with Black exploitation (Morris, 2019). Manipulated and misleading research, such as one study that helped bolster the claim that hip-hop causes youth alcohol consumption and eruptive violence, stereotypically links Black arts to criminality (Gordon, 2006). But hip-hop is *not* home to the fictionalized super predators, welfare queens, and crack babies.

The genocidal conditions within Black post-civil rights era realities of the late 60s and 70s forced an evolutionary jump in the development of Black music style: hip-hop. The South Bronx is generally accepted as the birthplace of the movement that took over the music world (Keyes, 2002; Bradley & Dubois, 2010; Blanchard, 1999; Alridge & Stewart, 2005). Centered on the urban poor Black experience and street aesthetic, the early culture of hip-hop, cultivated and embodied by Black youth, reflects the displacement, disinvestment, disembodiment embedded within the heart of Black life as Vietnam, the War on Drugs, and back-to-back economic recessions

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rocked Black individuals and communities (Payne & Gibson, 2009). Though the circumstances for the evolution of modern hip-hop date back mere decades, hip-hop as an art form dates back centuries (Mautsby, 1990). Hip-hop was not born from *a lack* of African or Black American musical expression and authentic identity; the genre is not baseless.

Hip-hop, and rap as a performance style, has deep African diasporic roots (Maultsby, 1990; Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009; Blanchard, 1999). Keyes (2002) and Payne & Gibson (2009) argue that rapping follows in the African bardic tradition dating back centuries. The role of the bard, sometimes referred also to as the griot, is located at the nexus of storytelling, meaning making, cultural translating, and recording history (Keyes, 2002; Blanchard, 1999)[5]. As such, the bard is a central and respected figure; the role of the rapper is in line with this practice (Keyes, 2002). Just as the bard acts as a cultural translator within the traditional African context, so too does the rapper. Moreover, stylistic, and elemental Africanism, namely style of delivery, mechanics of delivery, and sound quality, within hip-hop/rap music point to the evolutionary history of the genre (Maultsby, 1990). The creation of "blue notes," modeled after African musical concepts, and the application of the African concepts of outer and inner time to hip-hop also link the genre to its African roots (Maultsby, 1990; Keyes, 2002).[6]

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[5] In Ancient West African culture, a griot is a wiseman whose purpose is to unify the community, through tribe-wide psychospiritual gatherings, and carry on the stories and lessons of the elders (Keyes, 2002).

[6] For discussion on blue notes see Keyes, 2002, 187; For a discussion on time (Keyes, 2002, 140)

In contrast to the significance of the rapper, the bard, within Black communities as a leader and a communicator, Americans demonize the image of the rapper (Reyna, Brandt & Viki, 2009). In a 2009 study examining the relationship between anti-rap attitudes and racial prejudice, researchers found that holding anti-rap sentiments is linked to carrying out personal and political acts of discrimination against Black individuals (Reyna, Brandt & Viki, 2009). Negative attitudes towards hip-hop and rap music, and prejudices against rappers themselves, distract from the critiques central to the form and add to the systems of oppression that fuel its expansion. Further, those who hold anti-rap attitudes are more likely unable to understand the artist's central purpose, their lyrics, and their vision (Keyes, 2002). To fully grasp the potential in using hip-hop/rap music to connect and understand the lived experiences of low-income inner-city Black youth, these prejudices must be dismantled.[7]

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[7] Historically, "rap" refers to a style of music delivery in which words and poems were spoken over a simplified beat. Hip-hop music evolved, largely in part, from this form (Keyes, 2002). Hip-hop and rap are colloquially interchangeable, thus the terms are used interchangeably in this work.

Chapter Three

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Black youth between the ages of 10-34 years old are 2.6 times more at risk for homicide than white youth of the same age (Sheath et. al, 2018). With targets on their backs, Black youth, particularly those who are low-income and/or street-identified, are foxes in white America's chicken pen.[8] Mass incarceration, poverty-induced substance abuse, and *dis*-employment abduct Black parents, separating them from their children and leaving the youth more exposed to the effects of structural inequity (Halloran, 2019; Payne & Brown, 2016; Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). Disinvested schools employ teachers with statistically less training and discriminatory attitudes regarding Black youth, particularly Black boys, and do not offer refuge or support to the youth (Low, 2011; Payne & Brown, 2016). Further, Black youth are disproportionately exposed to domestic and neighborhood violence caused and exacerbated by structural forms of violence (NCTSN, 2019; Payne, 2013; Payne, Hitchens & Chambers, 2017). Homicide is the leading cause of death for Black boys and men aged 1-44 years old, from infancy to middle aged in developmental terms, and the second leading cause of death for Black boys is suicide (CDC, 2016; Boyd et al., 2022).

Exposure to, and the threat of violence are major stressors in the lives of Black youth and contribute greatly to the disparity in Black and white youth's long-term outcomes (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019; NCTSN, 2019). Consequently, Black youth and

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[8] Street-identified refers to individuals who engage in the lifestyle and identity of street-life (Payne, 2001, 2005).

adults demographically experience the highest rates of medicalized trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD, for longer periods of time, ranging farther back in childhood (Halloran, 2019; NCTSN, 2019). Despite these circumstances, and despite past appraisal theory and social comparison process literature suggesting the opposite, Black youth consistently demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem than any other racial ethnic group (Bachman et al., 2011; Mead, 1934, as cited in Bachman et al., 2011). Indeed, two meta-analyses and a large-scale longitudinal study of self-esteem among Black youth produced findings to verify this (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002; Bachman et al., 2011). Studies have found that parental influence over positive racial pride is correlated with higher self-esteem among Black youth, and Black girls specifically (Bachman et al., 2011; Hughes et al., 2006; Tribble et al., 2019).

The youth involved in this study reside in the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, DE. Youth in Wilmington, Delaware, the city once labeled Murdertown USA, face these circumstances arguably more than Black youth located elsewhere due to record high murder per capita rates (Barrish, 2021). Yet, Black youth in Wilmington demonstrate high levels of positive esteem and loyalty/love for their communities, as is consistent with comparable current research (Payne, 2013). However, it needs to be noted that in 2020 shootings increased 50% in Wilmington; in 2021, residents suffered through the city's deadliest year in gun violence (Eichmann, 2021; Barrish, 2021). The People's Report, a community needs assessment of the

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Eastside and Southbridge neighborhoods just north of Riverside in Wilmington, found

that most participants report losing at least one family member or friend to gun

violence (Payne, 2013). In the neighborhoods surveyed, 64% of participants were

unemployed; the school dropout rate is reportedly 60% in Wilmington, broadly

(Payne, 2013). However, research revealed that, though gun violence is prevalent in

the city, it does not define the cite, according to residents surveyed (Payne, 2013).

Compassion and humanity are endorsed by the community as representative of the

Southbridge and Eastside neighborhoods in Wilmington, DE (Payne, 2013).

Regarding music listening, Black youth consume the most media of all

measured racial ethnic and age demographic (Nielson, 2022). A national online survey

of 499 self-identified Black youth reported listening to nearly 5 hours of hip-hop/rap

music per day (Anyiwo, Watkins & Rowley, 2021). In the same study, Black youth

were found to be influenced positively by listening to hip-hop/rap music towards

activism and community engagement (Anyiwo, Watkins & Rowley, 2021). Greenberg

& Mastro (2008) found Black youth identify with hip-hop artists more than artists of

any genre, which offers a front matter explanation as to why Black youth consume

high quantities of hip-hop/rap music. From an economic perspective on hip-hop,

Goldman Sachs reports that R&B and hip-hop are the music industry's most

consumed genres (Hale, 2019). The firm estimates that the genres will generate

$130.5 billion in revenue by 2030 (Hale, 2019).

Chapter Four

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hip-hop was born in the hearts of America's underbelly: disregarded Black youth. It is a street-oriented movement, originating from the South Bronx, led by Black youth with the mission of bringing the voice and words of their community to the forefront (Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009; St. James Encyclopedia, 2018). As such, hip-hop/rap music is an archive of a nearly limitless number of sources. Scholars within a multitude of disciplines studying hip-hop culture have used lyrical analysis, an ethnographic approach, as a tool that allows researchers to identify and attempt to understand the experiences of low-income street-identified Black individuals and communities (Glenn, 2020; Nama, 2010; Vito, 2014; Payne & Gibson, 2009; Randolph, 2018; Williams, 2020).

Youth Culture and Hip-Hop's Social Function

Structural and socio-cultural motivators of violence that exist within Black inner-city neighborhoods plague Black youth, inducing heightened levels of fear and posing an impending threat to them (Kubrin, 2005; Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009; Ginwright, 2004).[9] Every day Black youth are policed in discriminatory schools and on their own neighborhood blocks by white authority figures (Kupchik, 2022; Payne, Hitchens & Chambers, 2017). Specifically, Black youth in Delaware are over

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[9] This will be discussed further in the demographic profile.

three times more likely to get suspended than white students (Startz, 2016). Recent literature on school suspensions suggests that, in addition to the detrimental impact of suspensions on youth themselves, the suspensions also produce lasting impacts on Black families, schools and communities, and contribute to the cycle of Black family separation (Kupchik, 2022).

In this environment, the need for a bard – a voice, a prophet, a messiah – is filled by the rapper (Blanchard, 1999; Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009). Vetted by b-boys and b-girls, the social elite of hip-hop culture/arts that act as cultural street critics, rappers provide Black youth with public authentic representations of their experiences (Payne & Gibson, 2009; Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Blanchard, 1999; Keyes, 2002). Hip-hop is what the Black youth shape it to be, what the collective and individual experience of the youth is (Payne & Gibson, 2009; Ginwright, 2004; Alim, 2006). Additionally, hip-hop culture revolves around the street experience (Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009; Alim, 2006). Staying authentic to street epistemology, the code of the streets, determines the value of the rapper in the minds of hip-hop youth (Keyes, 2002; Kubrin, 2005). Hip-hop allowed Black youth to dissolve white America's value system in favor of one shaped by the youth that does not assume universal Black criminality (Ginwright, 2004; Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Blanchard, 1999). Nama (2010) validates this when he argues hip-hop Black youth, Black youth who embrace and participate in hip-hop culture, reject the narrative that respectability brings freedom and instead "embrace the ghetto as a site and source of social identity." Scholars have also argued that hip-hop, particularly street-conscious hip-hop,

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encourages Black nationalism, radicalism, and cultural expression (Pyatak, 2011). As opposed to internalizing racism, community building alternatives exist within the sphere of hip-hop.

According to Payne & Gibson (2008), hip-hop is a site of resilience for Black youth. Sites of resilience (SOR) theory is a framework that argues street-life produces psychological and physical spaces of resilience that allow for the encouragement of community and survival (Payne, 2005). Further, as a SOR, hip-hop offers refuge from the discriminatory, punishing systems Black communities and individuals endure or are forced to navigate daily. In Nas' "Life's A Bitch," from the transcendent and quintessential album *Illmatic*, he validates the cultural relevance of SOR when he states "Keepin' this Schweppervescent street ghetto essence inside us/ 'Cause it provides us with the proper insight to guide us" (Nas, 1994). Though not articulated within the same framework, many scholars share the opinion that hip-hop acts as an opportunity space and alternative individual and communal identity (Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009; Sims, 2011; Alim, 2006; Morrell et al., 2013; Dover & Pozdol, 2016; Thomas, 2019). McFerran et al. (2015) found that youth aged 15 to 18 years old who displayed higher levels of psychological distress, such as the extreme stress endured by low-income Black youth, positively correlates with music listening. Given that low-income Black youth listen to the most music of any age or race suggests that Black youth use hip-hop listening as a coping mechanism, practicing resilience.

Genre Diversity

Though hip-hop as a movement has shared purposes, hip-hop music is regionally, sonically, and aesthetically diverse. Prominent and widely consumed subgenres of hip-hop today include trap, drill, addict rap, and emo rap, as evidenced by the dominance of artists in these genres among most streamed artists of 2020 (Zhang, 2020). The trap subgenre of Hip-hop originated in Atlanta, Georgia in the early 2000s pioneered by prominent rappers including T.I., Gucci Mane, and Young Jeezy (now, Jeezy). In messaging, trap is oriented towards narrating the physical and psychological space of the "trap," the drug house, and the "game," engaging in the sale of illicit drugs and substances (Pointer, 2021; St. James Encyclopedia, 2018; T.I., 2003). Economic survival and family/community loyalty are factors indicated by artists within trap as precursors to involvement in drug dealing (Kaluža, 2018).

While the sounds of drill and trap music can overlap, they are distinct in their central organizing themes and regional inflections, cadence, and flow. Drill music, originating in Chicago, Illinois, centers the violence experienced and perpetuated by low-income Black young people living within the conditions of structural poverty, and the emotional responses these circumstances trigger (St. James Encyclopedia, 2018; Stacey, 2020). Unfortunately, the drill hip-hop world is characterized and stigmatized by the violence portrayed in drill artists' lyrics and their deaths, often in the form of gun violence (Musicians' Union, 2020). Drill has revived the moral panic over the danger of hip-hop music (Davies, 2021). However, just as the subgenres of hip-hop

that came before, drill reflects the lived experiences of the artists—young low-income Black men.

Addict rap and emo rap are, in most cases, very similar as they both center on mental illness, specifically depression and anxiety, and are also musically explorative, particularly of the rock genre (Stacey, 2020). Both popularly emerged during the mid-late 2010s and have become increasingly popular (Kornhaber, 2021). The key difference between them is emo rap does not necessarily include or reference substance use/abuse, whereas addict rap heavily features narration detailing heavy drug use (Stacey, 2020).

The Hip-Hop Nation, Lyrical Analysis & Youth Work

Hip-hop has been dissected by researchers in specialties ranging from Classical Musical Theory to Legal Studies to Global Policy. However, though hip-hop has garnered growing attention within academia, studies focused on lyrical analysis often, but not always, fail to center the perspectives and language of the demographic at study (Payne, 2015). These projects tend to be artist-centered; the methodology employed focuses first on exploring the artist's personal life experience and following that up by connecting the artist to an ambiguous, or assumed universal, "Black experience" (Randolph, 2018; Belle, 2014; Glenn, 2020). This disconnect is a flaw in the literature and it is dangerous. The consensus of much of this body of literature blatantly suggests that the conditions of structural poverty result in the breakdown of moral values and social identities among Black individuals and communities (Belle,

2014; Richardson & Scott, 2002). This perspective creates the space for stereotyping and discrimination which further opens the door to discriminatory acts and practices (Reyna, Brandt, & Viki, 2009). Hip-hop, according to renowned Hip-Hop Nation sociolinguist H. Samy Alim, is an African American Language (AAL) dialect that researchers outside of hip-hop culture cannot translate. Further, Skitolsky (2020) describes this inability of "goodwill" white scholars to adequately translate or communicate relevant themes in Black life and culture as *dis-articulation*. For researchers to have concrete and relevant insights into representations of Blackness, they must be led by "real" people with insights into hip-hop and Black culture with "real" connections to the music and the ability to understand and do the work to translate hip-hop.

The Hip-Hop Nation (HHN) is the collective peoples and activities within the world of hip-hop (Alim, 2004). Everyone immersed within the hip-hop world, from MCs to the Black youth who propel them, is part of the culture, language, and spirit of hip-hop (Alim, 2004)[10]. The HHN lives within the physical and psychological bounds of the HHN and, as such, are the foremost experts on hip-hop culture and narrating the HHN (Payne, 2013). Artists, and the HHN Black youth, act as street ethnographers, each song and album is a "go-along," an ethnographic methodology framed around the subject's everyday experience with organic questions and conversations arising from

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[10] Emcees (MCs), master of ceremonies, are rap artists traditionally accompanied by a DJ and, possibly, beatboxers (Keyes, 2002, 1, 40).

the interaction (Kusenbach, 2003). Hip-Hop's most core tenet is to capture the lived experiences of the HHN; the internal ideological conversation between the listener and the artist are the interview (Keyes, 2002; Payne & Gibson, 2009). This approach, which will be utilized within this study, privileges Black youth, hip-hop artists, and the HHN, entirely, in validating hip-hop music as a legitimate means of scholarship that produces credible and supported arguments about the lived experiences of those within the HHN.

Though not in the practice of street ethnography, lyrical qualitative analysis and similarly framed hermeneutic approaches are popular methodologies when studying the lived experiences of Black youth and adults (Payne, 2015; Vito, 2015). Three factors to explain this are: cultural relevance, convenience, and mass appeal. The historical, communicative, and meaning-making roles played by and at work within hip-hop, as elaborated upon previously, validate hip-hop music as a legitimate and important medium of study. Hip-hop is prime for secondary analysis because it is expansively abundant and easily accessible. Additionally, it is extremely popular in both national and international contexts and attracts attention (Hale, 2019; Morgan and Bennett, 2011). Hip-hop and R&B grossed $62 billion in 2017, and the upward trend is only climbing higher (Hale, 2019). From a personal perspective, American-based researchers will have had personal interactions with the genre, whether they be perceived as positive or negative, and this makes analysis seem simple. As will be demonstrated, this is not the case.

In the essay collection *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's Illmatic*, Adilifu

Nama, the 2012 American Book Award winner for his work *Super Black*, pieces

together the plethora of emblematic auditory images, sounds, and narrations of hip-

hop history and culture in Nas's "The Genesis." He argues that Nas's sampling of the

canonical film *Wild Style* guides the listener to the rapper's argument about the

devolution of hip-hop while signifying its purpose as a culture, an archive, and a

revolution (Nama, 2010). Nama claims, in his central argument beyond "The

Genesis," that hip-hop's purpose is to offer the possibility of "transcending" white

supremacy and the life it ascribes Black people (2010). While Nama succeeds in

deconstructing the notion that hip-hop is valueless and in offering a rich historical

reading of "The Genesis," he does not firmly connect his analysis to the lived

experience of Black youth or any specific population. Instead, he connects "The

Genesis" to the cultural world of hip-hop, and, through this, he makes inferences about

the lives of the Black youth that embody it and their responses to the music (Nama,

2010). He does not cite sources documenting the lives of the Black hip-hopping youth

that he frequently gestures to in his argument. Thus, though it is abundant with hip-

hop knowledge and does offer a sound reading of "The Genesis," it cannot be said that

his argument is truly reflective of the relationship Black youth have with hip-hop

today.

    Similarly, though with far less historical and culturally relevant support,

Samuel Glenn uses a lyrical analysis of Chance the Rapper's track "Finish

Line/Drown" to discuss Christian hip-hop as a budding genre in his thesis "Your

Favorite Rapper's a Christian Rapper" (2020). The foundation of his argument is rooted in theological theory and extensive biographical research on Chance (Glenn, 2020). In his analysis, he traces Chance's personal journey from active addiction and depression to sobriety and Christianity, using Chance's religious arc as an example of the potential of Christian hip-hop (2020). Glenn makes mention of the impact of race and the social identities that Chance navigates alongside Christianity, but the author's focus fails to stray far from interpreting biblical allusions and Chance's wordplay. The author's lack of discussion of the broader social context Chance comes from as a Black man from Chicago, and what specifically this entails, restricts the argument's validity or utility in understanding the relationship between Black youth, hip-hop, and Christianity.

Within the body of works using hip-hop lyrical analysis to understand the lived experiences of Black youth, there are also scholars who reinforce stereotyped images of Blackness that are amplified and exaggerated in mainstream hip-hop. In "When Men Give Birth to Intimacy: The Case of Jay-Z's *4:44*," Antonia Randolph (2018) argues that Jay-Z's vulnerability regarding his relationship infidelity opens the space for Black men to be honest with each other about their insecurities and masculinity. While Randolph's reading of *4:44* is favorable, the argument is invisibly structured around the notion that Black men and Black masculinity are toxic (2018). Randolph legitimately considers Black men's supposed infidelity and promiscuity as a real feature and flaw of Black men, specifically (2018). Further, the research on male behavior that is used to frame Black men's relationship behaviors and intimacy are

studies conducted on majority white samples, revealing Randolph's assumption that the masculinities of white and Black men are the same (2018).

Interpreting counternarratives occupies a sizable portion of the literature conducting lyrical analysis on hip-hop. Williams (2020) explores J. Cole's album *K.O.D.*, his response to the rise of the addict rap subgenre, as a counternarrative to the mainstream hip-hop that glorifies drug addiction. Though Williams discusses the social factors experienced by Black men, and his discussion is in part focused on the lives and struggles of Black men, again, his approach to understanding the demographic of Black men comes through a secondary lyrical analysis (2020). J. Cole, as a popular but not street-affiliated rapper, is not representative of Black men.

Payne (2015) takes a refreshing approach to the lyrical analysis of Young Jeezy's album *The Recession.* The author's argument is contextualized within the SOR framework used to translate the lyrics, a literature review of comparable biographical/lyrical analysis, and a relevant sociocultural background of Young Jeezy. The central argument, which holds that structural inequality molds the identity of street-identified men, is focused on a clear demographic and the author directly connects his lyrical analysis to lived experiences of Black men. Payne's innovative framing of the tracks from Jeezy's album as interviews allows for a more personal and grounded analysis. Without including the direct song and lyric selections of Black men, Payne still managed to capture their experience as, largely, economically impoverished. Based on the author's assessment, Payne (2015) suggests researchers and social scientists recognize the potential in Gangsta Rap music as

phenomenological accounts of the lived experiences of street-identified Black men. This model and method are most close to what this paper aspires to.

Scholars within youth-focused critical media and literacy studies have previously highlighted the communicative value of hip-hop when engaging with low-income Black and Chicano youth in the classroom setting (Morrell et. al, 2013; Ginwright, 2004; Low; 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Though research such as this, that seeks to use hip-hop as a means of critically educating youth, is extremely valuable in promoting the development of youth's understanding of social concepts and systems, this project seeks to invert previous scholarship in asking youth to use hip-hop as a means of further educating researchers through the culturally specific language of hip-hop. Alim (2007, 2009) has similarly advocated for youth centrality and control of HHNL translation. Further, he argues for the implementation of critical hip-hop language pedagogies (CHHLP) as a means of conducting autoethnographic research that promotes identity development and understanding linguistic discrimination. While the promise of this style of youth work in the education system is great, the focus of this type of work is youth education. In contrast, this project seeks to validate Black youth HHNL usage as adaptive, to attempt to glean nuances in the youth's communication of their lived experiences using HHNL, and to situate and affirm HHNL as a legitimate means of conducting youth work. To understand and communicate with low-income inner-city Black youth, researchers need to learn to let *them* speak their language, and to walk with them through the soundtracks of their lives.

Hip-Hop As Language

Before and with more frequency than researchers, artists/rappers themselves have championed the language of hip-hop. Albums such as Nas's *It Was Written* (1996), Lauryn Hill's *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998), Juvenille's *Tha G-Code* (1999), Nelly's *Country Grammar* (2000), Masta Ace's *Disposable Arts* (2001) and Q-Tip's *The Renaissance* (2008) are just a few of many hip-hop albums that, from the title to the last track, concern themselves with hip-hop language[11]. Unsurprisingly, hip-hop language is a loved topic of conversation for many hip-hop artists (Alim, 2004). Regarding hip-hop language and lyrical expression, the late hip-hop idol Tupac Shakur astutely argues "I'm being strong...What makes me saying 'I don't give a fuck' different than Patrick Henry saying 'Give me liberty or give me death'?" in the posthumous documentary *Tupac: Resurrection* (2003).

In contrast to discourse slandering hip-hop as nonsensical, non-uniform, and unintelligible, critical scholars within sociolinguistics and related fields have taken up the battle against this narrative (Alim, 2004). Hip-Hop Nation Language is an umbrella designator for speech, music, poetry, and literature, all modes of expression included in Hip-hop/rap (Yancy, 1991). There are 10 tenants of HHNL, as outlined by sociolinguist H. Samy Alim (2006): (1) HHNL is rooted in African American Language (AAL)[12], (2) HHNL is one of many dialects/languages spoken amongst

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[11] Alim (2004) previously noted this point through a similar and overlapping list of albums.

[12] AAL is distinct from AAVE in that it omits harmful and historically imperialist/racist markers. These markers are the term "vernacular," meaning casual and implying lack of legitimacy, and the dialectal

Black Americans, (3) HHNL is widely spoken and integrated into the language systems of many racial ethnic groups across the US and globally, (4) The language follows its own language conventions; grammar, phonology, lexicon, communication style and discursive mode is specific to HHNL, (5) HHNL is defined/comprised of speech, music, poetry, and literature included in Hip-hop/rap, as stated previously, (6) Attitudes about HHNL as a language and its usage, (7) HHNL is predominant to the identity of the HHN, (8) The language is regionally distinct, (9) essential to Black world-building and meaning-making and is perfectly catered and suitable for Black communicative needs, and (10) HHNL is unextractable from the sociopolitical circumstances of Black diasporic peoples and the entire HHN.

Despite research and scholarship generated since the 1960s by sociolinguists to define HHNL, the framing of hip-hop as language, in its communicative function, has gone largely unstudied by scholars interested in the perspective of those, largely Black youth, engaged daily in HHNL. In his work *Black Street Speech*, Baugh (1983) acknowledges the need for more of this work and is seconded by H. Samy Alim in his book *Rock the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (2006). However, Lissa Skitolsky argues in *Hip-Hop as Philosophical Text and Testimony: Can I Get a Witness?,* HHNL is legitimate as a means of study on Black identity, culture, and lived experience (2020). Further, she argues that hip-hop and HHNL are poetic testimonies, memoirs, of Black diasporic struggles with white supremacy (2020). Hip-hop in this

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label of "English" in relation to the English that English/Scots Irish American enslavers forced upon the African and US-born African/Black peoples.

conception is a collected archive of the centuries-long experience of living under the heel of white America, of surviving while Black. However, boots-on-the-ground research centering Black youth's active use of HHNL in daily speech and the youth's translation of the language is missing in present HHNL literature, and other hip-hop language conversations beyond this framework.

One Canadian scholar, Paula Chesley, surveyed 166 randomized non-Black youth to investigate the relationship between hip-hop listening and comprehension of AAE (AAL) terminology among non-Black youth (Chesley, 2011). Confoundingly, the study produced results demonstrating a positive correlation between weak social ties with Black people and communities and AAE (AAL) comprehension (Chesley, 2011). The author discussed this result in relation to the strength of weak social ties, a theory that argues weak social ties allow for wider dissemination of social influence (Chesley, 2011; Granovetter, 1973). However, the AAE (AAL) translations used as the answer key used to measure non-Black youth understanding, are oversimplified and, consequently, incorrect. The term *a grip*, sourced from Jay-Z's "Dirt off your shoulder," is given as an example of one term used in the study and is defined by the author as "a lot." Chelsey does not regionally identify the term as coming out of New York or elaborate on the language conventions the term follows. The translation does not encompass any of the geographical, structural, or psychological connotations of the term *a grip*. The author does not note Jay-Z's flow and rhythmic structure in the line "I paid a grip for the jeans, plus the slippers is clean"(Jay-Z, 2003). These elements are crucial to understanding its meaning. The convention of lyrical and

grammatical inventiveness within hip-hop makes room for the enmeshing of the words "a" and "grip" into "agrip," allowing for the creation of a creolized word with an individualized sound that follows HHNL standards; and, perhaps, even metaphorically, "agrip" encapsulates the feeling of the strangulation of structural inequity as indicated linguistically through the constricted one syllable word "agrip" and the choice of the term "grip" itself.

This research should be in the hands of and in practice within the Hip-Hop Nation, of those who actively and intentionally center HHNL native speakers and the culture from which the language comes. HHNL is active resistance, so those using and studying it are meant to be part of the coalition engaging in this activism. This project seeks to intervene in this language conversation on a small-scale with hopes of encouraging scholars interested in HHNL to push for this research and answer these essential questions regarding Black youth, the HHN itself.

Chapter Five

METHODOLOGY

The methodologies used in this study to examine the significance and communicative potential of hip-hop as a working Black youth language, HHNL, center phenomenological guidance provided by Wilmington, DE low-income Black youth. This approach, in allowing the youth's perspective to determine the course of research, is in line with the principles of YPAR, as a methodology that privileges the perspectives of youth living within the context/identity of study as experts best situated to conduct research on said context/identity (Payne, 2011). Additionally, this methodology follows the practice of street phenomenology informed by observational self-reflective study (Kusenbach, 2003).

Participants

Of the five youths involved in this study, two are sexed-male and three are sexed-female. The youths' ages ranged from 15 years old to 17 years old, with three youths at age 17 years old, one youth aged 16 years old, and the last aged 15 years old. The youth were identified via purposive sampling; All the youth selected to participate in this study previously participated in the UD affiliated YPAR Riverside Housing Project.[13]

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[13] See Appendix C for IRB documentation.

Data Collection

The central aims of the youth's involvement in this project are: (1), to understand the significance of hip-hop to low-income Black youth living in Wilmington, DE and (2), to collect phenomenological indicators exemplifying hip-hop as a Black youth-centered working language, HHNL (Alim, 2004). To collect information on the youth participants' hip-hop/rap music listening, an online survey was developed and distributed to Riverside youth via Google Forms.[14] Google's Drive platform allowed for greater accessibility as the mobile format is easy to access, which is key for low-income Black youth with possibly inconsistent computer access. The survey included questions on the role of music in their lives, their general rap music listening, their personal track selections, and the value of hip-hop music from their perspectives. Following general questions, the youth were specifically asked to identify their two favorite hip-hop/rap songs and the lyrics/bars from those songs that they most identified with. Following data collection via the Google survey, youth were contacted for a follow-up call to clarify lyrical translations and address any other unclear data.

Data Framing and Coding Process

The lyrics to youth-identified songs were sourced from *Genius* (https://genius.com/), a popular music site known for its accurate hip-hop/rap

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[14] A full copy of the online survey is included in Appendix

transcriptions. First, an overview of the logistics, including frequency, artists, and genre of youth hip-hop music listening will be generated. Survey data provided by youth will then be synthesized into a framework that captures why Riverside youth are engaging with hip-hop music and what purpose hip-hop serves in the lives of the youth. These themes will be rooted within the context of the Riverside youth's experiences but will be extended to address the lived experiences of the broader demographic of low-income Black youth. Then, youth-selected hip-hop/rap lyrics will be coded by communicative function, the purpose of an interaction, to understand how Black youth make use of HHNL in practice to communicate. In line with YPAR practice, interpretations of hip-hop lyrics provided by youth will be appropriately treated as grammatically and culturally correct within hip-hop/rap music following the conventions of HHNL in this methodology.

Limitations

The sample size and non-randomized participant selection hinder the generalizability of this study with respect to the broader lived experiences and well-being of low-income Black youth; however, this study opens the door to a broader discussion on hip-hop as a Black youth dialect and encourages the collection of more youth hip-hop theorizing. Additionally, though the manageable context of hip-hop trends within Riverside, Wilmington offers a case study level analysis of youth hip-hop communication, hip-hop listening is highly distinctive regionally, and the niche context of Riverside limits the study's representativeness. This study is meant as a

thought proposal, an inquiry, postulating on the potential of hip-hop as a dialect and begs for follow-up research.

Over the course of my senior thesis timeline, COVID-19 has reduced the scope of this project on Black low-income youth, identity, and hip-hop. Originally, the survey was meant to be distributed to a wider body of youth involved in Wilmington's community centers in-person following a focus group style data collection. As schools and community centers continually rewrote guidelines on gathering sizes, access to time with and the number of youths shrunk to none within the timeline of this project. This triggered the revisions and further revisions that produced the methodology followed. Despite setbacks, the guiding spirit of the project, to involve and center Black youth, has remained.

Chapter Six

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

From a bird's eye view, all the five Riverside youth surveyed indicated that they listen to hip-hop/rap music every day, multiple times throughout the day. Overall, the youth unanimously agreed that they engage with high levels of music and media. These findings validate earlier national survey research that found Black youth spend the most time (in hours) interacting with media, nearly 5 hours a day (Anyiwo, Watkins & Rowley, 2021). Though 10 songs were selected, only 5 artists were represented, Lil Baby, Lil Durk, and NBA Youngboy, NoCap, and Lil Poppa. Three extremely popular hip-hop artists of those selected, Lil Baby, Lil Durk, and NBA Youngboy, each had multiple of their tracks selected by youth, tallying 2, 3, and 2, respectively. Additionally, all but two songs, both released in 2021, were released during 2022. Of the 10 youth selected songs, 6 are identifiable as rooted in trap. Of the remaining 4 songs, 3 of those are all Lil Durk tracks and are categorized as drill rap. As both genres center street life, the youth's identification with them is unsurprising. The youth attach themselves to trap and drill narratives, not necessarily (and in most cases, not likely) because they are dealing drugs or carrying out gun violence directly, but because the music is reflective of the pressures of their everyday environments within or around their homes and neighborhoods.

Among all the youth surveyed, relatability and authenticity, as guided by hip-hop epistemology, distinguished their favorite artists and songs. Indicators of this are in every response, but a key phenomenological framing provided by two youth

participants most encompasses their feelings regarding the role hip-hop artists play in their lives: "[the artists] speak facts" & "[they]speak on the truth." During the follow-up call with one of the same two participants, youth specified that the "truth" artists reveal is that "violence has taken over [Wilmington]." When asked why youth listen to hip-hop/rap music, youth expressed the music (1) helps cope with emotions having to do with lived experience, and (2) for "fun." Thus, whether for therapeutic or recreational purposes, hip-hop acts as an emotional catharsis for the youth.

One participant noted, twice through the online survey and repeatedly during the follow-up call, that hip-hop/rap helps "sooth[e] [your] mind." This further indicates that the youth surveyed engage with hip-hop/rap music as a tool to help mitigate stress and to practice self-soothing by promoting their own positivity and joy. Interestingly, when asked to point to specific bars that speak to them, youth justified their choices by pointing to the authenticity of the artist and his/her/their experiences. This trend is in line with previous scholarship arguing the importance of authenticity in defining the value and status of hip-hop artists (Keyes, 2002; Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Blanchard, 1999).

Regarding how participants feel listening to hip-hop/rap music, three of five youths expressed conflicting dichotomous emotions, framed as "sadness & happiness" by one youth. When following up with the same respondent, the youth clarified they were happy to "relate to, you know, the lyrics," but sad in thinking of what events allow them to relate to the song. Another youth surveyed responded that they felt "caring" when listening to hip-hop/rap. Further, the youth explained that by "caring"

they meant "in my feelings," a colloquial AAL idiom that is not directly translatable but, in essence, expresses feeling hurt by a person or situation and often includes isolation as the practiced response behavior. Youth also described their "angry" experience listening to hip-hop/rap songs as they align with "[their] past." The idea of a "past" strongly resonated with youth, when followed up with. They expressed regret and pain about circumstances and actions they were part of while actively surviving in Riverside.

In results to the online survey, youth emphasized fervently that they "relate" to the music. Independently, each youth made sure to note that the importance of the music is rooted in their ability to "relate" or "compare" to the artists and songs selected. In terms of communicative function then, the youth use HHNL in part as a direct means of communicating through identification with selected lyrics. Further, the connections youth identify between them, and hip-hop artists and the emotions felt because of listening to hip-hop suggests that youth conversationally interact with hip-hop/rap music. Youth internally respond to the artists by allowing the music to bring them to their "past" and interact with "the story" as articulated by one youth. In a separate follow-up call, one youth said of listening to music with friends, "if we relate…we say something." This call-and-response mode of engaging with hip-hop music, the youth then said, is the same internal process at home, meaning each bar, chorus, and verse is taken as words the artist is speaking to the youth. In this way, the youth are engaging in practicing hip-hop as a conversation, using artists as mentors and his/her/their lyrics as advice.

Chapter Seven

QUALITATIVE LYRICAL ANALYSIS

As the secondary aim of this project is to understand Black youth's use of

HHNL as a direct means of communication, the lyrics selected by youth provide more

context for how they are interacting with their favorite songs and artists and suggest

themes representative of youth identified experiences. Survey responses suggest the

youth identify most strongly with lyrics expressing (1) the (artist's) lived experiences,

and (2) the (artist's) resulting emotional responses these lived experiences trigger,

with a lean towards identifying their emotional responses. Within identified lyrics

demonstrating lived experiences, the relevant themes include: (a) street life, and (b),

relationship instability. Within identified lyrics demonstrating emotional responses,

the relevant themes include: (a) pain/resilience and (b) lack of trust/loyalty.

Interestingly, the lyrics identified as emotional responses selected by youth are each

dichotomous. The lyrics selected and the purpose they serve youth are opposing,

which will be further explained within the analysis.

Identification of Lived Experiences Through HHNL

In part, youth directly identified formative lived experiences through the

selection of lyrics describing a specific event. These lyric choices are also an indicator

of the youth's values and ideological lens. As a trend, the youth proposed lyrics in line

with the hero archetype, the nothing-to-something narrative, or the "humiliation –

superiority" narrative that, as researchers propose, is a prominent story arc in hip-hop

(Kravchenko et al., 2021). What this indicates is that youth view themselves positively and attribute his/her/their many challenges to the hero's battle. In this way, hip-hop listening promotes healthy self-esteem among Black youth within the context of the streets, and hip-hop itself acts as a site of resilience (Payne, 2006, 2011). Additionally, this perspective is future oriented and demonstrates emotional strength and resilience when considering the structural inequity faced by low-income Black youth living in the inner-city (Payne, 2011).

Youth Involvement in or Exposure to Street Life

Payne (2001, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008) introduced *street life* to scholarship as a phenomenological ideology rooted in personal and economic survival within the contexts of *the streets*. As a framework understood and practiced first by those involved in the streets, street life is multifaceted, spanning from community building actions, such as social bonding and economic generation, to gun violence and illegal drug-related activities (Payne, 2011). Street life is, at its core, an adaptive approach to survival under structural inequality (Hitchens and Payne 2017; Payne 2011). Street life, as a lifestyle and worldview, is familiar to and frequently used or referenced by the Riverside youth surveyed. In one follow-up call, the youth responded to the question of "how you been?" with "good, good, tryna stay out of the streets." Though the physical space of *the streets* is certainly part of what is communicated here, "the streets" primarily means street life in this context. Low-income Black youth benefit from street life in gaining connections and support, economic possibility, and an

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identity, however the youth recognize that street life is dangerous (Payne, Hitchens & Chambers, 2017).

"I be in the loop" (Lil Baby, 2022). When asked what "I be in the loop" means, the youth responded "it means…like, I'm in the mix. Wait, wait, wait! Aaahhhh, no. It means I know a lot of things." Things, as used by the youth, refers to information about what is happening in *the streets* and within other neighborhood social circles. The youth selected this line to communicate their role as a relevant, participatory member of their neighborhood who interacts with and has positive rapport with other Black youth. It is also an indicator of social capital and status, as to be "in the know" implies being connected and influential. The youth emphasize the importance of connection and approval because the youth were socialized to place tremendous value in community (Payne, 2013). The habitual *be*, noted by scholars as a unique linguistic development in HHNL, implies that the youth is consistently socially aware and is, symbiotically, in good social standing. Further, the youth's social identification with the line demonstrates positive self-esteem and self-opinion within the context of their social spheres. In conversation with findings that suggest Black parents emphasize racial ethnic pride in the socialization of their children to protect Black youth from the psychological harm caused by hegemonic white supremacist individuals and systems, the youth's use of hip-hop to reinforce their positive social identity demonstrates the youth independently taking up adaptive skills and coping mechanisms to take care of themselves (Hughes et al., 2006).

Linguistically, the translational distinction between "in the mix" and "in the loop" is subtle, yet it completely changes what the youth is indicating when the two are equated. To be "in the mix" is to be actively involved in either legal or illegal street life activity. Characteristic of HHNL and AAL, the line communicates being within the physical and psychological boundaries of the street context. Youth's identification and translation of "I be in the loop" indicates the youth's ideological perspective as grounded in the context of street life.

"Mama say I'm trippin', I'm with my n****s like a group home" (Lil Durk, 2022). This bar is rapped by Lil Durk in his 2022 track "Computer Murderers." As the song belongs to Drill rap, it characteristically narrates the ongoing beef, feuding within the street context, between Lil Durk and various other rappers. Street life is heavily represented in the song and in the youth's response to it. Specifically, Lil Durk emphasizes gun violence and *street love*, engaging in bonding activities and embracing *the streets* as a "family," which the youth emphasized as central aspects of his/her/their daily life (Payne & Hamdi, 2009).

The line selected by youth alludes to *running the streets*, engaging in legal and/or illegal behaviors and actions with other young Black men (and, less frequently, women). The phrase "I'm with my n****s like a group home" indicates continual time spent with a select group of other youth. Regarding the "group home" parallel made in the line, crews of young Black men who run together, regardless of whether they are gang affiliated, often provide significant social connections, and support and have many shared experiences within the context of street life, such as negative experiences

with policing in their neighborhoods (Payne, Hitchens & Chambers, 2017). Further, group homes, as involved with the criminal justice system, are part of the street landscape youth are exposed to and may have had experiences with themselves. Identification with the first half of the bar, as a young person heavily influenced by one's "Mama," makes obvious the participants' youth, in contrast to behaviors described. Overall, the identified line underscores the importance of close relationships, of brotherhood and street love, in the lives of Black youth and demonstrates the adaptive systems that Black youth navigate to survive.

  "I carry my choppa/ Before I was twelve" (Lil Durk, 2022). "What he trying to say basically is that more young people is joining gangs," responded the youth when asked what this line means to him/her/them. The youth then explained that this is just "how things are going today." While identification with this line in part communicates a direct experience the youth lived through and is precipitated by the dangers of the streets, it also communicates the youth's need for preparedness and protection. *The streets* aren't safe, and Black youth are the most at risk to be killed by gun violence (Sheath et. al, 2018). This is a formative experience, and the youth's identification of it demonstrates the paradigm epistemological shift in worldview it caused. In the broader context of Lil Durk's "What Happened to Virgil," he tells the story of how he lost his brother, DTHANG, to gun violence following a shooting that he, his brother, and cousin were involved in or a part of. It is also a tribute to iconic streetwear designer, Virgil Abloh, and pays homage to Durk's close friend and collaborator who was also killed due to gun violence, King Von. The bar directly

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before the youth's selection is "learned to survive." The youth learn to survive, even if that means carrying a "choppa," a gun, as a child to stay safe. Survivability is the core value demonstrated by the youth's identification of this bar, which is attributable to his/her/their street life orientation.

Relationship Instability

Family instability, exacerbated by mass incarceration, gun violence, and other diffused impacts of structural poverty, disrupts youth's positive relationship development experiences (Hitchens & Payne, 2015; Quimby et al., 2017). However, Black youth are more resilient to changes in family structure than youth of other racial ethnic demographics (Fomby et al., 2010). In part, this is explained by Black youth's heightened social adaptability and formation of close social ties outside of one's family (Okeke-Adeyanju, 2014). Peer relationships are critical for Black youth, as they promote healthy self-esteem, emotional regulation, and positive future relationship patterns (Quimby et al., 2017).

"Tears down my face broken from heartbreak" (NBA YoungBoy, 2022). "Emo Love," from which this bar was selected, heavily emphasizes the pain of unrequited and/or neglectful love within the context of the streets. In contrast to the other selections, this song does not contain any profanity and only features one verse. Its basic form reinforces the sense of abandonment and grief that is woven in throughout the song. When asked who, or what, in the youth's life caused the pain indicated in the song, "family" was the immediate, short response provided. The youth hesitated to provide more detail within the context of research but emphasized the

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importance of family despite personal pain caused by members of the youth's own family. The youth further elaborated that, while "heartbreak" is representative of the youth's emotional experience with familial relationship instability, the youth is healthily insistent upon the value of relationships overall. This is consistent with research that reports high levels of love/loyalty to family and neighborhood among Wilmington youth (Payne, 2013).

Take my heart then you leave me, don't act like you need me (NoCap, 2022). The Riverside youth place a tremendous amount of care behind relationships, romantic and platonic, with other youths. Research indicates that Black youth use social support provided by interpersonal relationships as a coping mechanism more than any other racial ethnic group (Tolan et al., 2002). In the context of the streets, where loyalty and realness are of extremely high cultural importance, relationships are one's perceived social value. Thus, the ending of a relationship is pivotal for Black youth, as is demonstrated by the youth's selection of this line as representative of their identity.

Emotional Identification Through HHNL

Consistently the Riverside youth surveyed emphasized that listening to their favorite hip-hop songs, while reflecting on their lived experiences, produces paradoxical emotional responses. While youth gravitate heavily towards hip-hop music that they "relate" to that speak of "real life situations" as a way of working through emotions, these songs recall and are linked to youth's most intimate lived

experiences. One youth noted that emotion completely guides his/her/their music listening, as his/her/their playlists "are organized by feelings." The youths' ability to use hip-hop to identify and process their emotions demonstrates emotional maturity, a skill essential for survival in life, specifically street life. The youth's most intimate and formative experiences and feelings are represented by their selections. Though all of the youth's emotionally communicative selections reflect negative emotional experiences, what distinguishes them is their directionality. The youth's overall mindset when faced with pain, heartbreak, depression, betrayal, etc. is forward thinking. The youth's engagement with hip-hop music allows them to channel negative emotions into a growth mindset and healthily work through emotional distress. Hip-hop, then, could play a key role in Black youth's highly elastic mental-emotional strength as compared to youth of other racial ethnic groups (Fomby et al., 2010).

Pain/Hope

I thought you would've knew I'm a n***a you can't hurt…a whole different person/It's a gift and a curse (Lil Poppa, 2021). The youth identified this song as "relatable" to his/her/their "real life." In the track, "It's Alright Again," Lil Poppa raps that while he is no longer running the streets, he will always be loyal to and remember where he came from. Though the artist denies being hurt, the line implies that someone tried to hurt him. Poppa's use of the second person "you" indicates that he is addressing, and so youth is also addressing, the individual who wronged him. The use of the word "knew," is meant to indicate that Poppa has

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internalized the characteristic of being strong, of being someone that "can't [be] hurt," and that it has resulted in a "whole different person" with an emotionally impenetrable disposition.

Pain is not central to what the artist is saying, but the youth's identification with the line suggests the youth has had to adapt to it. The youth's selection of this bar can be understood as the result of the youth's growth orientation, his/her/their trenches to riches mentality. The idea of the youth having a *past* is also implied here. Though the phrase "it's a gift and a curse" suggests that the youth view his/her/their past as valuable for growth. The youth, and the track itself, is demonstrating resilience and strength despite the circumstances faced as a resident of the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, DE.

All the pain I felt inside myself, thought it would never end/I just thought I would blame myself, can't even blame my friends (NBA YoungBoy, 2021). The youth who selected this line explained that listening to "Heart & Soul" from which the bar comes produces "sadness & happiness" in its relatability to the respondent. This track is about struggling, with getting out of the streets, with having made many mistakes, and with *the struggle* itself. It is filled with pain, but it is forward facing as exemplified using past tense in relation to all the lived experiences that shaped him and the pain they caused. The youth's identification with this line implies these experiences and emotions have also been present in him/her/them. As the pain in this line is internally directed, the youth also likely struggle with this. However, the youth communicated that this song "helps…a lot" in getting through hard times and in

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processing the youth's *past*. The youth explained, "I can be moody, but I can listen to music, and I can calm down." Thus, the youth's identification with this line is, along with the experience of pain, demonstrates fortitude, maturity, and adaptability.

Lack of Trust/Loyalty

The Riverside youths' lack of trust is observationally correlated with negative relationship experiences. All the youth noted, at different points during data collection, that disloyalty highly affects youths' relational perception. The youth seemed to indicate that no one can be trusted, not even family, due to the youths' *past*. Youth emphasized that disloyal behavior is what is "going on today" and contributes to violence within Riverside. Though lack of trust could be interpreted as a negative social response, the youths' deployment of it suggests that it is protective.

I ain't with all that fakin' shit, I'd rather keep it real/You mad at me about a bitch who fucking both of us (Lil Baby, 2022). The youth who selected this line argues, "He saying that never lie or be fake to your friend." Further, the youth commented "don't trust female because they just do yu wrong." Though the second comment could be interpreted as the youth expressing misogyny against women, what the youth is highlighting is the importance of platonic relationships and loyalty. The youth's identification with this bar suggests that relationship ties with young women has/have complicates/complicated his/her/their important friend relationships, but that the youth has come to internalize loyalty and friendship as personal values as a result. Further, the youth's endorsement of realness, "keep[ing] it real," reinforces the importance of loyalty.

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"How you my blood and you say you gon' pop me?" (Lil Durk, 2022).

Betrayal comes across first with this line. Also, from "What Happened to Virgil," the accusation, posed as a question, criticizes the lack of street morality and loyalty shown by a family member who threatened to kill Lil Durk. Not only does the bar point to the experience of getting switched up on, turned on, by a family member, it also is representative, as the youth's identifying choice, of his/her/their experience with and understanding of the dangers of relationships within the context of structural inequality which breeds deadly competition.

The youth synthesized the bar to mean "yu can't really trust nobody," but also indicated that the line has more depth than that. The HHNL/AAL term "blood," meaning biological, or equally close, family, implies the responsibility of family loyalty. Disloyalty to "blood" defies the code of *the streets*, the cultural practices, and guidelines specific to the street context. Loyalty to family and community are at the heart of many low-income Black communities, including the Southbridge and Eastside neighborhoods in Wilmington, DE (Payne, 2013). This makes familial betrayal significantly more damaging and formative to youth than it may have otherwise been. While the previous participant endorses the importance of family despite personally painful relationships, the youth who put forth this line does not share that sentiment. The experience of being threatened by one's "blood" reoriented the youth aways from biological family and towards trust-based street families.

Youth HHNL Usage Potential

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Hip-hop is a site of resilience for the Black low-income youth residing in Riverside that participated in this study (Payne, 2016). Youth endorse the role of hip-hop as therapy, a space that privileges emotional expression and allows for the introspective processing of trauma of low-income Black youth. Further, hip-hop aids low-income Black youth in coping with and adapting to a diverse array of challenges including tumultuous familial relationships, gun violence and death, and emotional distress (Sims, 2011). Hip-hop consumption also encourages positive self-esteem and, thus, success in educational, relational, and professional pursuits (McFerran et al., 2015).

Finally, the value in utilizing HHNL as a means of encouraging youth communication lies also in the specific insights this language allows. Youth identification of hip-hop lyrics and songs that are representative of their self-perceptions allows youth to reveal experiences and emotions specific to the street life context that are not culturally translatable and, consequently, difficult to communicate outside of one's own epistemological perspective. From a research perspective, this allows for more relevant and accurate data to be collected and results to be produced.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

For the Riverside youth, hip-hop is Vicks Vapor Rub and Vaseline, their cure-all. Hip-hop is a space where the youth can feel what they want to feel because the music provides the language and expression of the pain, heartbreak, or betrayal they may experience. But it also is a space for fun and creativity. "I like to put on concerts in my room," the last interviewee closed before hanging up. Hip-hop is a site of resilience, a coping mechanism, and active therapy for low-income Black youth (Payne, 2011; Hughes et al., 2006). Hip-hop music also reinforces parental racial-ethnographic pride shown to help protect the self-image and confidence of low-income Black youth (Tribble et al., 2019). Rap artists act as guides for the youth; their relatable lyrics and orientation encourages expression and self-awareness. In many ways, hip-hop provides language, support, and community in the same way a family, a community, or an active gang would. It may be best to compress all these functions to mean that hip-hop is an opportunity space for low-income Black youth.

Endorsing and validating HHNL usage among youth as legitimate and enriching privileges the youth as having valuable, unique and relevant experiences. Hip-hop offers language that is unique to the sociocultural experience of being within the HHN and embodying the culture (Alim, 2004). As demonstrated by the insights shared by the youth who participated in this study, allowing Black youth to guide these translations offers nuances in understanding their lived experiences and wellbeing. And, as should be most important in academic community-based research,

it is most reflective of the HHN youth and their individual and shared lived

experiences.

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YPAR YOUTH ACTIVITY, "THE MUSIC IN YOU"

PURPOSE OF THE NEXT ACTIVITY

- To get us all to start thinking about the way we see ourselves individually and in relation to the world
- Why?
  - So that we are better able to engage with this research and place ourselves in it
  - To be self aware
  - To start thinking about who we want to be and how this research can help us get there

THE MUSIC IN YOU

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RESEARCH

- Find a song that you feel that you vibe with/rock with
- Pick out a few lines, three or more, that stick with you in particular
- Prepare to play a clip of the song or read the lyrics and tell us why you feel like you relate to it

SHARE OUT

- Tell us
  - How you feel the song relates to you or your life
  - What feeling(s) you get from the song
  - Who else might like the song
  - Does the song discuss any of the topics we've covered so far (violence, housing, racism, Blackness)

My example: "Amphetamine" by Smino ft. Noname Verse 4 (4:29)

COMMON THEMES BETWEEN Y'ALL?

- Working on self, staying out of trouble "How I been"
- "Born tired" and "sweet life"
- "close that back door" "they wanna do what we do"
- "no more parties" support before vs after pandemic
- "248" realness & violence in community
- "Tombstone" self protection
- "The Bigger Picture" racism
- Conformity and rule following, jessie rayez
- Nipsey Hustle "Hustle and Motivate"
- "Lockdown" resilience and revolution

YOUTH (YPAR) MUSIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Youth (YPAR) Music Questionnaire

The responses to this questionnaire are meant to be used in a thesis project on the role of hip-hop/trap/gangster rap music in the lives of Black youth living in the city context. You will be compensated $45 for your participation in the survey. It should take an hour or less of your time. I will only use your responses with your permission. Please do not respond if you do not want to be involved. Thank you!

gsherba@udel.edu (not shared) Switch account

* Required

Name *

Your answer

Do you listen to hip-hop/rap music? *

○ Yes

○ No

What two rap songs are you listening to on repeat now? Or, what are your two favorite songs right now? If there is a local artist you like, please include a song from them as one of your two selections.

Your answer

Appendix C
IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTOCOL
University of Delaware

Protocol Title: Youth Civic Engagement: Exploring Housing access and Violence in
Wilmington

Principal Investigator
      Name: Ann M. Aviles
      Department/Center: Human Development and Family Sciences
      Contact Phone Number: 302-831-4724
      Email Address: amaviles@udel.edu

Advisor (if student PI):
      Name:
      Contact Phone Number:
      Email Address:

Other Investigators:

Investigator Assurance:

By submitting this protocol, I acknowledge that this project will be conducted in strict accordance with the procedures described. I will not make any modifications to this protocol without prior approval by the IRB. Should any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects occur during this project, including breaches of guaranteed confidentiality or departures from any procedures specified in approved study documents, I will report such events to the Chair, Institutional Review Board immediately.

1. **Is this project externally funded? ☐ YES ☐ X NO**

      If so, please list the funding source:

2. Research Site(s)

      ☐ X University of Delaware

      ☐ X Other (please list external study sites)

Is UD the study lead? ☐ **X YES**   ☐ NO (If no, list the institution that is serving as the study lead)

Workshops with youth will be held at UD's Wilmington campus and community centers in the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, DE.

3. **Project Staff**
Please list all personnel, including students, who will be working with human subjects on this protocol (insert additional rows as needed):

NAME	ROLE	HS TRAINING COMPLETE?
Shardae White	Youth Facilitator	Yes
Gabrielle Sherba	Research Assistant	Yes
Coley Harris	Community Youth Liaison	Yes
Alexandra Telenta	Research Assistant	Yes

4. **Special Populations**
Does this project involve any of the following:

Research on Children? Yes, youth aged 14-18 are included in this project.

Research with Prisoners? No

If yes, complete the Prisoners in Research Form and upload to IRBNet as supporting documentation

Research with Pregnant Women? No

Research with any other vulnerable population (e.g. cognitively impaired, economically disadvantaged, etc.)? please describe

Youth aged 14-21 residing in the Riverside community of Wilmington, DE. Many of the Riverside residents experience poverty, subsequently this study's participants will all be low-income Black and/or Brown residents.

5. **RESEARCH ABSTRACT** Please provide a brief description in LAY language (understandable to an 8th grade student) of the aims of this project.

Youth Civic Engagement: Exploring Housing Access and Violence in Wilmington seeks to engage youth aged 14-21 residing in the Riverside community of Wilmington, DE in civic

education. The Riverside community is currently undergoing a revitalization effort, REACH (**R**edevelopment, **E**ducation **A**nd **C**ommunity **H**ealth) Riverside (http://reachriverside.org/), in which they are seeking to transform the Riverside community via three pillars including: 1) Housing Redevelopment, 2) Education, and 3) Community Health. REACH Riverside is in the initial stages of development and the organization has expressed this is a long-term initiative that will be occurring over the next 8-10 years (Nagengast, 2018). Equipping youth in Riverside with the knowledge and skills to be active contributors to the process will be essential to its success. The REACH Riverside initiative currently taking place creates a significant opportunity for youth to learn about community redevelopment and the importance of civic education in addressing violence, poverty and housing. Lin (2015) finds that various citizenship education programs from kindergarten to high school have the capacity to develop students' civic engagement. Further, programs can help students in the secondary grades "develop a broader range of civic engagement outcomes that pertain to the school and community-level context" (Lin, 2015, p. 35). This project will actively involve youth in understanding the structural conditions facing their community, specifically to equip them in being active, participants in contributing to the revitalization of their community through civic education, research, and advocacy.

Specifically, this project aims to:
   a. Promote civic engagement among youth aged 14-21, specifically youth who have the potential for dropping/being pushed out of school and/or those not currently enrolled in school;
   b. Increase youth's academic skills—specifically reading, writing, critical thinking and public speaking; and
   c. Increase youth's capacity and motivation to be knowledgeable, active participants in their community's revitalization efforts.

6. **PROCEDURES** Describe all procedures involving human subjects for this protocol. Include copies of all surveys and research measures.

This project will employ Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methods (Cammarota and Fine, 2008) exposing youth to formal academic research skills and civic education. This will facilitate their inquiry into topics, issues and systems they must negotiate in order to understand the importance of being active participants in the revitalization efforts occurring in Riverside. YPAR stems from Participatory Action Research (PAR), processes in which young people investigate meaningful social topics, participate in research to understand root causes of problems, take action to influence policies and promote youth involvement in their communities while developing their research skills. [Y]PAR provides reading, writing, and data analysis skill sets to participants (Payne & Brown, 2017), and develops young people's knowledge, skills, and abilities to be experts on issues of importance to them, catalyzing systemic change in collaboration with their peers and supportive adults (Powers & Allaman, 2013).

Through the use of YPAR methods, this project utilizes civic education and engagement equipping youth in the Riverside community of Wilmington, DE with practical skills and knowledge, while simultaneously encouraging their analysis of systems and structures that create conditions of inequity, that often limit their ability to access education, housing

and community health. Ultimately these efforts serve to support youth's critical analysis and positive action/advocacy. The workshops developed for and with youth will be rigorous and of high quality. Workshops will utilize materials/lessons from http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/. Youth will be required to engage texts, documentaries, and historical documents equivalent to high school level. To accommodate for varied educational/reading levels of participants, workshops will be project-based and multi-modal (e.g. videos/documentaries, TedxTalks, case studies, popular education readings, role-playing, jigsaw reading approaches, etc.). This project intends to expose youth to YPAR methods to facilitate their academic, and social learning simultaneously cultivating their skills and capacity to be youth advocates for the betterment of their community.

Throughout the project, the PI and youth facilitator will document youth responses, in the form of field notes, to workshops/activities engaged for primarily curricular purposes. Meaning, we will assess and analyze how youth engage the information presented, including any challenges (e.g. literacy) to inform future workshop activities as well as possibilities in conducting similar workshops for future YPAR projects. Field notes may also be used for scientific reports, publications and presentations when appropriate. For example, field notes that inform the process of YPAR and/or curriculum development with youth will be shared—specifically aspects of the workshops that work particularly well with youth and/or aspects that present a significant challenge to engaging and facilitating youth's civic engagement will documented and shared. Again, any information will not include identifying information, only general descriptions of youth will be included (e.g. 16yo Black female).

Proposed Project Timeline:
Months 1-2:
   a. Submit IRB proposal
   b. Obtain approval

Months 2-3:
   a. Recruit 10-12 Riverside youth for participation. This will include an application/interview process(See Appendix A). Determinations will be made based on the eligibility criteria established. The onboarding process (see Pre-Workshop Assessment) will occur after Assent/Consent has been obtained. The purpose of the pre/post-workshop assessment is to allow the PI to gauge youth knowledge of concepts pre and post participation in workshops.
   b. Facilitation of workshops. Workshops will occur 2-days/week, each workshop duration will be 2-hours. Workshops will occur between the hours of 5-7p. Workshop topics will include: housing affordability/access, youth/gun violence, economic inequity, civic engagement, and youth participatory action research.
   c. Throughout the workshops, youth will have the opportunity to identify other topics of interest/need to be explored connecting to and addressing their ability to be well-informed advocates in their community.

Months 4-6:
   a. Youth research and planning to develop plan of advocacy/action.
   b. Youth will work directly with the PI and the youth facilitator. Groups of 2-3 youth will be organized to conduct research on topics identified.

Months 6-7:
   a. Implementation of youth plan (e.g. community forum, podcast, art exhibit, video, etc.)

Month 8:
   a. Write-up program process and evaluation.

7. **STUDY POPULATION AND RECRUITMENT**
Describe who and how many subjects will be invited to participate. Include age, gender and other pertinent information.

Ten to twelve youth aged 14-21 residing in the Riverside community of Wilmington, DE. Male and female youth will be invited to participate.

Attach all recruitment fliers, letters, or other recruitment materials to be used. If verbal recruitment will be used, please attach a script. (See Appendix)

Recruitment will be conducted by the youth facilitator of the project, Ms. Shardae White. Ms. White has worked with residents of the Riverside community for over 7 years as a social worker and community advocate, and has long-standing relationships with Riverside residents of all ages. Her role will be to recruit youth, facilitate consent/assent and run the workshops with support from the PI.

Describe what exclusionary criteria, if any will be applied.

Participants for this research project must meet the following criteria: 1) Resident of Riverside; 2) Aged 14-21; 3) Experiencing struggles in school and/or dropped/pushed out.

Describe what (if any) conditions will result in PI termination of subject participation.

If any youth participants pose a risk to themselves or others they will be removed from the project and be provided with resources appropriate to the issue raised.

8. **RISKS AND BENEFITS**
List all potential physical, psychological, social, financial or legal risks to subjects (risks listed here should be included on the consent form).

The chief concern for participants are that feelings of anxiousness may develop as a result of sensitive or negative experiences in their community. The youth facilitator is a social worker and is trained in working with youth who have experienced poverty and/or violence in the community of Riverside. If deep anxiety presents itself, participants will be referred to counseling services.

In your opinion, are risks listed above minimal* or more than minimal? If more than minimal, please justify why risks are reasonable in relation to anticipated direct or future benefits.

Risks are minimal as our focus will be discussing topics of housing affordability/access and research methods. Given that we do not know of youth's previous experiences with education, poverty and/or violence in the community, we will be sure to monitor/check-in with you to minimize any feelings of anxiety.

(*Minimal risk means the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests)

What steps will be taken to minimize risks?

Each workshop will provide an opportunity for youth to share any concerns or feelings of anxiousness they may experience when discussing issues of housing access and/or instability, including positive and healthy ways to process these feelings (e.g. journaling, deep breathing, etc.)

Describe any potential direct benefits to participants.

There are at least three ways in which participants overall will benefit from this study. First, the 6 youth will be trained in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methods, providing them with the knowledge and skills to engage in a critical analysis of the housing proposal being put forth by REACH Riverside, thus increasing social, professional and intellectual capital for these youth.

Second, YPAR requires organizing an "action" or activist based agenda that corresponds to the data generated by the research. Youth participants will be provided the support to organize a community-based event (e.g. spoken word, podcast, photo essay, etc.) to share what they learn about affordable housing, and community transformation.

Third, the youth will be provided a safe space in which they can discuss their concerns and/or opinions about the community transformation/housing initiative occurring through REACH Riverside. They will also be provided with stipends for participating in the workshops.

Describe any potential future benefits to this class of participants, others, or society.

Youth participants may choose to become more active in the REACH Riverside initiative, being informed and engaged citizens of the community efforts. Further, as youth will participate in workshops that seek to support and/or enhance their research skills (reading, writing, critical thinking, etc.) this has the potential to improve their academic skills in school; for those not currently enrolled in school, this may spark an interest to return to school and/or obtain a GED.

If there is a Data Monitoring Committee (DMC) in place for this project, please describe when and how often it meets.

No, a "Data Monitoring Committee" has not been organized nor is it required for the proposed project.

9. **COMPENSATION**
Will participants be compensated for participation?

Yes.

If so, please include details.

Youth participants will be paid $10/hour for their participation.
Workshops will occur over 7 months for approximately 4 hours/week.
4 hours/week for 7 months (112 hours) $10 x 112 hours =$1,120

Each youth participant has the potential to earn a total of $1,120 over the 7-month period, or $160/month.

Participants will receive pro-rated compensation for their actual participation in workshops. Compensation will occur bi-weekly, or 2xs/month.

10. **DATA**
Will subjects be anonymous to the researcher?

Participants will engage in workshops and their identities will be known to the PI, youth facilitator, research assistant and community youth liaison.

If subjects are identifiable, will their identities be kept confidential? (If yes, please specify how)

Youth participants will be provided the opportunity to share their learning with the community and therefore their identities will be known should they decide to provide public presentations of their learning/civic engagement. However, youth identities will be kept confidential within scientific reports, publications and/or presentations to maintain their anonymity (e.g. a 16yo Black female).

How will data be stored and kept secure (specify data storage plans for both paper and electronic files. For guidance see
http://www.udel.edu/research/preparing/datastorage.html)

How long will data be stored?

General demographic data will be collected from youth participants for the purposes of documenting the research (e.g. age, race, gender, grade) undertaken. Data from this project will be in the form of public, community information (e.g. spoken word, podcast, photo essay, etc.). A primary goal of this project is to equip youth with knowledge and

skills to be engaged and active members of the initiatives occurring in their community. Topics of research methodology, housing access/affordability and community transformation will be explored. Any publications that result from this project will only include information participants are comfortable sharing. YPAR methodology encourages youth to be co-creators of knowledge, and therefore, youth will be invited to participate in the writing of publications such as op-eds and/or journal articles. For any information shared within scientific reports, publications or presentations, the identities of youth will be kept confidential by only sharing general information such as the youth's age, gender and race (e.g. a 16yo Black female).

Will data be destroyed? ☐ YES   ☐ **X NO** (if yes, please specify how the data will be destroyed)

Will the data be shared with anyone outside of the research team? ☐ YES   ☐ **X NO** (if yes, please list the person(s), organization(s) and/or institution(s) and specify plans for secure data transfer)

How will data be analyzed and reported?

Data will be qualitatively analyzed. Outlets for reporting data include academic journals, book chapters, newspapers (op-ed), as well as trade and professional newsletters.

11. **CONFIDENTIALITY**
Will participants be audiotaped, photographed or videotaped during this study?

Some portions of the workshops may be audio/video recorded for learning purposes (e.g. presentation skill development). All participants will be given the option to not be recorded and/or to have their image blurred or obscured.

How will subject identity be protected?

Any identifying information will be omitted and/or modified for any publications produced from this project. For example, for the purposes of developing a manuscript for publication only general information will be included such as participants age, race and gender (e.g. a 16yo Black female).

Is there a Certificate of Confidentiality in place for this project? (If so, please provide a copy).

No, this project will not apply for a Certificate of Confidentiality.

12. **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

(For information on disclosure reporting see:
http://www.udel.edu/research/preparing/conflict.html)

Do you have a current conflict of interest disclosure form on file through UD Web forms?

Yes, I do have a current conflict of interest disclosure form on file through UD Web forms. Does this project involve a potential conflict of interest*?

No, there is no conflict of interest.

* As defined in the University of Delaware's Policies and Procedures ,a potential conflict of interest (COI) occurs when there is a divergence between an individual's private interests and his or her professional obligations, such that an independent observer might reasonably question whether the individual's professional judgment, commitment, actions, or decisions could be influenced by considerations of personal gain, financial or otherwise.
        If yes, please describe the nature of the interest:

13. **CONSENT and ASSENT**

  __X__ Consent forms will be used and are attached for review (see Consent Template under Forms and Templates in IRBNet)

  __X__ Additionally, child assent forms will be used and are attached.

____ Waiver of Documentation of Consent (attach a consent script/information sheet with the signature block removed).

____ Waiver of Consent (Justify request for waiver)

14. **Other IRB Approval**
Has this protocol been submitted to any other IRBs?

No

If so, please list along with protocol title, number, and expiration date.

15. **Supporting Documentation**
Please list all additional documents uploaded to IRBNet in support of this application.

Consent Form

Assent Form
Parent Consent Form
Pre/Post-Workshop assessment
Recruitment Script