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When the Beat Drops: Exploring Hip Hop, Home and Black Masculinity

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by

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Abstract

In this autoethnographic project, I take readers on a narrative journey to three of my storied homeplaces and explore my lived experiences within each site. In the process of exploring my homeplaces, I analyze how I perform my black masculine self within the context of each location, how my cultural body supports and challenges hegemonic black masculinity, and how each location constrains and frees up my performance of self. With this autoethnographic project, I will contribute to the field of communication by extending the method and writing practice of autoethnography, the theorization of the black masculine, and the exploration of black masculine performances represented in popular culture.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

This is a dissertation about bodies, hip hop, and home. This is a dissertation about how bodies are made visible and invisible. This is a dissertation that uses hip hop and popular culture as a metaphorical lens to examine the ways black masculinity is (re)framed and black masculine bodies navigate racialized spaces. In this autoethnographic dissertation, I examine corporal and spatial histories as I analyze my lived experience within my storied homeplaces: Little Rock, Arkansas, the academy, and the performance stage. Within each personal, professional, and performative homeplace, I analyze the instances in which my black masculine identity is made legible, marked by moments of belonging when shifting between social locations as the insider and outsider, and shaped by cultural expectations of racialized gender and class. Shifting my analysis of black masculinity between the micro/macro and personal/popular, I explore how mass media produced images of black masculinity contribute to the cultural (re)scripting of black manhood and inform my understanding and performance of my black masculine self within the intellectual, physical, and cultural spaces I navigate. Ultimately, this is a dissertation about how my black masculine body is (re)imagined within and moves through space(s).

My dissertation is guided by three primary questions:

(1) How do I understand my cultural body within three storied homeplaces?

(2) How does my cultural body support and/or challenge hegemonic black masculinity?

(3) How do I perform my black masculine self within homeplaces?

This examination of black masculinity and how popular culture represents and impacts its performance is central to discussions in Africana studies, media and cultural studies, and hip hop studies about the media's power to (re)frame and (re)produce visual and virtual hegemonic black masculine scripts that manifest themselves in the flesh of black masculine bodies. In this introduction, I review canonical and contemporary literature about black masculine scripts as representations and performances across these three academic areas, define the concept of homeplace and explain how spatial locations impact performativity and the development of selfhood, and outline how autoethnography equips me with an ideal methodological lens, that allows me to connect the micro/personal to the macro/popular, as I examine my lived experiences as a black man within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Hip Hop and the Black Masculine

With its emphasis on examining and understanding the lived experiences of members of the African diaspora, my research on hip hop culture and the (re)framing and performance of black masculinity, fits firmly within and contributes to the interdisciplinary field of Africana studies. Hip hop culture is a site of intellectual inquiry that has significance within and to the fields of Africana studies. Within my research that analyzes hip hop culture, I explore how media produced images of black men in popular culture have influenced my understanding and performance of black masculinity. Hip hop's impact on America popular culture and (re)shaping hegemonic black masculinity on a regional, national, and global level make it an important and relevant site to explore the black masculine through the transdisciplinary lens of Africana studies, and media and communication studies.

In addition to Africana studies, communication studies scholars have also used interdisciplinary research to examine the connections between hip hop culture and the lived

experiences of black people. For instance, within communication studies, scholars have explored hip hop's link to space and place (Forman, 2002), connection to feminism and black feminist thought (Boylorn, 2016; Durham, 2010), impact on cinematic depictions of racialized and gendered bodies (Boylorn, 2017), framing of black masculinity (Jackson, 2006), aesthetic ruptures to canonical American art forms (Light, 2018), and impact on the ways the mass media remembers and (re)imagines black bodies (Christopher, 2015). This dissertation, with its analysis on the scripting of the black masculine within American popular culture and the performance of my black masculine self within three distinct homeplaces, extends the work of the aforementioned scholars by examining hip hop's connection to spatiality, its gendered implications, aesthetic/intellectual value, and power to (re)shape how we view the performance of black masculinity within American popular culture. This dissertation extends the research of the communication scholars above by analyzing hip hop culture from multiple perspectives in an attempt to illustrate hip hop's cultural significance and academic value.

While academics within communication and Africana studies have made contributions to the field of hip hop studies, it is important to note, since its inception, hip hop studies has been a transdisciplinary pursuit taken up by scholars across the academic landscape. In 1994, cultural and American studies scholar Tricia Rose (1994), considered by many as the founder of hip hop studies, published her germinal book, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America.* In the years following the release of *Black Noise*, scholars in the fields of education (Dimitriadis, 2009; Henson, 2016; Hill, 2009; Love, 2012; Richardson, 2003; Watts, 1997), English (Bradley, 2014 & 2017; White, 2011), economics (Stoute, 2011), rhetoric (Banks, 2010), gender studies (Brown, 2009; Cooper, 2014; Neal, 2013), music (Carson, 2017), media studies (Smith-Shomade, 2003), cinematography (Donalson, 2007), history (Alridge,

2005), communication (Johnson, 2014; Sciullo, 2014; Watkins, 2005) and architecture (Wilkins, 2000) have analyzed hip hop in their research. While this list is not exhaustive, it does give readers a sense of hip hop's significance as a site of academic inquiry across disciplines. Positioning my dissertation within hip hop, Africana and communication studies, situates my research within a disciplinary framework that lends itself to the examination of the scripting of black masculinity in American popular culture, while also making intellectual contributions to each mentioned field.

Scripting Black Masculinity: Representations

> The body is a social instrument that figuratively holds the projections of others in the confines of its text. Those projections are what I refer to as the inscriptions, the impositional writings of others on bodies that are not their own. With each new pejorative iteration, as promulgated via popular culture as well as other public and private vehicles, the body is burdened by another set of ideologies and ideas.
>
> -Ronald L. Jackson, 2006, p.7

Communication and cultural studies scholars have documented canonical and contemporary black masculine scripts within popular culture and the performance of the black masculine in public and private spaces. Here, when I mention scripts, I mean the representation *and* the enactment of black masculinity. Black masculine scripts are historically constructed and anchor hip hop-related popular culture imagery. Early representations of the black masculine are rooted in racist assumptions about the black body as superhuman and subhuman during the minstrel era (Bogle, 1989; Jackson, 2006; Mapp, 1972; Morris, 2011; Neal, 2013; Turner; 1994). In his book, *Blacks in American Films*, Edward Mapp (1972) details nineteen early scripts attributed to black bodies on film and performance stages. Within this scripting, black bodies

were portrayed as being savage Africans, mentally inferior, vicious criminals and sexually superhuman (pp. 30-31). These early depictions of the black masculine as subhuman and superhuman became the foundational corporal texts for subsequent canonical and contemporary mass media produced representations of black bodies.

Many scholars have used their research to catalogue and condense the classic hegemonic scripts produced to mark blackness. Extending the work of Mapp (1972) by synthesizing the canonical representation of black bodies, Donald Bogle (1996) catalogues five primary black scripts used on the silver screen throughout history. Among these scripts are coons, bucks, tragic mulattoes, mammies, and Uncle Toms. In his book, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body,* Ronald Jackson (2006) synthesizes Bogle's depictions of these characters. Through Jackson's (2006) work, we can see that images of the lazy, shiftless, illiterate coon, the promiscuous mulatto, the strong and stamina filled mammie, and the muscular, violent, sex crazed buck/brute all work to perpetuate the canonical notion that black bodies possessed superhuman and subhuman qualities (pp. 26-44). These classic pejorative scripts produced by the mass media became the lens through which we began to see and make sense of blackness.

Contemporary mass media produced representations of the black masculine revive the images portrayed during the minstrel era. Analyzing contemporary film, Jackson (2006) notes how movies like *Soulfood* (Tillman, 1997) portray black men as sex-driven bodies, echoing the minstrel era scripting of black men as hypersexual beings who cannot control their sexual urges (Turner, 1994). Further putting mass media representations of the black masculine under a magnifying glass, in *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z*, Miles White (2011) notes how hip hop has been used as a vehicle to proliferate pejorative scripts of the buck and brute as revised "urban brutes" and "street thugs" (p. 50). This contemporary scripting of black men as hip hop thugs and brutes

echoes the late 1800s and early 1900s scripting that often rendered black men as monolithic, hyper violent, vicious savages.

Contemporary media representations of the black masculine also work to reject the images created during the minstrel era. From her film analysis of *Fruitvale Station* (Coogler, 2013), communication scholar Robin Boylorn (2017) notes how the film reimagines black masculinity and marks black men as beings who inhabit multiple identities and a spectrum of emotions and challenges the historically one-dimensional scripting of the black masculine. Like film, Brian Collier's (2016) examination of the television show The *Boondocks* (McGruder, 2005) mark it as a mass media production that highlights black intelligence and pushes back against canonical narratives of black bodies as intellectually inferior beings. Both *Fruitvale Station* and *The Boondocks* are media productions from the hip hop generation that provide me with representational scripts that illustrate how black men in American popular culture and in their everyday lives often perform outside of the narrow performative scope depicted in the mass media.

Contemporary scholars have also used their research to analyze the ways in which representations of black masculinity within hip hop culture are simultaneously complicit with and complicate hegemonic black masculinity. In *Looking for Leroy*, Africana and hip hop studies scholar Mark Anthony Neal (2013) examines black masculine performance by analyzing how the musician Jay Z perpetuates canonical media stereotypes about black men and at the same time expands the performative range of black masculinity by performing cosmopolitanism. Hip hop cosmopolitanism is characterized by a "desires for physical, social, and economic mobility, including... a mobility from or even within the essential tropes – playa, pimp, hustler, thug and nigga – that define contemporary mainstream hip-hop masculinities" (p.37). For Neal, Jay Z's

cosmopolitan masculinity complicates the simplistic reading of black masculine performances in American popular culture and highlights the complexities that exists within black men. Jay Z, *The Boondocks*, and *Fruitvale Station* speak back to the historical pejorative mass media scripting of black men and offer an intricate framing of black masculinity in an entertainment industry that often reduces black men to one-dimensional representations that don't venture far from canonical stereotypes.

Scripting Black Masculinity: Performances

Scholars have used their research to examine how black masculine performance is marked and influenced within cultural homeplaces in the public and private spaces. Analyzing the performance of black masculinity in public locations, researchers have examined the ways in which black men perform their black masculine selves in university classrooms (Alexander, 1999; Young, 2007), as employees on college campuses (Alexander, 2017; Lemons, 2008), and in communal settings in black communities (Alexander, 2003; Young 2007). Conversely, academics have also analyzed the ways in which black men perform masculinity in the private spaces of their professional and personal lives, such as when they are alone in their offices (Johnson, 2015) or inside the privacy of their homes (Alexander, 2000; Johnson, 2011). Whether addressing the public or private homeplaces black men reside within and navigate, each of the aforementioned scholar's work gives us a glimpse into the various ways in which black masculinity is understood, performed and influenced by spatiality.

Further examining the connection between space and black masculine performance, researchers have analyzed the strategic ways in which black men use corporal performances to navigate cultural and social locations. These corporal performances include gestures, body language, speech, facial expressions and poses that black men deploy in their everyday lives

within their public and private homeplaces. Concerning the corporeal performance of black masculinity in the public and private sphere, in his book, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z*, Miles White (2011) states:

> Movement, gesture, posture, and kinds of stylized street wear are discourses that mark many young urban black males in full rebellion against standard norms of deportment and draw from a vernacular vocabulary of stylized expressive movement that black youth have used to mark difference. (p.41)

One of the black masculine performative gestures specific to the hip hop generation is mean mugging (White, 2011). Mean mugging can be read as a performance that reiterates the aggressive, violent brute while simultaneously contests the demand that black men be subordinate and happy (e.g., Uncle Tom). Mean mugging can also be seen as a restorative gesture that aims to counter the historical portrayal of black men as overjoyed, whimsical coons and pushes "back against the Panopticonic gaze of patriarchal structures of power in which black males are made hyper-visible and the subject of constant surveillance by institutions of state power and media" (p. 43). Thus, through the mean mugging gesture black bodies perform resistance by asserting control over and resisting the controlling of their body and rejecting stereotypical corporal scripts assigned to them.

In addition to mean mugging, the cool pose and swagger are black masculine performances enacted in public and private homeplaces. The cool pose or cool posturing can be deployed in several ways: it can be exhibited through the way you talk, walk, or position your body. According to Majors and Billings (1992), the cool pose has many functions. It is a "way of surviving" (p. 2), "masking strategy" (p. 2), "coping mechanism" (p. 3), "critical psychological defense" (p.3), "well-developed and creative art" (p. 27), and an outward presentation of

"masculine self-control" (p.29). In their book, *Cool Pose*, Majors and Billings (1992) state "This strategic style allows the black male to tip society's imbalance scales in his favor. Coolness means poise under pressure and the ability to maintain detachment, even during tense encounters" (p. 2). Conversely, swagger is also a performative gesture that scholars have noted to be used by black bodies in the public and private sphere. When discussing swagger, White (2011) writes:

> It is to some degree both an external and an internal act of performance, as it indexes not only rhythm and style in one's performance of physical self and personal carriage, but also suggests a high degree of self-confidence, the knowledge that one can handle himself in any situation with cool and sophistication. (p.42)

From this reading, it can be concluded that swagger, like the cool pose, is also a creative coping mechanism and psychological tool that black bodies use to navigate everyday life. Swagger indexes movements and performative gestures used by black bodies in their public and private lives that signal to the world and self, reassurance, confidence, and composure (White, 2011, p. 42). From the way an individual handles success and failures, to the way an individual talks to and with others, swagger can be exhibited in a multitude of ways and is among the indexed gestures that exemplify how black masculinity manifest itself in the body (White, 2011).

Performance gestures don't just manifest themselves in flesh, clothes can also play a major role in indexing performativity. According to White (2011), clothes "help signify social identification and self-identity" and are "indexical of one's socio-cultural background and often telling markers of racial ethnicity and identity" (p. 45). This reading of clothing, such as the wearing of athletic apparel, oversized jeans, a bandana, leaving underwear waistbands visible, or twisting ball cap backwards renders these fashion choices as markers of meaning and potential

performative and political gestures (White, 2011). In my dissertation, I analyze how cool poses, swagger and clothing choices, as a marker and performance of masculinity, work to support and challenge hegemonic black masculinity within popular culture and in my lived experience within three distinct homeplaces.

Black Feminist-Informed Black Masculine Theory and Homeplace

This dissertation is grounded by a black masculine theoretical framework (Jackson, 1997; Jackson & Dangerfield, 2004; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Robinson, 2016; Wade & Rochlen, 2013), bell hooks' concept of homeplace (1990), and theories centered on the performativity of place. Aligning with the focus of black masculine studies, the theoretical lens of black masculine theory rejects the post-racial idea of colorblindness and is centered on analyzing and theorizing the uniqueness and complexities of the black masculine experience. Using black masculine theory to ground this project provides me with a culturally conscious black masculine lens to explore black male subjectivity and the intersecting of identities within the working class black male body.

Black masculine theory posits that conceptions of masculinity should not be culturally generic or generalized (Jackson, 2006). Not acknowledging difference is problematic and assumes sameness. Addressing the issue of generalizing masculinities, in *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, communication scholar Ronald Jackson (2006) writes "In assuming that all masculinities are the same, one presupposes that all men should completely share the burden of U.S. White male patriarchal allegations without sharing the licenses to White male privilege, access, inclusion, and power" (p.129). Black masculine theory also marks black masculinity as heterogeneous, multifaceted, and fluid. Marking black masculinist scholarship as distinct and in opposition of being viewed through a Eurocentric lens, Jackson (1997) asserts "Black

masculinist scholarship cannot afford to accept, approve, and adopt the same cultural, social and political agendas as traditional White masculinist scholarship. The two areas of gender theory share some commonalities, however there is a distinction that emerges at the intersection where gender meets culture" (p.731). Regarding the complexity and fluidness of black masculinity, Jackson (2006) writes "Black masculinity is a behavioral category in flux developing with age, experience, stability, cultural consciousness, self-comfort, and spiritual awareness... it is increasingly difficult to agree on universal criteria for black manhood" (pp. 139-140). Jackson's point about the fluidity and range of black masculinity is made even clearer when he asserts "masculinities are not to be understood as a singular or unitary reality, but as multiple masculinities, pluralized to accent an anti-essentialist perspective, which accounts for variegations due to culture, class, sexual preference, religion, and other axes of difference" (2006, p.132).

Black masculine theory is anchored by several foundational tenets. In the book chapter titled, "An Integrated Theory of Black Masculinity," Ronald Jackson (2006) articulates the assumptions that undergird black masculine identity theory. These beliefs include:

1. Struggle is a human activity that solidifies one's sense of community.
2. Struggle is defined by group experiences (i.e., it is not that struggle is unique to black males but that racial and gender group experiences of black males contextualize struggle).
3. Struggle is the centerpiece of the black masculine identity model because of the complexity of defining and negotiating black masculine identity.
4. All identity theories in some way call for dialectics. In this case, black masculine identities are enwrapped in an I-Other dialectic involving politics of recognition.

5. Black masculine persons are usually preoccupied with a sense of self-efficacy, which, when achieved, offers a sense of life satisfaction, autonomy, and stability.
6. Black masculine persons' motivation to achieve is culturally, historically, and socially founded.
7. Without struggle, recognition, independence, and achievement, commitment to community is virtually impossible. (p.135)

In the same book chapter, Jackson (2006) outlines several thematic constructs drawn from the literature on black masculinity that are germane to understanding black masculine selfhood. These paradigms include: recognition, independence, achievement, and community (p.134). Specifically, the constructs are concerned with understanding how: recognition politics affect positionality (p.137), independence is connected to the transformation of male masculinities (p. 138), setting and achieving personal goals is connected to the cultural self (p.139), and the "community plays a viable role in how masculinities are constructed and positioned" (p.140). Using these premises and constructs set forth by black masculine theory provides me with a culturally sensitive framework and lens to view the performance of black masculinity in hip hop/popular culture through, analyze my lived experiences within the three homeplaces I identify, examine how I perform my black masculine self, and inspect how my identity in terms of race, class, and gender support and challenge hegemonic black masculinity. Like Jackson and Lemons, I draw from black feminist scholar bell hooks. My dissertation merges bell hooks' research that examines the performance of masculinity (hooks, 2003; hooks, 2004) and the development of black selfhood within cultural locations (hooks, 1990). In particular, hooks' concept of homeplace and similar theories of spatiality that I deploy, address how specific spaces shape and impact individuals' performativity. Ultimately, hooks' concept provides me with a

spatial and performative lens to analyze how the homeplaces I identify have influenced the ways in which I understand and perform my black masculine self.

bell hooks' (1990) concept of homeplace rereads the idea of homemaking. For hooks, creating a homeplace is not a servile or passive effort, instead, it is a "radically subversive political gesture" that she witnessed her foremothers perform (hooks, 1990, p.382). Homeplaces are sites of resistance, places of refuge, locations of healing and recovering wholeness, and spaces of renewal, recovery, and developing critical consciousness (pp. 382-388). However, hooks (1990) also states that homeplaces can be oppressive, abusive, and normative confirming spaces (p.388). Whether affirming or harmful, from hooks' reading of homeplaces, it can be concluded that these private and public racialized cultural spaces have a dramatic impact on our identity development.

Additionally, three spatial claims serve as the foundation for my understanding of how space informs the way others and I perceive my black masculine self. The first claim is spaces carry histories and performative norms (Bowman, 2006; Dubois, 2014; Harrison & Dourish, 1996; Tuan, 1977). The second claim is spaces are not passive. They are active. As communication and performance scholar Judith Hamera (2006) writes, "space is not simply an inert context, a barren stage waiting for actors to show up. On the contrary, it is itself an actor, produced by and, in turn, producing communicative possibilities materialized by embodied subjects" (p.76). The last claim is space is continually evolving. As Janet L. Abu-Lughod (1999) states, environments are "created and continually being re-created, albeit by collectivities of social actors engaged in complex dances of successive and symbiotic interactions" (pp. 4-5). Although many of the aforementioned theorizations about spatiality focus on the public sphere, scholars have also illustrated how private communities and spaces influence the performativity

of social actors (Boylorn, 2013, 2014; Durham, 2013). This triangulation of tenets, spaces carry histories and performative norms, spaces are active, and spaces are constantly evolving, lead me to believe that as I enter a space, the histories and performative norms of that space form a lens through which my black masculine self will be viewed. However, as I am being viewed through that lens, my performance within the space is constrained by and evolves the history and performative norms of the space and the performances of others in the space. Thus, I actively impact, and simultaneously, am actively impacted by spaces, their histories, and the individuals within them. It is through this triangulation of claims that I understand how space informs how others and I perceive my black masculine self.

Along with space, bodies also carry histories (Browne, 2015; Neal, 2013; White, 2011). Corporal histories are ascribed to us within the communities and cultures we exist within. These histories influence our performance, how others view us, and how we see ourselves (Jackson, 2006). These historicized scripts often serve as lenses through which our bodies and performances are analyzed and understood. As we move throughout our lives, often without noticing it, we are constantly engaged in supporting and/or challenging these hegemonic histories and scripts. These spatial theorizations, along with hooks' concept of homeplace, make palpable the active and influential nature of public and private localities and provide me with a framework to examine how spatiality impacts how I understand and perform my black masculine self in the three distinct homeplaces I identify.

Autoethnography as Method and Performance

> Autoethnography unearths. It is the mind-mining excavation of experience exhumed from buried field notes and dormant memories recovered to reconstruct one's self within a particular historical or cultural context.
>
> - Aisha S. Durham, 2014, p. 19

In this dissertation, I use the research method of autoethnography to situate my lived experience within broader conversations about black masculinity and locate homeplace as racialized space. Similar to qualitative research methods such as narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and autocritography (Awkward, 1999; Lemons, 2008), autoethnography is defined as a subjective genre of writing and introspective methodological approach that is anchored in personal lived experiences, displays multiple layers of consciousness, and situates the personal self within a cultural, political, and social context (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Griffin, 2012; Jones, 2000; Martinez, 2006; Rodriguez, 2006). Situating the "I" within a cultural context, autoethnography's methodological marking of the self becomes, not a "self-centered product, but a reciprocal process" that reflexively examines how research is connected to and embedded within researchers (Steier, 1991, p. 7).

Written from a first-person point of view, autoethnographies can appear in a variety of forms, including: memoirs, narratives, short stories, poetry, fiction, photographic essays, and journals (Durham, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones, 2000; Griffin, 2012). Expanding the methodological scope of autoethnography to include performance, Spry (2001) marks performance autoethnography as "the convergence of the 'autobiographic impulse' and the 'ethnographic moment' represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the intersections of the

always migratory identity" (p. 706). Thus, performance autoethnography can be seen as a qualitative method that allows researchers to explore and understand the cultures and lived experiences of others and the self through the embodied experience of performing autoethnographic texts (Denzin, 2003, 2017; Fuller, 2000; Neuman, 1996; Spry, 2017). Autoethnography provide me with an ideal method to produce embodied creative art- based scholarship (Ellis, 2002; Faulkner, 2016), and analyze how I have come to understand my cultural body and perform my black masculine self within distinct homeplaces.

There are many benefits to using autoethnography as a methodological approach. These benefits include autoethnography's ability to critique and extend current theory and research about identity and culture, illuminate social phenomena, give voice to marginalized individuals, and make research accessible to lay audiences (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). For example, Bryant Keith Alexander and E. Patrick Johnson are leading scholars who have who developed autoethnographic performative writing about black masculinity. In his article "Skin Flint," Alexander (2000) creates an autoethnographic text that details his relationship with his father and highlights how as an adolescent and adult he internalized racism, classism, and prejudice (p. 109). Echoing Alexander, E. Patrick Johnson (2001) creates a reflexive personal narrative about his grandmother to introduce a discussion about how research within queer studies often overlooks race and class. In my research, I extend the work of Alexander and Johnson by using personal narratives to explore black masculinity. Another advantage of using autoethnography is the method's self-reflexive bend. Steier (1995) states, "Reflexivity, or a turning back onto a self, is a way in which circulatory and self- reference appears in inquiry, as we contextually recognize the various mutual relationships in which our knowing activities are embedded" (p. 163). Thus, self-reflexivity asks researchers, in this case autoethnographers, to analyze and acknowledge the

ways in which their relationship to their research impacts the ways they interpret and produce scholarship. Ultimately, self- reflexivity requires scholars to view themselves as not passive, but instead, active observers, interpreters and producer of data and knowledge (Steier, 1991, p.84).

While autoethnography has its strengths as a methodological approach, it also has limitations. Conducting autoethnographic research can present researchers with some ethical challenges (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Some of these challenges include implicating others and their actions and describing experiences that involve others from a singular perspective. Considering these challenges and how autoethnographers work can frame others, it is imperative that researchers mark their reflections as singular and subjective interpretations of events or experiences (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015).

In addition to ethical challenges, autoethnographers receive criticism for using a methodological approach that is neither, generalizable nor objective (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). However, the goal of autoethnography is not generalizability; it is looking at the self to say something meaningful about culture and reflexively understanding self in relation to others. The aim of autoethnographic work is to speak to readers through stories that mirror their own life experiences, inspire readers to compare and contrast their own experiences with those in autoethnographic renderings, and inform readers about cultural experiences, processes, and performances that they may not have been privy to in their lives (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

There are additional limitations to this methodological approach. Because autoethnography is a methodological practice anchored in personal lived experience, this project might be limited by the emphasizing of a single story to narrate black masculinity, highlighting of space-specific experiences of belonging as a black male body using homeplace, and the

privileging of one perspective as opposed to multiple experiences through other embodied methods such interviews and focus groups. While objectivity is not the goal of autoethnography, I suggest autoethnographers acknowledge their positionality in relation to the research(ed) and examine how their positionality may impact the research(ed). As Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) state, autoethnographers should "account for…identities, limitations, and perspectives and show readers that…the way I make sense of…experiences are not the only way to make sense of them" (p. 30). In my dissertation, I acknowledge and explore my positionality as a college-educated straight cisgender black man from the hip hop generation researching black masculinity and analyze how my positionality in relation to my research impacts my work.

With autoethnography's emphasis on examining the self, cultural performances, and how the self is situated and implicated within cultural contexts, I have an ideal method to conduct my research that analyzes my performance of black masculinity within distinct racialized homeplaces and how my cultural body supports and challenges hegemonic black masculinity.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation uses hip hop as a lens and metaphor to weave together and analyze my experiences within my storied personal, professional, and performance homeplaces. Utilizing the hip hop b-boy/b-girl, DJ and MC as metaphorical threads to connect the chapters, my dissertation examines the ways in which black men in the mass media and in their everyday lives challenge and support hegemonic black masculinity.

Chapter two explores Little Rock as a personal homeplace where black masculinity is performed and represented. In chapter two I explore my upbringing in Little Rock by calling attention to a triangulation of events that I experienced in the mid and late 90s while living in the greater Little Rock metropolitan area. These events include living in Little Rock during the

“gang war” years, losing my father to cancer, and falling in love with hip hop music. This chapter intertwines these events and examines how they collectively shifted, shaped, and (re)framed my adolescent understanding of what it meant to be a black man. Using the metaphor of the hip hop b-boy this chapter explores my black masculine “be” coming and contributes to scholarship that analyzes the ways in which black men in the mass media and in their everyday lives, support and challenge hegemonic black masculinity.

Chapter three explores my homeplace on the performance stage and within performative writing. Combining elements of spoken word poetry and performance autoethnography, within chapter three I creatively explore and expand the ways in which we as scholars present autoethnographic research and write about/represent the lived experiences of black men. The spoken word poem I share within this chapter, “Unveiling Our Scars”, weaves back and forth between personal reflections about love, the cultural scripts and stereotypes black men navigate in their daily lives, and an in-depth examination of a romantic relationship. The poetry within this chapter analyses how my actions within interpersonal and romantic relationships have supported and challenged hegemonic black masculinity. Within chapter three, using my autoethnographic poem and lyrics of the hip hop MC, Jay Z, I challenge the canonical and contemporary monolithic scripting of black men as super human, unable to experience pain, and being emotionally stoic unless expressing anger (Boylorn, 2017; Neal, 2013; White, 2011), and illustrate what communication scholar Ronald L. Jackson (2006) described as the embracing of "multiple black masculinities rather that an essentialist, unifocal black masculinity" (p. 150). Ultimately, the chapters within this dissertation combine hip hop, homeplace and the black masculine to provide readers with a creative-intellectual lens with which to explore and analyze the complexities represented within black men and their performance of masculinity in the mass

media and their everyday lives.

Chapter four explores my academic homeplaces. Like the DJ who mixes together snippets of songs, within this chapter, I use snippets of memories to create a layered account of my experience of being an insider/outsider within racialized academic spaces. Sharing these snippets lead me to a discussion about how the writing choices I deploy within my dissertation are an active attempt to make room and create a homeplace for myself within the ivory tower. Extending the deejay metaphor, I discuss how DJs use turntables and records to sonically merge different worlds by bringing together disparate sounds, voices, and cultures. I argue, like the DJ, my writing intentionally brings together two worlds/two cultures/two voices/two selves: my academic self and hip hop self. Through my word choice (mixing in hip hop/black vernacular), use of hip hop aesthetics (hip hop metaphors and examples), and who I cite (sampling), I remix canonical Eurocentric ways of producing knowledge, make room for my voice to be heard in the racialized academic homeplaces I exist within, and follow in the footsteps/extend the work of code meshing hip hop scholars like Mark Anthony Neal, Aisha Durham, Michael Eric Dyson, Regina Bradley, Bettina Love, Vershawn Ashanti Young, and Marc Lamont Hill, who use hip hop aesthetics within their academic writing to push back on and (re)write the ways black bodies can exist within the academy.

In the conclusion, I review my dissertation's intellectual contributions to communication, hip hop and Africana studies, and revisit the personal journey and revelations that I experienced while composing this project. Within this chapter, I also discuss the ways in which I grappled with narratively and aesthetically combining my hip hop self and academic self within my research. Furthermore, I reflexively explore how my research highlights the problematic ways in which I have romanticized hegemonic black masculinity as an adolescent/adult and discuss the

way in which hip hop culture, like the scripting of black masculinity in the mass media, can be liberating and simultaneously limiting. Lastly, I articulate the limitations and implications of my dissertation to the field of communication studies and explore possible future trajectories of research concerning the performance of black masculinity.

Ultimately, this autoethnographic dissertation examines my storied homeplaces: Little Rock, the academy and the performance stage. Through my narrative, I illustrate snapshots of black manhood, explore my understanding of my black cultural body, analyze my performance of the black masculine, and examine how I support and challenge hegemonic black masculinity. By conducting autoethnographic research and privileging my personal lived experience, I aspire to speak to readers through stories that mirror their own life experiences, inspire readers to compare and contrast their life experiences with those located in my autoethnographic renderings, and inform readers about cultural experiences, processes, and performances they may not have experienced or identify with (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As an emerging communication scholar, it is my hope to contribute to the field by extending the methodological and writing practice of autoethnography by blending narrative with poetry and performance, theorizing southern working-class black masculinity using intersectionality, and updating tropes of the black masculine in media and communication represented in the post-hip hop generation.

CHAPTER TWO:

BETWEEN HIP HOP, HOME AND HBO

Marginalization and alienation are dynamite just waiting for a match.

-Maurice Jackson (2005)

Every city has its storied past. Some southern stories are buried only to be resurrected and whitewashed to avoid darkening their lily-white legacy. My coming-of-age story during the 1990s was commercialized, commodified, and communicated through the lens of cable television networks and hip hop culture. With the documentary *Gang War*, HBO attempted to rewrite the national narrative concerning black life in Little Rock. In one generation, the stories of revolutionary civil rights leaders and nationally renowned business districts of black Little Rock withered into ones about crips and bloods that transformed a southern city into the Wild Wild West. From beauty to blight, my childhood embodies both stories. I embody black Little Rock. In this chapter, using hip hop and the metaphor of the b-boy who reconfigures his body to communicate and generate new meaning, I identify stories from my past in Little Rock to show competing scripts of black masculinity. I use the HBO documentary *Gang War: Bangin in Little Rock* (Levin, 1994) and the southern hip hop styling from a group called Outkast, as historical "breaks" to narrate my black masculine "b" coming. The coming-of-age stories I body are autoethnographic snapshots that speak to an expanded rendering of black masculinity, the regional shift of hip hop to the US and global south, and the "new" south attempting to reconcile different stories about blackness in the post-civil rights era.

Outkasted Masculinity: Big Bois and Andrés

In the Kitchen, 1994. Leaning against the kitchen counter, I struggle to digest the news my mother shares with me. She says, "Anthony is dead." I only know one Anthony and I saw him earlier this week. She can't be talking about him. She adds, "I wanted to tell you before you saw the story on the news." As she shares the details surrounding Anthony's murder, I feel myself growing numb. My ability to concentrate on what she is saying begins to fade. My vision begins to blur as my eyes fill with tears. I see my mother's lips moving, but I'm only grabbing and retaining bits and pieces of her sentences. Anthony was shot to death. Gang initiation. Burglary. My mind can't and doesn't want to grasp what she is saying. I clutch the kitchen counter to support the heaviness my body is beginning to feel. I keep thinking to myself that it doesn't make sense for death to come for a 17-year-old black boy who is so full of life and energy. Anthony was not raised to be a gangster. He came from a two-parent home. He had a mother and father that loved him. His father played golf! How many gang members have parents that play golf? If Anthony didn't break into that house to get initiated into that fucking gang, he never would've been shot to death by the homeowner and I wouldn't be crying in this kitchen and wishing this day never happened.

During my adolescent years in Little Rock, I was invited to perform two contrasting scripts of black masculinity. Both of the performative options were highlighted within the music group, Outkast. The members that made up the music duo were both considered outcasts because they were young black men in American society and southern artists in a heavily East Coast/West Coast hip hop culture during the 1990s. I had the option of being the Big Boi that performed a pimp/street ethos and embodied hegemonic black masculinity, or I had the option of being like Andre 3000, a stereotype defying individual that refused to obey the normative

hegemonic standards of black masculine performativity. Anthony… was an Andre who wanted to "be"come a Big Boi/boy.

When Arkansans speak of living in the south and Little Rock during the 1990s, somewhere in the conversation they will probably mention Bill Clinton's political stint as governor or Coach Nolan Richardson and the Arkansas Razorbacks who terrorized teams with their "40 Minutes of Hell" (Holley, 2012) when they won the 1994 NCAA basketball championship. However, spoken about with less enthusiasm, what is also likely to come up in a conversation about Little Rock in the 90s is the violence that gripped the city during that period. It was an unproportioned level of violence that earned Little Rock the unceremonious title of "murder capital" of the United States (Strachan & Manley, 2017).

This violence and the role that black boy played within it was scripted. In the HBO documentary, *Gang War: Bangin in Little Rock* (Levin, 1994), the Little Rock County Coroner Steve Nawojczyk shows pictures of murder victims to neighborhood youth, warns them about the horrors of gang life, and pleads with them to end black on black violence. The film documents drive-by shootings, gang rituals, and funerals filled with bereaved parents, parents that remind me of Anthony's mother and father. Within the documentary, black boys in Little Rock, black boys that looked like me and my friends, rarely stray beyond the performative scope of violent brutes and gangsters/thugs (Jackson, 2006; White, 2011), or what Hillary Clinton described in 1996 as "super predators" (Graves, 2006). Within the film, black boys are portrayed as a sickness, or as one newspaper columnist put it "like a cancer, Crips and Bloods and all the other variations on inner-city gangs have metastasized at an alarming rate" (Silverman, 1994). However, while columnists and film makers used media outlets to categorize black youth in Little Rock as a sickness, few utilized their platforms to detail the pathogen producing state and

federal violence that contributed to the creation of the economically vulnerable communities where the youth lived and were filmed. For many Arkansans and Americans, the documentary was an eye-opening moment that gave viewers a glimpse into the lived experiences of inner-city youth and the violence they live with daily. For me the film was a lesson in how monolithic media depictions of black life can contribute to the outkasting of black men and the misunderstanding/misrepresentation of our lived experiences.

Hip Hop music provided what the documentary did not—it provided a context to intraracial discord and offered a window into the material and emotional lives of black boys braving the compounded violence of poverty in the 1990s. Whether hanging out on street corners or porches, or cruising in cars, the documentary showed gang-affiliated black boys emphatically reciting rap lyrics verbatim from their portable stereos and car speakers. Here, a visual correlation is made between the rise of gangsta rap and the escalating violence in Little Rock. Ultimately, the film portrays hip hop as the theme music for black youth anarchy and upheaval. However, the violence that manifested in black Little Rock was not created by the increased popularity of gangsta rap. Instead, it was birthed out of decades of marginalization, alienation, and systemic state-sanctioned violence. The director of *Gang War*, Marc Levin, conveniently overlooks the structural conditions that produced the violence that he filmed. There is no mention of the Housing Act of 1949, the Federal Highway Act of 1944, redlining practices, or racial discriminatory policies deployed over decades to destroy communities, displace families, deny home loans, and develop hyper-segregated neighborhoods like the Little Rock public housing projects represented in *Gang War* (Kirk, 2005; Semuels, 2016). It was this divestment of city and state resources in black communities that contributed to extreme concentrated poverty and 70 percent of those living below the poverty line in Little Rock during

the 1990s being black (Kirk, 2005; Kirk, 2007, Kirk & Porter, 2014). Through the lens of the director, a simple narrative script is created, black males are innately violent and incubators for toxic masculinity. Through a different lens, a hip hop lens, I would be exposed to portrayals of black men that upheld these negative images and other portrayals that flipped the script, pushing back upon normative hegemonic performances of black masculinity.

Funeral Home, 1998. I don't know what or how I should be feeling in this moment. As I sit on the front row of my father's funeral, I am reminded of Anthony's funeral. Death is becoming a regular occurrence in my life. I am getting accustomed to housing the numbness and simultaneous rage that manifests when I lose people that I care about. As I stare at the floor, one by one, tears begin to fall and a small puddle forms between my feet. Even though it is directly in front of me, I do not want to look at the casket. Seeing my father's lifeless body will make this event too real. If I don't look at the casket, I can imagine he is still alive and this is a bad dream.

A few weeks prior to his death, my mother told me that it wouldn't be long before he passed away. I am learning, death is like a hurricane, whether you know it's coming or not, nothing can really prepare you for the magnitude of its force. I keep thinking, this isn't a lesson fourteen-year-old children should have to learn. In the months leading up to his death, my mother and I watch as chemotherapy treatments aggressively wither and soften my father's 6'4 chiseled frame.

When the funeral ends, my mother and I go home. The house is filled with silence because neither her, nor I feel like talking. I go to my room, lay on my bed, and stare at the ceiling. In my fourteen-year-old mind, I ponder, if I will have to be the man of the house now? What does that even mean? I put my headphones on and press play on my CD player. Hip hop

breaks the silence as it flows into my eardrums. I close my eyes and allow myself to get lost in the lyrics and the rhythm of the beat. The songs didn't remove the numbness/pain I feel from losing my father or Anthony, or quiet my questioning mind. However, the songs do provide me with two to three minute windows of escape from my reality and the deafening silence.

Cool Pose: Bedroom Rehearsals

I survived the Little Rock gang war years depicted in the documentary. After my father died from cancer, I looked to hip hop culture to find and mimic black manhood. For me, as a youth, the black masculine images depicted within hip hop culture were what Simon and Gagnon (1984) defined as cultural scenarios, or representational scripts of signs and symbols that become instructional guides for performance. To me, hip hop became more than just music. Ultimately, I viewed hip hop and the black men within it as a performative soundtrack and template for black masculine behavior and identity. Black men within hip hop culture in late 1990s and early 2000s were often relegated to being represented as gangsters, hustlers, and players by the mainstream media (Boylorn, 2017; White, 2011). This narrowly depicted triune of black masculine representations became the scripts I tirelessly rehearsed. When the block was too hot—from the state of police surveillance or the state of southern summer heat--my bedroom became my "cool" place for my black masculine rehearsal sessions. Like a b-boy practicing atop a piece of worn cardboard on a street corner, (re)making and (re)imagining the ways his body can contort and be seen, my bedroom became the practice space where I rehearsed my cool pose. Cool poses are defined as "the use of posing and posturing to communicate power, toughness, detachment and style" (Majors & Billson, 1992, p.8). Standing in front of my bedroom mirror, I mimic the posturing of gang members I saw in my community, while listening to the music and singing the gangster rap lyrics from Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* (Broadus & Young, 1992) album and songs like

Snoop Dogg's "Gin and Juice" (Casey, Young, Finch & Broadus, 1994). In front of my bedroom mirror, while listening to songs like Tupac's "Hit 'Em Up" (Shakur, 1996) and the Luniz's "I Got Five On It" (Ellis & Husbands, 1995), I practice throwing up gang signs, sagging, and perfecting a mean mug to look aggressive with swagger. I could not look weak. I could not look soft. I could not look like a bitch (Neal, 2013). This racial-gender performance echoed in rap was the script my friends and I choreographed daily to become men. My ability to perform swagger and the cool pose was a survival strategy that I had to master. To be seen as weak or soft, was to be marked for (social) death.

Corner Store, 1995. I'm feeling extra good because I have on my favorite all-red St. Louis Cardinals shirt. It is springtime, which signals it is baseball season. Before my father got sick, we would watch baseball together for hours. This day, I get a chance to hang out with my older sister and cousins to cheer for our favorite family team. It is unseasonably hot, so I decide to walk to the store a block away from my sister's house to buy a soda. As I leave, she tells me to be careful. I hear her words leaving the convenience store where a big boy twice my size is mean mugging me. "Where you from, cuz?" From his questioning, I am sure of two things. One, he is a Crip because of his use of the familial slang term reserved for its gang members. Plus, he is wearing a designer British Knights t-shirt (these shirts were often designed with the bold capital letters BK and signified that an individual was a "B"lood "K"iller). Two, his question is not a question. From the seriousness and sternness in his voice, I can tell he thinks I am a member of a rival blood gang, because I am wearing a red shirt and red is one of the primary colors that blood gang members wear. "I don't bang," I say stuttering. Thinking I am a rival gang member trying to get out of a fight, he says "Oh, forreal, you don't bang, homeboy? Then where you from cuz?" Even though I said I didn't gang bang, I know if I tell him where I live,

which is a blood neighborhood, it is going to lead to a fight that I know I will lose. Thinking quickly, I point to my sister's house. "My sister stays right there." He recognizes the home. With a puzzled look on his face, he asks "You related to Miss Carolyn?" "I'm her little brother," I reply. Upon hearing this, the aggressiveness in his voice decreases, he softens the mean mug that covers his face, and I slowly begin to feel like my life is no longer in danger. Out of respect for my sister, he gives me a pass with parting words that I would have to live or die by: "Don't wear red over here no more lil homie. That shit can get you stomped out or killed. If you do wear red when you visit your sister, you need to stay in the house." I heed his advice walking back to my sister's home. Fight avoided this time. But sometimes moments like these make me wish I had more of a Big Boi/big boy image. Moments like these make me wish I was in a gang. If I was in a gang, I would have people to back me up and fight for me if I ever got confronted. I wouldn't be scared, feel weak, or have to pray that I could talk my way out of a confrontation.

Andre 3000: Expanding the Possibilities of Black Masculinity

It's like everybody's talking about sipping champagne and being big time. So we took it upon ourselves to do something new.

- André Benjamin (1996)

"ATLiens"

Put my glock
away I got a stronger
weapon
That never runs out of
ammunition So I'm ready
for war okay.

- André Benjamin (1996)

While I coveted the street toughness and gangsterness of big boys and Big Boi, I also admired the defiant and rebellious performance of black masculinity brandished by Andre 3000. In the 90s, as he evolved and became a celebrated artist who curated his own style of outkasted masculinity, a style that rarely conformed to hip hop culture's performative norms, I soaked up his words and mimicked his behavior as well. As a teenager, I was not only influenced to rethink black masculine performance because of Andre 3000's avant-garde style, but the non-violent themes he weaved into his lyrics also were instrumental in shifting and reshaping my idea of what were acceptable black masculine performances. During the 1990s, when many notable MCs and record labels were embroiled in rap beefs and producing hyper-aggressive music that instigated and glorified violence, Andre 3000's music served as a lyrical counter narrative. Examples of this can be seen on the album Outkast released in 1996, *ATLiens*. From that album, on songs like "ATLiens" and "Babylon," which were released during the height of the legendary and violent bicoastal feud taking place in hip hop that claimed the lives of Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G., Andre 3000 rapped about the need for black men to not yield to aggression, make conscious efforts to not resort to violence, and put down guns and be empowered through discovering alternative ways to channel their anger (Benjamin, 1996). As my infatuation with Outkast grew, repeatedly listening to songs like "ATLiens" and "Babylon" made me begin to question the hyper aggressive thug/brute (White, 2011) persona I desired to cultivate and saw many black men performing within the hip hop industry and my community.

Although his MLK-like/peace influenced lyrics offered positive alternatives to violence, Andre understood and stated on multiple songs that his words, which did not match the more violent, hyper aggressive, and perceived harder rhymes of his contemporaries, would cause some

listeners to view him as less masculine or soft (Benjamin, 1996; Benjamin, 1998). As a black boy, his rhymes remixed masculinity and provided an alternative way of thinking about and becoming a man. Andre challenged gangster scripts of the hard, tough and aggressive black boy that I'd previously practiced in my bedroom mirror. Through Outkast's records and music videos, he expanded my understanding of the performative possibilities of black masculinity. While studying and rehearsing the performative scripts exhibited by Big Boi and Andre 3000, my embodiment, performance, and idea of black manhood shifted and contorted in contrasting directions. Like a b-boy looking for the perfect moment during a song to get free and exhibit some new moves, Andre 3000's performance of black masculinity provided me with a performative "break beat" within hegemonic black masculinity, and showed me that the performance of black manhood does not have to exist within a box. Instead, black manhood can look, sound and move in a variety of different ways.

Bus Stop Chronicles: It is an average afternoon and bus ride home. Big boy weed smoke moves from the back of the bus to the front where lil homies like me make beats with pencils and fist pounds as we freestyle and rap our favorite hip hop lyrics. The cypher is all the way live. So live, that I don't notice the blue 87 Caprice Classic that is tailgating the bus. The bus driver pulls up to our bus stop and warns the older homies that he will call the police on them if they smoke weed on the bus again. All the lil homies laugh because it is the same threat that we have been hearing all year long. As the bus doors open a sea of smoke and black adolescent bodies flow from the bus onto the neighborhood corner. As soon as me and my homeboys start back up our freestyle session, a Chevy Caprice bumping loud music swerves onto my block with its tires peeling out and barely misses hitting me and my best friend. The driver of the car along with four other people riding with him hop out the ride. The driver of the Caprice pulls out a strap

and points it at the head of my best friends' older brother, a Big Boi/big boy, who is standing a few feet away from me. The driver yells, "What's up with all that motherfucking bullshit you were talking at school bitch? Say something now slob (a derogatory term used to refer to blood gang members) ass nigga!" My best friend and I freeze. The Big Boi/big boy stares down the barrel of the gun. Then, the driver of the Chevy Caprice pulls the trigger.

Bus Stop Chronicles: While walking to the bus stop, I did it. I committed a hip hop and homeboy cardinal sin. I accidently stepped on the fresh white kicks of a neighborhood kid. This is gonna be a problem. There is no amount of "sorrys" that could remove the smudge I'd just left on the new pair of Nikes. Lord, why did the shoes have to be white? That stain ain't coming out. Before I can begin to utter my apology, the kid thrusts his arms into my chest and shoves me. I stumble backwards, tripping over my feet. Instantly, I assume my bedroom rehearsed 'I ain't nobody's-bitch' pose I routinely choreographed in the mirror. Mirroring the energy and imagery of a b-boy showdown, a crowd of school aged kids quickly create a circle around us and begin cheering and yelling. They want to see a battle. Me and the boy I committed the cardinal sin against circle each other with clinched fists. The crowd yells for someone to throw the first punch. Make the first move. I can tell from our extended circling of each other and lack of punches thrown, neither me nor the other boy actually want to fight. However, neither one of us wants to be seen as soft. I lower my hands and slowly begin to retreat. "I can't believe you are punking out like a little bitch," an onlooker says. I save face and my cool pose by asserting, "ain't nobody got time for this bullshit." To some big boys I was soft, a loser. In my mind, however, I did not lose the black boy (b-boy) battle. Instead, I was becoming a man who was slowly *learning to be ok with being an outkast.*

Contorting in the Key of Masculinity

According to black masculine identity theory, black men's perception of masculinity is not fixed, instead, it is in constant flux. However, it is within their communities that black men's perceptions of appropriate black masculine behaviors are modeled and affirmed. These communities (i.e. homeplaces) are significant influences on how black men perceive and perform black masculinity (Jackson, 2006). Analyzing the correlation between community and how black men conceptualize black masculinity, in this chapter I explore how my experience of growing up in my homeplace of Little Rock, Arkansas and within hip hop culture, in my teenage years during the 1990s helped to shape my identity. This chapter examines the cultural scripting and representation of black masculinity within popular culture, explores how mass media produced images of black men and Little Rock informed my understanding and performance of my black masculine self, and analyzes how my behavior as an adolescent supported and challenged hegemonic black masculinity. Moreover, I detailed how the hip hop duo Outkast provided a blueprint for emerging scripts of black masculinity in the new South. In the process of shifting how black men and the performance of black masculinity were seen within hip hop, I suggest that Andre 3000 expanded my idea of manhood by challenging the traditional gangster/brute/buck black masculine scripts that I mimicked for protection and acceptance early in my adolescence.

Music, as an embodied performance, has the power to inform how we see ourselves and the world around us. McRae (2009) states:

> Technologies, such as musical instruments are connected to and with our experience of the world at an embodied level, and these connections shape the ways in which we know the world and are in the world. As I learn to become a bass player, I am changing even at

> the level of my body, and therefore changing both who I am and how I come to know myself. (p. 136)

In a later essay, McRae (2010) included musical compositions and songs in the category of transformative musical technologies that have the power to shape our identities and perceptions. Like McRae, I believe our relationships with music technologies can be impactful. In my case, it was not a musical instrument, instead, it was hip hop music/culture that changed how I saw myself and the world around me. Like the musician who moves their hands across the fret broad and contorts their fingertip in search of the right note on their bass guitar, I also spent countless hours in front of my bedroom mirror listening to hip hop music and reading hip hop magazines, attempting to contort my body into what I thought was the correct key of masculinity. Like McRae with his bass guitar, my rehearsal sessions changed who I was and how I came to know myself. During those rehearsal sessions, my black masculine body and identity were the instruments I tirelessly attempted to play in the right pitch. Those rehearsal sessions forever changed how I saw black men and the range of their performative possibilities.

As a youth, my performance of black masculinity was a choreographed carbon copy of what I saw on city corners, television screens, and heard in rap music. When I was exposed to Andre 3000's music, it was like seeing a b-boy dance for the first time. I was amazed because I did know black men could move (through the world) like that. Mirror the range of reimagining and contorting that that b-boys did with their bodies, from stylized footwork, shuffles, drops, spins, and freezes (Johnson, 2015), Andre 3000's reimagined the way black masculine bodies could perform within 90s hip hop culture. Benjamin's performance of black masculinity created a break beat within hip hop and my imagination, that stretched, rather than restricted, how black men could move, and allowed black masculine bodies, including black boys like me, to

maneuver more freely throughout the dancefloor of our days and be ok with dancing to the beat/notion of a masculinity that breaks normative standards of black masculine performativity. Andre 3000 complicated my narrow scripting of black masculine performance and opened my teenage mind to what communication scholar and black masculine theorist, Ronald L. Jackson (2006), describes as the adoption of a model of black masculinity that embraces a spectrum of performative possibilities. For that, I am forever grateful.

CHAPTER THREE:

BLACK MASCULINE EMOTIONALITY AND HIP HOP POETICS

> Say that I'm foolish/ I only talk about jewels/ do you fools listen to music or do you just skim through it?
>
> -Sean Carter (2001)

Many scholars have explored how examining and using art-based research, especially music, through an autoethnographic lens can impact and evolve the way we conduct and analyze qualitative research (Bartlett, 2009; Bartleet & Ellis, 2009; Daykin, 2008; Durham, 2014; Mio, 2005). Citing music's potential influence on qualitative research, Bochner and Ellis (2003) write:

> To use art or music as a mode of narrative and autoethnographic inquiry is to move toward a new research paradigm in which ideas become as important as forms, the viewer's perceptions as important as the artist's intentions, the language and emotions of art or music as important as its aesthetic qualities. (p. 507)

In this chapter, I follow in the academic footsteps of Durham, Ellis and Bochner, who desire to use artistic texts to stretch the boundaries of what we consider qualitative research and I extend the conversation that examines how music and autoethnography are intertwined. To accomplish this goal, I explore how hip hop MCs use poetics to paint personal accounts, argue that some hip hop songs double as autoethnographic texts, and illustrate, within my homeplace on the locations of inspiration and instruction when communication scholars compose their own performance stage, how those personal and poetic musical texts can be fruitful sites to mine as

autoethnographic narratives. Ultimately, in this chapter, I argue that we as scholars should play with and expand the borders of autoethnography by broadening the scope of what we consider as autoethnographic texts. By doing so, we open ourselves and our imaginations to new possibilities of (re)thinking and (re)imagining the ways in which we write and represent our personal narratives and the qualitative research we conduct within communication studies.

Within hip hop culture, MCs are the wordsmiths. They are the griots. They are the carriers of culture through verse. Like the b-boy who reconfigures his body, MCs bend language and syllables to tell stories that detail their lived experiences and the experiences of others. Like a surgeon who uses poetics (rhyme, metaphors, similes, imagery, personification, etc.) as a scalpel, MCs dissect the world around them with their words and suture their observations into songs. On the microphone and stage, the MC shares their truth and expresses to the world that they have a story that is worth being heard.

It is within my homeplace on the performance stage where I most resemble a MC. On the performance stage, like the MC, I use language to critically analyze the world around me and interrogate the meaning behind my lived experiences (Madison, 2006). On the performance stage, like the MC, I illustrate a level of artistic agency as I (re)write myself into being and complicate the ways in which society views and represents my black body (Spry, 2011). Like it is for the MC, the stage is a homeplace where I reveal, (re)imagine, and (re)cover parts of my identity (hooks, 1990). On the performance stage, like the MC, I move from the semantic to the somatic, as I embody the words that were once written in the pages of my journal. On the stage, like the MC, I hope my performance resonates with and moves the crowd, or as Bryant Keith Alexander (2000) puts it, "serves as a vehicle for understanding the intimate details of the articulated lived experience for both the performer and the audience" (p.100).

Making a Case for Autoethnographic Hip Hop

> As we have discovered, music and autoethnography have much in common. At the heart of both is the desire to communicate engaging and personal tales through music and words, which inspire audiences to react, reflect, and in many cases, reciprocate.
>
> -Brydie-Leigh Bartleet & Carolyn Ellis, 2009

Since its inception, hip hop artists have created songs that situate their personal narratives within particular socio-cultural contexts and created music that is autoethnographic in nature. Evidence of this can be seen on classic hip hop songs like "The Message" (Chase, Fletcher, Glove, & Robinson, 1982), by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. As one of hip hop's first conscious rap songs and videos, "The Message" provided listeners and viewers with a social commentary on the effects of violence, drugs, and police brutality in the economically vulnerable inner-city community of the South Bronx in New York City during the early 1980s. The narratives created by the artists on "The Message", while reflexive and revealing, mirror autoethnographic research in the ways in which the rappers lyrically describe, analyze, and make sense of their personal lived experiences within a very specific historical and cultural context.

Hip hop MCs and autoethnographers share many similarities. While autoethnographers use paragraphs and publications to articulate their narratives, and MCs use lyrics and linear notes to detail personal accounts, both groups of writers often use their words to compose creative narratives that are grounded in lived experiences, critically analyze culture and examine how the world around them impacts their own and others behavior.

This doubling as autoethnographer and MC can often be seen in the work of Shawn Corey Carter. Screenplay writer, movie producer, philanthropist, author, entrepreneur, and entertainment mogul are all words that accurately describe Shawn Carter, also known by his

stage name, Jay Z. However, before Carter donned any of the aforementioned titles, he was first a great writer. His writing credits include thirteen solo albums, four collaboration albums, two Billboard Music Awards, three American Music Awards, twenty-one Grammy Awards, and a listing amongst Rolling Stone's greatest artists of all-time. From the campus of the University of Missouri to Georgetown University, college courses analyze Jay Z's writing, storytelling, influence on popular culture, and impact on the globalization of urban music. At times, Carter's writing is laced with hyper-black masculine displays of arrogance, misogyny, and materialism that revive minstrel era representations of black men as savage brutes (Bogle, 1996; Jackson, 2006) or contemporary street thug/gangsters (Bausch, 2013; Boylorn, 2017; Neal, 2005). However, scholars have also noted that Carter's lyrics can be highly introspective, reflexive, vulnerable, and offer critical cultural commentary (Bailey, 2011; Neal, 2013; White, 2011). Aesthetically, he is revered for his wordplay, extended metaphors, deployment of double entendres, vivid imagery, and creative storytelling. In the following, I explore three of Carter's songs: "Moment of Clarity," "Breathe Easy," and "4:44" and illustrate how these musical compositions also double as autoethnographic texts. After examining the autoethnographic qualities of each text, I illustrate how Carter's musical compositions inspired and influenced the writing choices I made when composing my own autoethnography and spoken word poem titled, "Unveiling Our Scars." Thus, as I analyze Carter's musical compositions, I do not intend to produce a conventional cultural criticism or a close reading of the albums. Instead, I am invested in interpreting how his discussion of black masculinity informs how I perceive my own performance of the black masculine.

July, 2017. Jay Z's thirteenth studio album, 4:44, drops. I rush to the store to purchase it. As I sit in my car in the parking lot, I rush to remove the album from its plastic wrapping and

place it into my cd player. As the music begins to play, I am anxious to know what version of the MC I will hear on this album. Will it be the slick talking thuggish yet distinguished "American Gangster" Jay Z? Will it be the big money talk and you can only dream of having the riches I have "Watch the Throne" Jay Z? Or will it be the throwback back, intricate wordplay, extended metaphor writing, double entendre using, and painting pictures with words "Blueprint" Jay Z?

The MC's Gaze Swings Inward and Outward

The autoethnographer is always investigating how the self is tied up within and influenced by society. Concerning autoethnography, Ellis and Bochner (2000) write:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth, autoethnographers gaze, first, through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward. (p. 739)

On the songs "Moment of Clarity" and "Breathe Easy*,"* Jay Z mirrors the inward/outward gazing Ellis and Bochner describe. Within these musical compositions, the pendulum of Carter's gaze swings back and forth, reflecting on the personal choices he's made throughout his music career, analyzing how his decisions have been influenced by entertainment industry culture and society at large, and examining how his choices have impacted his journey within hip hop culture. On "Breathe Easy," Jay Z weaves an in-depth narrative that examines his development as an artist, his commitment to discipline and cultivating a strong work ethic, and the psychological and physical demands/challenges that come with success in the music industry. Ultimately, the song "Breathe Easy" is a metaphoric autoethnographic text exploring Jay Z's reflections of what it took for him to ascend through the ranks of the entertainment industry and maintain his status

within hip hop and popular culture. On "Breathe Easy," Carter (2010, p.136) states:

I'm far from being God/ But I work goddamn

hard/ I wake up the birds so when the nerds

asleep/

I'm catching my second wind the second the first one ends/

Discussing the conceptualization of "Breathe Easy," in his memoir, *Decoded* (written in collaboration with famed hip hop journalist and feminist, dream hampton), Jay Z (2010) writes:

> I also believe there's a lot to be learned from elite athletes. Sports are one of the greatest metaphors for life, and watching athletes perform is like watching different ideas about life playing themselves out. Athletes aren't just fascinating for their physical skills, but for what their performances tell us about human potential and character. (p. 140)

Within "Breathe Easy," Jay Z compares the kinesthetic exercise routines of elite athletes to the discipline and work ethic needed to become successful within the entertainment industry. Examining Carter's words within the context of "Breathe Easy," it can be argued when Jay Z states "I wake up the birds" in the verse I cite earlier, he is creatively alluding to the old wise saying "The early bird gets the worm." In the aforementioned proverb, the early bird wakes up before other creatures in the forest in order to be successful. However, in Carter's verse, he proclaims that his dedication to being successful is likened to those athletes who finish their exercise regimen before the sun has had a chance to peak over the horizon. Thus, Carter is proclaiming that he doesn't wake up with the early birds, instead, the work ethic that he has developed and his drive to be successful in the competitive entertainment industry pushes him to work so hard that he becomes the early bird's alarm clock. With Carter's artistic autoethnographic text "Breathe Easy," he gazes inward and outward, illustrating for listeners the

personal decisions he has made within the music business, reflecting on how those decisions were influenced by the entertainment industry culture he orbits within, and describing how his choices have impacted his positioning within and ability to navigate the hip hop and popular culture landscape.

The MC's gaze swings inward and outward

Music can be used as a powerful autoethnographic tool to contextualize and make sense of lived experiences and analyze how events have shaped our identities. As Bartleet and Ellis (2009) state, autoethnographic songwriting allows us to "explore the fragmented, subjective, and complex memories" (p. 14). Echoing these thoughts and drawing a link between the personal and socio-historical nature of hip hop music, Love (2016) asserts that hip hop artists often weave "social, economic, physiological, and psychological" themes into their lyric (p.320). This exploration and weaving together of complex and fragmented histories and relationships is present on Jay Z's song, "Moment of Clarity." "Moment of Clarity" is enveloped in transparency, unbridled honesty, vulnerability, and social commentary. On the first verse of the song, Jay Z dives into details about the fractured relationship he has with his father and how his father's death impacted him. Reflecting on these events, Jay Z writes:

When pop
died/ Didn't
cry/
Didn't know him that well/
Between him doing heroin and me doing crack sells/
…damn that man's face was just like my face/

In his book, *Decoded*, Jay Z (2010) discusses the above lyrics from "Moment of Clarity." He

writes:

> This sounds cold, the truth is that my father left my family for good when I was young and didn't reenter my life until I was an adult. Three months after we had our first conversation in twenty years, he died. (p. 135)

Within "Moment of Clarity," Carter details the psychological, emotional, and economic impact his father's drug addiction had on his family, for example, the teenage Jay Z selling drugs to support his family and fill the financial void of his absent father. While discussing his former life as a drug dealer and detailing his father's drug addiction, on "Moment of Clarity," Jay Z's autoethnographic narrative swings outward, giving listeners and readers an in-depth look into Carter's fragmented interpersonal father/son relationship and a glimpse into how the heroin and drug epidemic of the 1970's and 1980's ravaged many inner-city black and brown families and communities throughout New York (Kerr, 1986). However, on the song, Jay Z's gaze also swings inward as he shares his intrapersonal reflections about how his strained relationship with his father has impacted him emotionally and relationally throughout his life. Thus, on "Moment of Clarity," Jay Z gives listeners an intimate glimpse of his life growing up in the Marcy Project Houses in Brooklyn, New York, during the 1980's and performs what communication and hip hop studies scholar Aisha Durham defines as the autoethnographic work of unearthing, mind mining, and excavating lived experiences and memories to reconstruct one's self within a particular historical or cultural context (Durham, 2014, p.19). Analyzing the songs "Breathe Easy" and "Moment of Clarity," it becomes clear to see that some hip hop music doubles as autoethnographic texts and illustrates that "music, like autoethnographic writing, is a medium for heartfelt reflection and learning, a way of understanding ourselves and our world and of communicating that understanding to others" (Bartlett & Ellis, 2009, p. 14). Seeing hip hop

music through this autoethnographic lens invites scholars to open a discussion about how might autoethnographic music inform and expand the ways in which we creatively compose and (re)present our own autoethnographies as researcher and scholars.

As I listen to the new album, I keep thinking "I have never heard Jay Z be this vulnerable as a MC." On songs like the title track, 4:44, it sounds and feels like he went into a recording booth, the engineer pressed record and Jay Z decided to bear his soul. The bravado is toned down. It has been replaced with repentance and remorse. Although Jay Z's lyrics on 4:44 are connected to his personal past relationships, the experiences expressed within the song resonate with me so much, especially the words of the chorus "[Why] do I find it so hard/ When I know in my heart/ I'm letting you down every day/ Letting you down every day/ Why do I keep on running away?" On 4:44, when those words are sang, I feel them, and they move me because they represent the perfect soundtrack for most of my intimate relationships.

Writing a MC Inspired and Influenced Autoethnography

For at least three years, I attempted to write about the complicated dating relationship my wife and I experienced before we got married. Many times, I would start to write poems about our complex courtship, however, I failed to finish all of them. I would often stop writing because I didn't want to return to the mental or emotional space I was in when we first began dating. When I met my wife, I was broken. When I met my wife, I was still reeling from and trying to make sense of my mother losing her battle to cancer. For months, I watched as chemotherapy made my mother's hair, waistline, and desire to live, fade. Throughout the time my wife and I dated, the pendulum of my emotions swung back and forth between falling in love and being emotionally unavailable. Some days, I was extremely happy to be in a relationship. Other days, as hard as I tried, I could not run away from the fear of possibly losing someone I loved, again. I

was terrified. I wanted to fall in love, however, the fear of losing another person I cared about was impeding my ability to fully open my heart. The memories of the scars I caused and received in past relationships, coupled with the emotional toll my mother's death took on me, molded me into an individual that was yearning for love, but kept everyone I was romantically involved with at a safe emotional distance.

Enter the MC, Jay Z. The lyrics, vulnerability, and emotions exhibited in Jay Z's song, "4:44," and the accompanying music video, became the impetus for me to create the autoethnographic spoken word poem, "Unveiling Our Scars," and successfully write about the beautiful and simultaneously difficult dating relationship my wife and I experienced. Within the song and music video for "4:44," Jay Z openly reflects on how his infidelity and not allowing himself to become emotionally attached to people has and could have impacted many of his interpersonal and intimate relationships. The track is filled with vulnerability, regret, admissions of womanizing and remorse for being emotionally unavailable. Thus, on the song, "4:44," while upholding the pejorative hegemonic scripting of black men as sex-crazed and emotionless, Jay Z also pushes back on the portrayal of black men as being unable to display any emotion beyond anger and exhibits that emotions such as sadness, regret, and vulnerability do exist within the performative repertoire of heterosexual black men. On the track 4:44, as Mark Anthony Neal (2013) and Miles White (2011) have detailed in their own research, the ways in which Jay Z performs black masculinity simultaneously ruptures and reifies hegemonic representation of the black masculine and complicates the narrow scope through which we view black men's performative possibilities.

With his lyrics and the images within the music video for "4:44", such as an excerpt from an Eartha Kitt interview where the singer in speaking passionately about the beauty and power of

love, a black female and male hip hop dancer performing choreographed movements that reflect the highs and lows of being in a relationship, and real life images of black men and women in relationships exhibiting a range of emotions, it becomes clear that Carter's "4:44" is an intensely personal narrative, yet the autoethnographic music video artistically pushes viewers to see Jay Z's lyrics through a cultural lens and situate his lived experience within a cultural conversation about black masculinity/manhood and heterosexual relationships in the black community.

Although my lived experience does not exactly mirror Carter's, I am familiar with the regret that's present in his voice on "4:44." It resonates with me. Like Carter, I have reflected numerous times on how my unwillingness to open my heart to partners has led to the destruction of relationships. However, these intimate emotions and experiences rarely appeared in the poetry I performed on public stages. Carter's song, "4:44," changed that. Repeatedly listening to and ruminating on Carter's lyrics produced within me a level of intrapsychic (re)scripting (Simon & Gagnon, 1984) and personal reimagining of the black masculine self and the emotions/experiences heterosexual cisgender black men/artists within the hip hop generation can and should perform in the public sphere and share on public platforms. When I first listened to Jay Z's "*4:44*," I didn't do it with the intentions of being inspired to create a poetry-based autoethnography. However, as Ellis (2009) states, "That's the way autoethnography often works… one autoethnography leads into another" (p. 5). In the process of writing a hip hop inspired autoethnographic poem that chronicles the emotional roller coaster of a romantic relationship, like Jay Z, I also create a text that upholds and simultaneously challenges canonical and contemporary stereotypes of black masculinity.

In the Jay Z inspired autoethnographic spoken word poem, "Unveiling Our Scars," I weave back and forth between reflections about love, the cultural scripts and stereotypes black

men navigate in their daily lives, and an in-depth examination of the dating relationship that my wife and I experienced before getting married. Using emotional recall (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), the poem examines interpersonal/intimate relationships and the black masculine by chronicling the range of emotions and experiences I lived through in past relationships. In the poem, I exhibit a range of feelings including: happiness, fear, vulnerability, sorrow, anguish, uncertainty, and anxiety. Through chronicling my personal lived experience in "Unveiling Our Scars", I position the black masculine with a spectrum of emotive possibilities, while challenging the unidimensional scripting of black men as bodies that possess/exhibit a narrow range of emotionality. Ultimately, "Unveiling Our Scars" extends the research of communication scholars like Bryant Keith Alexander (2004), Robin Boylorn (2017), Ronald L. Jackson (1997), and E. Patrick Johnson (2014), who use their scholarship to (re)imagine the performative possibilities of black masculinity and destabilize hegemonic representations of black manhood.

The small coffee house is packed.

The open-mic poetry host calls my name.

The crowd claps as I walk towards the

stage. I stand behind the microphone,

Survey the audience,

Close my eyes,

And share these words…

Unveiling Our Scars

Why do I feel this way

You're stronger than this

Keep it together

How do I deal with these emotions

Keep your composure

Why can't I get passed this

Who can I talk to

What will they think

You're stronger than this

Why can't I move forward

Keep it together

I can't get hurt again

Why am I emotionally numb

Just act like you're ok

I want to tell you I love you

But I've been hurt so much in the past

The words I love you have slowly begun to feel sandpaper soft on my lips

When I begin to bleed memories of exes

Opening my heart to someone new isn't an appealing first aid kit

The people that we fall in love with can lift our happiness into the heavens

Their caresses turn our smiles into crescents

We enjoy orbiting in their presence

But when we feel the gravity of someone putting space between us and them

We become eclipsed with sadness

When you've been hurt by someone you love

You will begin to treat your heart like a cake

Because relationships are about how much of yourself you are willing to share

And honestly,

There is a difference between giving someone a piece of yourself

And giving him a layer

Will our hearts ever rest

We must be patient to be

But instead we rush more

Wait… giving him a layer, will our hearts ever rest, instead we rush more

Him a layer, ever rest, rush more,

And somehow,

Without even knowing it,

We allow our past relationships to turn us into mountains of emotions

We stand on cliffs of confusion

You don't know how much you are afraid of heights Until you are about to jump into a new relationship

Maybe this time it will work out

That's what we're hoping

But we can't fall in love unless the parachute of our heart is open

When your heart's been broken

And your feelings are numb

We all have the potential

To evolve into people and things we said we would never become

We all have the potential to be natural disasters

An earthquake of emotions

A tsunami of selfishness

We all have the potential

To break people's hearts

Drive people away

Destroy and demolish

I guess we all are a little bit more like hurricanes than we would like to acknowledge

When you've been hurt by someone you love

You will try to explain how you feel

But sometimes,

You can't find the right words to say it

How can I explain

My heart's been broken and put back together so many times

It's beginning to resemble a mosaic

But there is nothing beautiful about being hurt by someone

Nothing pretty about being Picassoed in pain

You say that we can paint a masterpiece together

You say that we can create it

You say we can have it

But you keep telling me

We can't create a new masterpiece

If I keep using my old relationships as a palette

You tell me we can't see eye to eye

Because I am standing on top of my insecurities

I try to do things to push you away

But you refuse to retreat

I tell you I'm a monster

But you keep telling me you can see beauty in the beast

You say that you understand that I built a fortress around my heart

So, I would never get hurt again

But you keep telling me

Those same walls I built to protect myself

Are the same walls that aren't allowing you to get in

Jay Z's Stylistic and Compositional Influence

In his book, *Writing Qualitative Inquiry: Self, Stories, and Academic Life*, Bud Goodall (2008) implores academics who are interested in qualitative research to explore and analyze the work of other kinds of writers so that they can expand the stylistic and compositional choices they have at their disposal when writing their own research. Basically, Goodall states, as researchers, we should study how writers compose their texts and in the process of studying other writers, we increase the ways in which we can (re)present our scholarship. Below, I articulate how Jay Z's writing choices stylistically influenced how I composed the autoethnography and spoken word poem, "Unveiling our Scars."

Layered Accounts

"Unveiling Our Scars," much like Carter's musical composition "*4:44*," is a narrative based layered account (Rambo, 1995) that swings back and forth between present and past interpersonal/intimate relationships. Concerning layered accounts, Rambo (1995) writes:

> The layered account is a narrative form designed to loosely represent to, as well as produce for, the reader a continuous dialectic of experience, emerging from the multitude of reflexive voices that simultaneously produce and interpret a text… The layered account draws on many points of view and presents them to the reader as representations of lived experience. (p. 396)

Like "*4:44*," "Unveiling Our Scars" begins in the present day with a conversation with my current partner and reflections on my present relationship. As the poem progresses, much like "*4:44*," it weaves back and forth between the past and the present. This can be seen in the first stanza which I begin with the line "I want to tell you I love you." Here, I am speaking to my current partner. By the third stanza, where I write "The people that we fall in love with…", I am in the process of reflecting on and discussing past relationships and the happiness/hurt that I've experienced within them. In the seventh, eight, and ninth stanza of the poem, I swing the narrative arc back to a discussion with my current partner and reflections on my present relationship. Stylistically, traveling back and forth between past and present-day relationships and experiences, the autoethnographic poem "Unveiling Our Scars*,"* structurally mimics and compositionally mirrors the first and second verse of Jay Z's "4:44*"* where he navigates back and forth between an imaginary conversation with his wife in the present day and women he's had relationships with in the past.

Extended Metaphors

Stylistically, on the song "Breathe Easy," Jay Z deploys the literary device of extended metaphor throughout the entire musical narrative. Reflecting on his use of extended metaphor within the text, Carter (2010) writes "This whole rhyme… is really about technical rhyming… In this case, the challenge is to create as many clever rhymes as possible using the exercise

metaphor" (p. 138). On "Breathe Easy," Jay Z extensively uses extended metaphors to creatively construct his musical composition. However, while Carter strives to exhibit cleverness in his writing, his cleverness is matched by his ability to produce a musical text that is also evocative and anchored in his personal experience.

When composing "Unveiling Our Scars," I desired to stylistically reflect Carter's use of extended metaphor. This can be seen throughout my poem. For instance, in the second stanza of "Unveiling Our Scars" I use an extended metaphor that draws on body/medical vocabularies, "bleed memories of my exes" and "Opening my heart isn't an appealing first aid kit" to highlight the memories of failed relationships that fueled the apprehension I felt when I began to fall in love with my wife. In the third stanza of my poem, I use the first verse "The people we fall in love with can lift our happiness into the heavens" to set up my use of words like crescents, orbiting, gravity, space, and eclipsed to weave a celestial extended metaphor that explores the euphoria of falling in love and the anguish experienced when relationships end. In the fourth stanza of my poem, the lines "treat your heart like a cake" and "There is a difference between giving someone a piece of yourself and giving him a layer" develop an extended metaphor that reflects the trepidation people experience when deciding to open their hearts to someone or remain emotionally withdrawn. With "Unveiling Our Scars*,"* I mirror Jay Z's song "Breathe Easy" and use extended metaphors to create an autoethnographic account that is creative, clothed in my lived experience, and simultaneously challenges the canonical and contemporary monolithic scripting of black men as super human, unable to experience pain, and being emotionally stoic unless expressing anger (Boylorn, 2017; Neal, 2013; White, 2011).

Homophonous Language

On the second verse of Jay Z's autoethnographic song "Moment of Clarity," he uses the

text to explore the landscape of the music industry and the tension between art and commerce. Within the song Jay Z remarks:

Hustlers and boosters embrace

me/ And the music I be making/

Truthfully/

I want to rhyme like Common Sense/

But I made five mil/

I ain't been rhyming like common since/

In the above snippet, Jay Z uses homophonous language, "Common Sense/Common since," to compare himself and his career to that of musician and musical contemporary, Lonnie Rashid Lynn, Jr., also known as Common Sense. When it comes to writing, Jay Z (2010) has applauded Common Sense for his great technical skill and "dazzling lyrical display" (p. 137). However, here, using homophonous word play, Carter quips that while Common's style of writing is technically sound, Common has not been able to have large commercial success (in the early 2000s). On the surface, this may seem like a snub to Common, but on another level, what Jay Z is doing in the above verses is opening a conversation about the struggle artists endure when attempting to navigate the creativity within and accessibility of their writing.

In the third stanza of "Unveiling Our Scars*,"* I stylistically mirror Jay Z's "Common Sense/common since" homophonous phrasing used in his song "Moment of Clarity" and weave homophones into my autoethnographic poem. Modeling Carter's stylistic choices, I write:

There is a difference between giving someone a piece of yourself

And giving him a layer

Will our hearts ever rest

We must be patient to be sure

But instead we rush more

Wait… giving him a layer, will our hearts ever rest, instead we rush

more Himalaya, Everest, Rushmore,

And somehow,

Without even knowing it,

We allow our past relationships to turn us into mountains of emotions

Here, although I creatively follow Jay Z's lead and use homophonous language within my storytelling, aesthetics and creativity do not become a substitute for substance. My word choice is very intentional, grounded in my lived experience, and reflective of moments I remember becoming a mountain of emotions after a relationship had unexpectedly ended. The homophones I choose accurately and creatively depict the occasions when I unwisely rushed into relationships even though I wasn't emotionally ready to open my heart to someone. Although I use homophonous language to creatively write the autoethnographic poem "Unveiling Our Scars," the words I choose speak directly to the many sleepless and tear-filled nights I have experienced because of heartbreak and loss.

Like the MC, I stand on stage behind the microphone and gaze into the crowd. As I recite the words to "Unveiling My Scars" at the open mic poetry set, my wife sits in the audience. With each word that I recite, I begin to relive the experiences that inspired them. As I share the poem, I hear the crowd responding with clapping and snapping. I try, but I cannot fight back the tears. As I recite the poem to the crowd, I close my eyes and I begin to replay how I would do things to push my wife away during our courtship, because I was afraid of falling in love. I remember telling myself to man up. I remember the fear of having my heart broken. As I recite the poem, I

remember the pain I caused others, because I was afraid to allow them to love me. When I finish the poem, the small coffee shop erupts with applause. As I leave the stage and return to my seat, I see that my wife is crying. She tells me she remembers, too.

When I read the autoethnographic poem "Unveiling Our Scars" at the open mic, as the first tear began to trickle down my face, I briefly felt ashamed. I was embarrassed because I felt like I shouldn't be showing "those" type of emotions in front of a room full of strangers. As I paused my performance and tried to stop the tears from flowing, I told myself that I needed to be stronger. I needed to "man up"! As I restarted my performance, the tears stopped only to start again. However, as I continued to perform and the audience audibly reacted to the imagery and metaphors within the poem, as the story resonated with the audience more and more, I began to feel less and less ashamed of the tears and emotions that accompanied my words. As I continued my performance, I realized, man or not, I had no reason to be ashamed of the emotions I was showing. The internal and outward struggle I experienced regarding the emotions I exhibited on the performance stage align with a tenet within black masculine theory that posits "Struggle is the centerpiece of the black masculine identity model because of the complexity of defining and negotiating black masculine identity" (Jackson, 2006, p. 134). A struggle to perform and (re)define my understanding of black masculinity arose while I stood on the performance stage. Viewing my experience on the performance stage using the aforementioned theoretical tenet as a lens, I am able to see that the emotional struggle I experienced while performing became an opportunity for me to internally renegotiate and expand what I viewed as acceptable performances of black masculinity.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that analyzing music texts and shifting the borders of what communication scholars consider as autoethnographic texts has the potential to

aesthetically open the door to new possibilities concerning the ways they compose autoethnographies. As Goodall (2008) states, these possibilities include expanding the ways in which we as scholar write and (re)present our qualitative research. Through the crafting of my hip hop inspired autoethnographic spoken word poem that explores black masculine emotionality and challenges the media produced notion that heterosexual black men have and exhibit a limited emotional repertoire, I make a case for researching and analyzing the aesthetics and unique compositional techniques MCs use to create autoethnographic texts. By doing so, we open up ourselves and our imaginations to new possibilities of (re)thinking and (re)imaging the ways in which we write and represent the research we conduct as communication/qualitative researchers and add to the aesthetic, stylistic, and creative repertoires that we as scholars can choose from when composing our personal narratives and autoethnographic scholarship.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DJS, TURNTABLES AND (RE)MIXING IVORY TOWER TRADITIONS

> This book is… my concerted effort to create a critical language that is as "fly, funky, and out tha box" as the very music and events I scrutinize.
>
> -Mark Anthony Neal (2003)

This chapter explores my academic homeplaces. Like original hip hop deejays who reimagined how vinyl records were traditionally meant to be used, within this chapter, I sample and repurpose Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zones and argue that my academic writing as a hip hop scholar creates compositional contact zones, or spaces where cultures collide. Like the DJ who mixes together snippets of songs, within this chapter, I use snippets of memories to create a layered account of my experience of being an insider/outsider within racialized academic spaces. Sharing these snippets lead me to a discussion about how the writing choices I deploy within my dissertation are an active attempt to make room and create a homeplace for myself within the ivory tower.

In this chapter I also sample Simon and Gagnon's (1984) concept of interpersonal scripts. Interpersonal scripting is the process "that transforms the social actor from being exclusively an actor to being a partial scriptwriter or adapter shaping the materials of relevant cultural scenarios into scripts for behavior in particular contexts" (p. 54). Connecting the ideas of interpersonal scripting, social actors and performance, in this chapter I illustrate how DJs within hip hop culture are historical social actors, cultural/performative scriptwriters, and play a vital role in

(re)imaging my experience and the experience of other scholars of color within academia. Using the techniques of hip hop deejays as a metaphorical/performative lens, I discuss how DJs use turntables and vinyl records to sonically merge different worlds by bringing together disparate sounds, voices, and cultures. I argue, like the DJ, my writing intentionally brings together two cultures and seemingly divergent parts of my identity, my academic self and the self that is a part of the hip hop generation. Through my word choice (mixing in hip hop vernacular), use of hip hop aesthetics (hip hop metaphors and examples), and who I cite (sampling), I remix canonical Eurocentric ways of producing knowledge, and make room for my voice to be heard in racialized academic homeplaces.

Scholars have chronicled the challenges black men have experienced while navigating academia. These challenges include the fear of triggering white fragility and the constant double conscious state of wondering how the emotions they display may be racialized and gendered (Johnson, 2015), continual need to legitimize their existence within academia and among white colleagues/peers (Young, 2007), perpetual awareness of how the intersections of their black masculine identity mark them as "others" on college campuses (Alexander, 2017), struggle to find academic publications that speak to and represent the intersections of their identity (Johnson, 2001), and the push back they experience when attempting to decenter whiteness and destabilize white supremacy (Lemons, 2008). Each one of these instances speaks to the struggles and insider/outsider status black men often experience within the culture of academia. Using the hip hop DJ as a metaphoric lens, this chapter extends the work of the aforementioned scholars by exploring the ways in which my black masculine self has experienced and attempted to reimagine my existence within academic homeplaces, and continuing to mark the lives' black

men lead within academia as an important and necessary site of inquiry within communication studies.

Deejays are a foundational pillar within hip hop culture. Traditionally, DJs are the musicians that get the party started, keep the party jumping, play the break beat so that b-boys/b-girls can do their thing, and curate a list of songs that allow MCs to bless the mic and the crowd with their lyrics. While DJs should be and are celebrated for how they perform in front of audiences, what crowds witness deejays do on stage is the manifestation of countless amounts of hours spent listening to and researching music and honing turntable skills behind closed doors. As Stoever (2018) states, it is the job of the deejay or "selector" to meticulously engage in the "careful, deliberate, and meaningful act of choosing music for oneself and others to hear, feel, and move to" (p. 3). In this chapter, I autoethnographically illustrate the parallels that exist between my lived experiences within racialized academic spaces and the performance of DJs crate digging, sampling, and mixing.

Crate Digging

The DJ sits on the floor in the aisle of the music store surrounded by a sea of shelves filled with vinyl records in plastic crates. Minutes quickly turn into hours as he meticulously sifts through the collections, section by section. One by one, she analyzes each vinyl album, carefully reading the liner notes, examining the cover art, and looking for clues that may reveal how the record will sound or move people. As he sifts through the stacks of records, he is searching for sonic buried treasure. She is searching for a sound that is unique and will stand out. They want to find music that the crowd will not just hear, but they will also feel (Stoever, 2018). As she holds each record in her hands, she envisions being behind the turntables. From tempos, to drum patterns, to vocal snippets, to guitar riffs, she is searching for songs that she can sample, flip, scratch,

chop, speed up, or slow down, and help create a signature style that will set her apart from the other DJs in her borough. He wants the music that he plays on his turntables to be unique and different, yet still sound like and resonate with the community he comes from. They want to use their turntables to create an aural collage, one that blends and brings together the foreign with the familiar. On the floor of the record store they spend hours digging through crates of jazz, blues, rock and roll, afro beat, gospel, classical, blue grass, and reggae records, searching for music that their audience may have never heard, but will move the crowd when they play it. They are searching for voices that speak to them.

My Undergraduate Academic Homeplace

> Black men represent less than 5% of the student population at 4-year institutions of higher education in the United States
>
> -Horn, Berger, & Carroll, 2004
>
> While I've been educated in majority-white schools for the greater part of my life, I have never gotten over the feeling of otherness associated with being a "minority" in them.
>
> -Gary Lemons, 2008

I never knew how poor I was until I received an academic scholarship to a private university. My mother and I pull up to the pristine campus in a pickup truck that had seen better days. The chipped and fading paint that covers the truck contrasts the manicured lawn and luxury sedans that surround my dormitory. The buildings on campus are surrounded by flower beds that boast a kaleidoscope of colors. However, the disproportionate amount of minority students at the college is a very black and white reality for me. As I walk on campus and survey my new surroundings, a myriad of questions summersault in my mind. What am I doing here? Will I fit

in? Will I be able to academically compete? Where are the rest of the black people? I watch as my classmates unload suitcases from the trunks of their cars and take their belongings to their dorm rooms. My family can't afford luggage. However, growing up poor, you learn to make do with what you have. My pants, shirts, and shoes are carefully packed into plastic bags. On the back of the rusting pickup truck with the bumper that is hanging on for dear life, sacks that once carried our groceries, now carry my college wardrobe and belongings. I take my clothes up to my room in silence. However, on this campus, the bags I carry them in speak volumes.

In my dorm room, as I sit in silence, I am filled with an ocean of emotions that overflow as tears stream down my face. I am excited. I am nervous. I am anxious. On a campus that boasts over 1,500 students, I feel alone. I feel like I don't belong. I am angry for and ashamed of being poor and black. However, despite my socioeconomic status, I am aware that my family is wealthy in love and support. I feel out of place. Yet, I am cognizant of the sacrifices that were made for me to be sitting where I am.

On this campus, the building hallways are decorated with golden framed portraits of former graduates. Graduates who are businessmen and politicians. Graduates whose names adorn the buildings on campus. Graduates whose kids fill the classrooms. Graduates whose families have been attending the university for generations. I am the first one in my family to go to college. Some days, I walk through the hallways on campus for hours, looking at the portraits and searching for a face that resembles mine. Looking for a portrait that reminds me that brilliance and success comes in my shade. Searching for a face that would whisper to me that I belong. Like the DJ… *I am searching for voices that speak to me.*

My Graduate School Academic Homeplaces

> Non-White scholars are significantly underrepresented as published authors and under cited as producers of value in the field of communication
>
> -Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs, & McIlwain, 2018

As I sit at my desk in my graduate assistant office, I stare into the pages of my course syllabi for the semester. It is a new year. I am hopeful that this semester will be different from the others. I am hopeful that this semester will be filled or at least sprinkled with more course readings that are authored by people of color. After I scan the assigned readings, read abstracts, and google authors, I am left disappointed and instantly transported back to my freshman year in college. Except at this juncture in my life, I am not searching for faces, but instead, voices that remind me that brilliance comes in my shade; voice that speak to/of the communities that I grew up in; voices that resemble my own. Like the DJ… *I am searching for voices that speak to me.*

I remember my mother and father telling me that I would have to work twice as hard when I enter academic settings. However, I did not know that the concept of doing "double the work" would take on a new meaning for me in graduate school. As I navigate through graduate programs, I master the art of finding enough time to read the course materials that are listed in the syllabi and search for the articles, books, and voices of scholars of color that are often left out of my classroom discussions. Like the DJ… *I am searching for voices that speak to me.* To be clear, I know and do not assume that all people of color have similar stories or that the stories/scholarship of white scholars cannot resonate with people of color. For instance, I have found parallels to my lived experiences written in the research of white scholars who explore their upbringing in working class families (Bochner, 2012; Hodges, 2015; Hodges, 2016).

However, throughout graduate school, I longed to read the work of minoritized scholars who used their research to explore their black lived experience. Many of these scholars' stories reminded me of my own and reiterated that my voice/experiences had a place within the walls of academia. Example of this can be seen in Aisha Durham's (2014) research about Diggs Park, which reminds me of my own inner-city upbringing in Little Rock, AR. I also feel it in the work of Vershawn Young (2007) and Bryant Keith Alexander (2003), whose critical examination of barbershop cultural cause me to reminisce about the different establishments where I've gotten my hair cut and locks twisted throughout the years and the cultural significance barbershops have had in my life. This connection to the work that black scholars produce can also be seen in the scholarship of Mark Anthony Neal (2003), whose use of slang within his essay writing reminds me of the vernacular that I use when I'm discussing hip hop culture with friends and associates. These scholars and their voices/stories remind me of home. However, these voices and stories from and about black culture are often absent from my syllabi. Thus, in graduate school, I master the art of making sure that I complete the readings the professor assigns and making time to search for the voices and read the work of scholars that remind me my research and stories that explore black lived experiences have a place within the academy. Like the DJ… *I am searching for voices that speak to me.*

Sampling

The DJ stands in front of her/his turn tables. Her/his eyes and ears are focused on the glossy rotating 45 in front of her/him. As s/he plays, and replays, and replays, and replays, and replays, each record from her/his latest crate digging expedition, s/he listens. S/he listens and meticulously analyses each sonic part of the vinyl records as s/he searches for a section to sample. S/he listens for a soulful organ or horn riff that s/he can creatively flip, make her/his

own, and move the crowd to lift their hands towards the ceiling in excitement. S/he listens for alyric or phrase that s/he can isolate, repeatedly play, and cause the entire audience on the dancefloor to sing along in unison and point to the DJ booth in approval. S/he is searching for a portion of the song that s/he can remix, reimagine, and help the crowd hear it in a new way. S/h*e want to honor and pay homage to the creative work of artists from the past, expose audiences to their work, and extend the work of those artists through her/his own.*

My Graduate School Academic Homeplaces

Nervously… I stand in front of my classmates to conduct a conference style PowerPoint presentation on my final paper in the course we are enrolled in together. Within the paper and presentation, which explores black popular culture, black masculinity and southern hip hop, I cite and sample the work of scholars of color who weren't included in our syllabus but contribute to many of the intellectual discourses we had in class. Within my presentation, I articulate how each scholar of color informs my research paper and how I extend their work. After my presentation, many of my classmates ask me how I found time to read our regularly assigned readings and the work of the other (othered) scholars. The majority of my classmates admit they have never heard of the 'other' academics whose work I sampled. After my presentation, some of my classmates have questions for me and want to learn more about the work of the scholars of color I mentioned. Some of my graduate school colleagues even ask me for a list of the authors I cited, so that they can explore their work further. Within academia and hip hop culture, citing and sampling is the process of making sure that voices that may get overlooked have an opportunity to be heard.

The sampling, or to use another DJ metaphor, 'increasing the spins' of the work of scholars of color within our research not only makes sure that marginalized voices are heard

within academic spaces, but it also increases their intellectual currency. As Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs, & McIlwain state, "publication and citation practices produce a hierarchy of visibility and value" (2018, p. 257). Within this chapter of my dissertation, I extend Chakravartty et al. argument by further bringing attention to the political nature and palpable impact of citation practices within academia. Within the academy, there is value in who we mark as knowledge producer. Similarly, within hip hop culture, when a DJ or producer samples someone, they are marking the work of the artist that they sample as valuable and illustrating that artists' work is worthy of being heard and extended. Within communication studies, we must begin to follow suit and sample/value the work of scholars of color more. If we don't, we run the risk of diminishing the quality of knowledge produced within our discipline by limiting the amount of voices that we deem as valuable and worthy of being heard (Chakravartty et al., 2018).

Citing and sampling the work of scholars of color also works to "decenter white masculinity as the normative core of scholarly inquiry" and illustrates in a real and material way that diverse opinions, voices, and ways of knowing/being are valuable to us within academia (Chakravartty et al., 2018, p.254). When appropriate, citing the work of minoritized scholars, expands the communication canon and makes room for non-white scholars to find a homeplace for themselves and their work within academia. *Sampling is the process of making sure that voices that may get overlooked, have an opportunity to be heard*.

Contact Zones and The Art of Mixing

Mary Louise Pratt (1991) defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p.1). Pratt's primary goal for creating this concept was to "reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing" (p.1). Ultimately, Pratt uses the concept of

contact zones to reimagine classroom spaces. Explaining how creating contact zone can transform academic settings, Pratt writes:

> The class functioned not like a homogeneous community or a horizontal alliance but like a contact zone. Every single text we read stood in specific historical relationships to the students in the class, but the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous. Everybody had a stake in nearly everything we read, but the range and kind of stakes varied widely. (p.5)

Analyzing how contact zones manifest themselves in Pratt's classroom, it can be concluded that one of the primary tenets for constructing a contact zone is the acknowledgement and bringing together of different identities and positionalities, no matter how disparate they may appear.

Further exploring the concept of contact zones, spaces where different cultures and identities meet, Pratt analyzes a historical document written by Peruvian nobleman, Guaman Poma. Throughout her examination of Poma's manuscripts, Pratt articulates the many ways in which his writings harbor the characteristics of a contact zone. For instance, one of the primary reasons Poma's writings are considered a contact zone is because the historical documents he produced were composed in two languages, Spanish and Quechua. While Quechua was Poma's first language, Spanish was the language that Poma learned after his homeland was conquered by Spaniards. By composing a manuscript in two languages, Pratt asserts Poma was able to create a contact zone through his writing and bring two cultures together on one page. With one document, Poma was able to address different groups of people who occupied different positionalities, and simultaneously speak from and through the multiple identities that existed within himself. The discipline of hip hop studies is an intellectual site where scholars embody

Pratt's concept of contact zones, speak from and through the multiple identities that exist within themselves, and bring together two worlds as hip hop culture resurrects itself in the pages of their research within the ivory tower. This bringing together of two worlds can be seen when hip hop scholars turn their essays into turn tables and use their research to mix and merge academic and hip hop vernacular (Bradley, 2014; Carson, 2014; Love, 2012). This contact zone creating can also be seen when hip hop intellectuals use song lyrics and other components of hip hop culture within their research as metaphors to critically analyze, through a socio-cultural lens, their lived experiences and the locations they mark as homeplaces (Boylorn, 2016; Chang, 2005; Hill, 2009). This speaking from, through and merging multiple identities can be viewed within the work of hip hop academics whose scholarship intentionally mirrors the structure of hip hop songs as they utilize poetics, figurative language, and rhythm to construct the prose within their research (Durham, 2014; Dyson, 2001; Neal, 2003; Tate, 2016). My dissertation honors and extends the work of the hip hop scholars above by using my research to create contact zones, explore the ways in which hip hop aesthetics and culture can reimagine Eurocentric ways of producing/presenting academic knowledge, and bring together my hip hop self and academic self within the pages of my scholarship.

As s/he plays and scratches one record on the turntable to her/his left, headphones cover one of her/his ears so that s/he can also listen to the record that s/he is cueing up on the turntable to her/his right. Sweat drips from her/his brow as the energy in the party intensifies. S/he slows down the rate at which the record on the right is playing so that its tempo can be synchronized with the record on the left. Once the records and their rhythmic patterns are in sync, with her/his hands alternating between different sonic universes, s/he uses her/his cross fader to seamlessly navigate back and forth between and combine the musical worlds. As the DJ mixes reggae music

with hip hop music, and the rhythms of soul music melt into R&B, her/his turntables and the dancefloor become a place where different cultures seamlessly come together.

National Communication Association Convention

As I sit in the audience, I overhear the presenter at the front of the room call my name. My neighbor turns to me and smiles. I stare back at her in disbelief. Thoughts like "Are you kidding me" and "Is this really happening" flood my mind. I stand up and walk to the front of the room. I am shocked and humbled. The paper that cites academics and hip hop artists. The paper that unites different worlds and puts university scholars into a conversation with hip hop artists. The paper that blends together academic theories with hip hop aesthetics. The paper that I worked extremely hard on but didn't believe it would get accepted to this conference, because I thought my use of slang and hip hop vernacular would mark the essay as being unintellectual or too urban. That paper… has just won the John T. Warren Top Student Paper Award at the National Communication Association national convention. After I retrieve my award and take a picture with the presenter, I return to my seat in the audience. As I sit with the award in my lap, I am still in awe. I cannot believe it. Even though I poured many hours into the essay, when I wrote the paper, I never thought it would receive any accolades. When I wrote the paper, I only wanted to quiet the voice in my head that says the creative-intellectual work I produce doesn't sound scholarly enough and unite my academic and hip hop self on the same page. Like the DJ does on his turntables, I just wanted to seamlessly bring two worlds together in the hopes that someone would vibe to it. I just wanted to create a contact zone and homeplace for myself within my writing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, using hip hop DJs and their techniques as a metaphoric lens, I have shared snippets of my lived experience within academia and argued for rethinking the ways in which we create and value knowledge production in the academy. As an individual who was born and raised in an urban environment and a member of the hip hop generation, in this chapter, I bring elements from each of these locations into my writing to create a site of belonging within my scholarship and racialized academic homeplaces. Like an individual who redecorates a room to make it feel more like home, I use my academic writing as a place making tool and redecorate/remix canonical and Eurocentric ways of producing knowledge within academic settings. In the process, I mark the racialized academic spaces I exist within as sites of belonging for my black body, experiences, and ways of producing knowledge.

By using Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zones as a lens to analyze my written academic work and the research of hip hop scholars, it opens the door for me to explore the different ways I can use and mark the scholarship I create, like Poma's writing, a space where I speak through the multiple identities that exist within myself. Sampling and repurposing Pratt's concept force me to ask questions like: in what ways can the pages of my work be a meeting place for the multiple parts of my identity? Not only through the content I analyze, but also through the aesthetic choices I make concerning language and the presentation of my knowledge. How can my writing be a site of resistance and a homeplace for me within academia? How can I use my work to create what Pratt (1991) termed a "rhetoric of belonging" within the pages of my scholarship (p.5)? How can I honor the words of Audre Lorde (2009) with my work, "If I do not bring all of who I am to whatever I do, then I bring nothing, or nothing of lasting worth, for I have withheld my essence" (p. 182 – 183).

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE BEAT GOES ON

Since its inception in 1973, hip hop has become a global phenomenon that is continually changing the world. In the process of changing the world, hip hop's influence on the mass media, and vice versa, has also impacted how black identities are portrayed, perceived, and performed. Within this dissertation, I intertwined stories from the media with lived experiences to explore the moments when the black masculine scripts exhibited in popular culture resurrect themselves in the flesh of ordinary black masculine bodies.

This dissertation about racialized gender and class representations and black masculine performance, while situated within the field of communication studies, also contributes to the interdisciplinary fields of hip hop studies and Africana studies. One of my primary concerns within this text was the production and impact of mass media produced performances of black masculine scripts that often reduces black men to one-dimensional caricatures that don't venture far from pejorative canonical stereotypes. For example, the power-laden controlling image of the Herculean, hyper-aggressive brute-turned-thug has been used since slavery to justify violence and inhumane treatment of black men. My research suggested controlling images and cultural scripts (1) reproduce cultural myths about black masculinity and (2) reduce black men to bodies that are perceived to have limited performative possibilities. Within this dissertation, I extended the work of communication and hip hop scholars who mark hip hop as a valuable, creative and cultural site for academic inquiry.

Each chapter of this dissertation was written in the spirit of examining the complexities of black masculine performances. In chapter one, I used the hip hop metaphor of the b-boy/b- girls to explore the ways in which the mass media shifted and contorted my perception of acceptable black masculine performances during my adolescent years in Little Rock, AR. Marrying memory with local and national media accounts, I used flashpoints from my childhood to explore how my homeplace of Little Rock, through the lens of HBO cameras, was marked as a location shaped by anarchic black on black violence (Durham, 2014). However, "bodily violence was just one. Poverty permeated. Perceptions of poor people helped to justify symbolic violence with stereotypes and state violence with policies that formally resegregated black communities" (Durham, 2014, p. 126). Within this historical and cultural moment during the 1990s in Little Rock, I mark how the scripting of black masculinity, within popular culture, (re)shaped my understanding of the black masculine and the ways in which my adolescent performance of manhood supported and challenged hegemonic black masculinity.

The second chapter analyzed my experiences of being a black man and spoken word artist within my homeplace on the performance stage. Mirroring the metaphorical hip hop lens deployed within each chapter, I explored the aesthetic, stylistic, and autoethnographic similarities and qualities that exist between spoken word poets and hip hop MCs. Further investigating the link between hip hop and performance poetry, I examined how hip hop texts have influenced the ways in which I personally compose poetic autoethnographic texts. In particular, the texts I analyzed explored the performance of black masculinity in romantic relationships and the canonical and contemporary hegemonic depiction of black men as bodies that possess a limited range of emotions. Ultimately, in this chapter that explores the production and embodiment of performance texts, I argue that examining autoethnographic compositions that are produced for

audiences outside of the academy, especially those performed by hip hop MCs, has the potential to expand the ways in which qualitative scholars compose and categorize performative/autoethnographic research and enlarge the audiences their research can reach.

Chapter three explored my academic homeplaces and the unique ways in which black bodies, particularly black men, experience the political space of higher education. Within this chapter, I follow in the academic footsteps of hip hop scholars like Mark Anthony Neal, Aisha Durham, Michael Eric Dyson, Regina Bradley, Bettina Love, Vershawn Ashanti Young, and Marc Lamont Hill, who use hip hop aesthetics within their scholarship to (re)imagine the aesthetic parameters for academic writing and (re)write the ways black bodies can exist within the academy. Like the DJ who merges snippets of songs, within this chapter, I merge snippets of memories to create a layered account of my experience of being an insider/outsider within racialized and gendered academic spaces. Using the hip hop DJ as a metaphoric lens, I discuss how DJs use turntables and records to sonically merge different worlds by bringing together disparate sounds, voices, and cultures. I argue, like the DJ, my writing intentionally brings together different cultures and different voices: my academic self and hip hop self. I argue, through my word choice (mixing in hip hop vernacular), use of hip hop aesthetics (hip hop metaphors and examples), and who I cite (sampling), I remix canonical Eurocentric ways of producing knowledge and make room for my voice to be heard in the racialized academic homeplaces I exist within.

Each chapter in this dissertation, with the exploration of my personal, professional, and performance homeplaces, serves as a tool to represent my embodied experiences, and the experiences of other black men in their everyday lives and popular culture. Ultimately, when I began writing this dissertation about black masculinity, it was because I wanted to see my "self"

within academic literature. In graduate school, I would spend semesters, 16 weeks at a time, without seeing a scholar of color in the literature I read for class. And on the oft chance that I did read the work of a scholar of color, the chances were significantly low that it would be written by a black man or about the experiences of black men.

When I began writing this dissertation about black masculinity, I also wanted to complicate what I saw in academic literature. I wanted to challenge the idea that masculinity is monolithic. As Jackson (2006) states, "Traditionally, among gender theorist in many disciplines, including communication has been to interpret the incendiary nature of masculinity studies in the specter of the European American experience. The assumption made is that all masculine persons function in homogenous ways" (p. 128). With this in mind, I desired to write a dissertation that extended the work of scholars like bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Richard Majors, Robin Boylorn, Bryant Keith Alexander, E. Patrick Johnson, and Amber Johnson, who have used their scholarship to explore and analyze the complexities that exits amongst black masculine bodies and their experiences.

Although my dissertation is situated within communication studies, across disciplines, there needs to be more research conducted that explores the intricacies of the lives that black men live and the complexities that exist amongst black masculine performances. Ultimately, more research should be conducted on the ways black masculinity is understood through the intersectional lens of social identity. With each article that we write and story that we publish that examines these intricacies, we have the potential to widen the lens through which we see black masculinity and move closer to a comprehension that "[black] masculinities are not to be understood as a singular or unitary reality, but as multiple masculinities, pluralized to accent an anti-essentialist perspectives, which accounts for variegations due to… axes of difference"

(Jackson, 2006, p. 132).

The 1990s and 2000s were golden eras within hip hop. It was these eras that made me fall in love with music and turned me into a "hip hop head". However, as with all genres of art, evolution is inevitable. Thus, as the art form has evolved, so too must hip hop studies. Hip hop culture is producing a wealth of artists and creatives who are using their work to reimagine and expand the scripting and performative possibilities of black bodies within the mainstream media. These creatives include Ryan Coogler, whose films *Fruitvale Station* (2013), *Creed* (2015), and *Black Panther* (2018), complicate canonical stereotypes and hegemonic black masculine performances within hip hop cinema (Boylorn, 2017). These creatives include artists like Lizzo, Tierra Whack and Rapsody, whose music catalogues and performances are reimagining the ways in which black women are scripted within contemporary hip hop culture. These artists also include Big K.R.I.T., who has used his recent music albums to talk about taboo subjects amongst black men in hip hop culture, such as his struggles with anxiety, depression, and alcohol addiction, and created the double album, 4eva Is A Mighty Long Time, to physically and aesthetically represent the complexities and multidimensional nature of his black masculine identity. Furthermore, rappers like Lil Uzi Vert and Young Thug have challenged heteronormative notions of black masculinity through the hip hop medium of fashion, while artists such as Nipsey Hustle and Vince Staples have used their black masculine performance within hip hop culture to complicate the simplistic pejorative reading of black men who are actively involved in gang culture. Each one of these artists, in their own unique way, through film, through femininity, through fashion, are evolving the ways in which we view black bodies within hip hop culture and the mass media. These artists, their art and the questions they raise within it, are at the forefront of hip hop culture and should continue to be at the forefront of our

inquiry as scholars within contemporary hip hop studies.

Between Black Feminist/Thought, Black Masculinity and Black Men

Black feminist scholars and black feminist thought have had a profound impact and influence on the research and personal lives of many men of color who use their scholarship to examine and explore the topic of black masculinity. In his book, *Black Male Outsider*, Gary Lemons (2008) remarks:

> For years, shame and low self-esteem kept me believing that I would always be on the margins of blackness and maleness. Ironically, teaching white students black feminist antiracism enabled me to understand that being black and male cannot be reduced to a set of myths and stereo-types of black manhood and masculinity. I did not learn this from white students. I learned it from the theory and political practice of black women feminists. (217).

Like Lemon's, black feminist scholars, in particular, hip hop feminists, have tremendously impacted the ways in which I interpret and interrogate black masculinity. These scholars include Aisha Durham, Bettina Love, Robin Boylorn, Regina Bradley, and Amber Johnson. Each one of these scholars has helped me to realize the depths to which black masculinity, in my research, personal life and in popular culture, can be problematic and/or beautiful. These researchers have forever changed my life as a scholar and as a black man. For that, I am truly grateful.

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