

RAP MUSIC: POPULAR PERCEPTIONS AND ITS AFFECT ON THE LIVES OF  
ADOLESCENTS ATTENDING JACKSON MIDDLE AND GRIMSLEY HIGH  
SCHOOLS OF GUILFORD COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

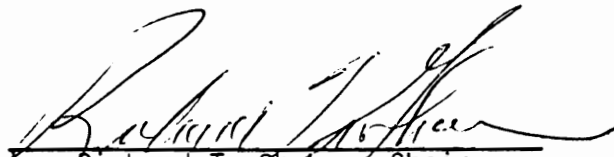
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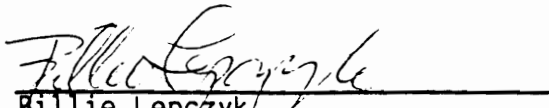
Henry Vanderbilt Johnson, Jr.

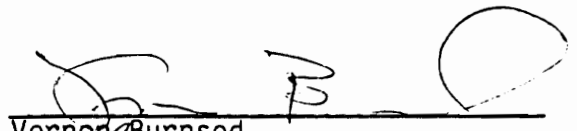
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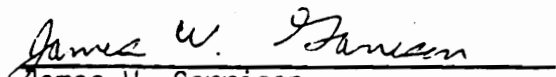
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
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RAP MUSIC: POPULAR PERCEPTIONS AND ITS AFFECT ON STUDENTS  
ATTENDING JACKSON MIDDLE AND GRIMSLEY HIGH SCHOOLS  
OF GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents has been a controversial topic since the mid-1970s. The celebratory and inflammatory aspects of rap and the often negative media coverage of rap music and rap artists have placed the questionable art form at the forefront of popular controversy. Rappers often struggle with the tension between fame and rap's gravitational pull toward inner-city narratives; generally, rappers craft stories that represent the creative fantasies, perspectives, and experiences of racial marginality in America. Effort to make meaning of this art form and its perceived affect on contemporary American youth is at best obscure. Rap music is often deemed noisy, nonsensical, and absent of sustenance by strongholds of popular culture. Rap's controversial landscape tends to be inundated with the following questions in regard to its affect on the lives of adolescents: Can violent images incite violent action; can music enhance the political mobilization of the disenfranchised; and whether or not sexually explicit lyrics contribute to the moral "decay" of contemporary American society?



## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The rap on rap is at best highly controversial. There are those who view rap as a legitimate music form and others who view rap as "semi-organized noise." The debate on whether it is "semi-organized noise" rests on the listener and the listener's appreciation or the lack of it. It is safe to say that music is a personal experience. That which is termed music to one individual may be deemed noise pollution to another.

As an African-American male and a questionable member of the "perceived" so-called Black middle-class community, I firmly believe that music--rap included--is socioeconomically sanctioned. It is not uncommon for members of the upper-class to espouse a high appreciation for Bach and Beethoven. Members of middle-class Black America tend to espouse high appreciation for jazz. Members of lower socioeconomic groups tend to be connoisseurs of rhythm and blues (R&B) and rap. Yet it is not uncommon to find individuals who appreciate diversity in music choice. To suggest that music is social class oriented does not take away music's ability to cross class and race lines. Music is essentially choice-oriented.

I make no claims that my position on rap music and popular culture represent the typical view of Black Americans. Rap music is too complex, too culturally expressive to ever be reduced to one person's perspective.

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents attending Jackson Middle and Grimsley High Schools of Guilford County, Greensboro, North Carolina. Qualitative research methods were used to explore experiential, attitudinal, and descriptive responses to rap music and diverse language patterns. These two methods included the use of focus groups and student interviews.

Using the above stated research methods, efforts were made to explore the often complex and contradictory positions of research findings among sociolinguists, educators, rap artists, and media representatives. The research highlighted the following: the evolution of rap; the sociocultural and sociopolitical attitudes toward rap music and the hip-hop landscape.

### Genesis of the Study

As a former middle school English teacher, I was overwhelmed with the large number of students who engaged in rap recitation. It was not uncommon to hear and see students rapping in hallways, restrooms, cafeterias, school bus stops, water fountains, and on school buses. In most cases the students were African-American, male, poor and underachievers.

My interest in rap was initiated when I became baffled and disturbed when several students in my English class had difficulty with eight parts of speech but could recite rap lyrics with perfection. I

would often ask myself, "How is it that they (students) can't even spell a three syllable word, but can recite Kurtis Blow's single, "The Breaks" without missing a single line. When Sugarhill Records released the 12-inch single, "Rapper's Delight," I could not understand how students who were termed underachievers could recite the single in its entirety but could not respond meaningfully to a simple writing prompt. I could not understand how rap could be so important, yet learning to read and write so trivial. I could not understand why rapping was so popular. Students appeared excited and competitive about rap, yet totally indifferent when it came to academics. There were days when I would look at select underachieving students and get angry. I would get angry because I didn't feel as though the students were worthy to rap. This notion was premised on the belief that the students' classroom performance was so poor that I concluded that the time spent on learning rap lyrics should have been spent on classroom work. It appeared that rap gave students a sense of pride, a sense of purpose, and a sense of belonging. Students appeared to develop a sense of identity. The ability to rap appeared to be a symbolic rite of passage. It determined acceptance or nonacceptance.

As I further witnessed the evolution of rap and its impact on inner-city youth, I began to notice a drastic change in student dress. Students began to emulate rap artists in dress and mannerism. Rap artists typically wore over-sized tops (shirts) and jeans. Over-sized shirts, baggy jeans, military-style boots and gold chains became the

attire of male students. It appeared that a new culture had manifested itself. The culture was termed hip-hop. The hip-hop culture had made society very uneasy. Parents, school officials, clergy, and law enforcement officers became very concerned about the so-called hip-hop culture. Ministers expressed the belief that the hip-hop culture made African-American youth look like young hoodlums. Black youth denounced the belief that they looked like young hoodlums. They considered their dress a simple means of self-expression and choice. Black youth contended that their parents wore bell-bottom jeans, afros, and polyester slacks.

Parents who were teens during the '70s defended bell-bottom jeans, polyester slacks, and afros on the premise that they did not wear their bell-bottoms mid-way their buttocks and beltless. They contended that afros were neatly trimmed and clean. Bell-bottom jeans and polyester slacks were neatly pressed and hemmed. Parents further stated that teens of the '70s took care to not look like gangsters or thugs. Teens had high levels of pride and self-esteem. By contrast, members of the hip-hop culture appeared to take delight in dressing and acting like deviants. Parents termed the tough-guy, anti-establishment, and anti-status quo demeanor "gang-style terrorism."

Comparing and contrasting the two eras became a winless battle. The hip-hop culture rested its position on the notion that the '90s youths are more politically correct and emancipated than the youths of the '70s. They considered the '70s youths to be passive and

controlled by the dominant culture. The '90s youths are redefining culture and power.

As a school counselor and educator, I witnessed the onslaught of the hip-hop culture. The school environment became the primary setting for social engagement. Academics, learning to read and write, took the backseat to getting paid. Loyalty to crews and self-survival took precedent over academics. Students learned rap lyrics before learning multiplication tables. The hip-hop culture provided the landscape for inner-city youth to question values socially accepted by the dominant society. Working in the inner-city environment required high levels of patience, tolerance, and courage.

There were times that I felt as though the school environment had become a joke. Teachers were expected to be miracle workers or magicians. As an educator, I felt as though I was expected to lead students to learning, not make them learn. Students appeared interested in being so-called cool/popular and fashionable. Reciting rap lyrics, cursing, and referring to female students as "bitches" became the norm. Rapping appeared to be the manner in which inner-city youth dealt with problems. I, as an educator, could not make the pain of divorce, hunger, drug abuse, physical abuse, mental abuse, single-parenthood and neglect go away. I had no magical formula to make these conditions disappear. The conditions were real and needed attention.

The hip-hop culture provided inner-city youth with a sense of community and hope. Inner-city youth, for the first time, had voice.

Voice was initiated through rap. The school environment provided inner-city youth with a platform and an audience. Teachers expressed concern that students were learning to rap before learning to read, write, and think. As an English teacher, there were times that I felt like throwing out my English text. Several of my students were experiencing enormous personal upheavals and learning about subject and verb agreement was not their top priority. Teaching became extremely challenging and polymorphis. Reaching students demanded high levels of creativity.

Due to the fact that teaching had become almost impossible and students were at best "warm bodies" with zero academic interest, I felt compelled to excrete my creative juices for the sake of humanity. Inner-city youth appeared anti-establishment and rap oriented. In an effort to reach students, I concluded that I should work with students where they were. They were underachievers who were extremely rap oriented. I talked with students. I purchased rap music. I watched rap videos and I frequented rap concerts.

After becoming a novice rap connoisseur, I attempted to integrate rap into my English classes. The task was mighty and extremely time consuming. It was not uncommon for students to refer to my rap writing as stupid. The word "stupid" became a daily word in my classes. It hurt my feelings but I continued with my writing. As I continued to write and as students continued to label my works stupid, I grew tired of hearing students admonish my writing. I eventually put my foot down

and required students to write their own raps. Initially, students complained and fussed about having to write. They moaned about not being able to find sensible rhyming words. Students complained about not having enough time to finish their pieces. I smiled to myself and felt a degree of satisfaction. My students were dialoguing with me versus at me. Students were dialoguing with each other versus at each other. I identified Fridays as "show and tell" days. In essence, Friday became the day that was set aside for students to share their favorite work. Initially, students were shy and reluctant to share. After the second week of sharing, students appeared anxious and excited about their original works. My interest in rap music and its impact on adolescents stemmed from this experimental undertaking.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore rap music and the attitudes and perceptions of middle and high school students at Jackson Middle and Grimsley High schools. Effort is made to explore the social, cultural, and apolitical nuances of rap music as perceived by the above indicated students. The findings of this study may be useful to educators and other elements of popular culture who work to enhance relations and to ensure that all students' learning experiences are successful. The findings of this study may also be instrumental in bridging the communication gap between adolescents and adults. It is further hoped that the findings of this study will serve as a catalyst for elements of popular culture to engage in critical dialogue with America's youth culture.

The specific objective of this study is as follows:

1. To explore the perceptions of rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents attending Jackson Middle and Grimsley High schools of Greensboro, North Carolina.



### Statement of the Problem

Rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents has been a controversial topic since the mid-1970s. It was during this period that musical lyrics began to address social issues (Davis, 1990; Berlant, 1988; Lipsitz, 1988; Toop, 1984). Rap, often termed as protest music, made its debut in contemporary popular culture in the mid-1970s. As an art form, rap was immediately rejected by popular culture and middle-class Blacks. Rap was immediately deemed the music of the poor and the disenfranchised. Rap critics laughed at the questionable art form and readily ridiculed it as music for those who could not afford musical instruments (Sexton, 1995).

Rap's capacity as a form of testimony, as an articulation of a young Black urban critical voice of social protest has profound potential as a basis for a language of liberation. In lieu of rap's political mobilization potential and its often harsh and unapologetic approach to addressing societal ills, rap has been negatively stereotyped as "organized noise that poisons young peoples' minds." To this end, elements of popular culture and middle-class Blacks often deem rap music as a legitimate culprit that leads young people to a path of destruction and corruption. The researcher's goal is to explore rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents.

### Significance of the Study

Rap music has been stereotyped as having a negative impact and adding to the corruption of youth and society. Today's rap musicians rap about child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, family dysfunction, random violence, police brutality and much more. These issues may not be positive or make elements of popular culture happy; however, rap artists address what is really going on in their homes, their neighborhoods and their lives.

The affect that rap music has on the lives of adolescents is unquestionably controversial. Pro-rappers contend that rap music is simply an art form that spotlights the voices of urban Black and Hispanic kids throughout the country (Rose, 1994). America's youth culture vehemently denounces any notion that rap music encourages adolescents to join gangs, experiment with drugs, disrespect females, and engage in acts of violence. America's youth culture espouses the belief that rap addresses relevant social dilemmas facing society's youth and adult populations.

In lieu of the numerous negative connotations associated with rap music and adolescents, this study is significant in regard to its potential to provide a multitude of perspectives on rap music and its perceived affect on the lives of adolescents.

### Definition of Terms

1. Wack - A term used by urban Blacks to mean silly, crazy, or without logic. Example: Man, that story is wack!
2. Phat - A Black English Vernacular term used to describe a subject in a complimentary fashion. Example: Tupac has some phat rhymes.
3. Gril - A Black English Vernacular term used to mean the face. Example: Man, don't be gettin' in my gril with that.
4. Hype - To get excited or very happy. Example: Listening to Wu-Tang made me hype.
5. Chill - A Black English Vernacular term used to mean relax. Example: I'm goin' to chill for a while.
6. Frontin' - A Black English Vernacular term used to describe someone perceived to be phony. A facade.
7. Griot - "A Fifteenth and sixteenth century West African figure who challenged social transgressors to listen to the will of the people" (Toop, 1984, p. 3).
8. The Dozens - "The dual of verbal wits organized around the linguistic violation of an opponent's mama" (Brown, 1972, pp. 205-206).
9. Pattin Juba - "A term used in the 1850s to describe the practice of telling tall tales, handing out verbal abuse in rhymes, all in the accompaniment of chest-whacking and thigh-slapping" (Sexton, 1995, pp. 31-32).

10. Signifying - "The act of talking negatively about somebody through stunning and clever verbal put down" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 82).
11. Gangsta Rap - "Rap lyrics that describe lurid fantasies of cop killing and female dismemberment" (Rose, 1994, p. 1).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

QUESTION #1 - TELL ME ABOUT RAP MUSIC. WHAT DO YOU PARTICULARLY LIKE ABOUT RAP MUSIC?

QUESTION #2 - WHAT THOUGHTS DO YOU HAVE ON RAP MUSIC AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH VIOLENCE?

QUESTION #3 - IN YOUR OPINION, HOW ARE BLACKS AND WOMEN DEPICTED IN RAP VIDEOS?

QUESTION #4 - WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON RAPPERS BEING CALLED ROLE MODELS?

QUESTION #5 - IN YOUR OPINION, HOW HAS RAP MUSIC AFFECTED YOU?

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is twofold. First, a historical perspective of rap music is presented to provide a wholistic view of rap music and its evolution in American society. The second component of this literature review addresses sociocultural and sociopolitical aspects of rap music in popular culture.

### The Evolution of Rap Music

Tricia Rose, an Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies at New York University, contends that "rap music began in the mid-1970s in the South Bronx in New York City" (Rose, 1994, p. 2). Rose has written numerous articles on rap music and contemporary popular culture. She defined rap as a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music. Its lyrics concentrate primarily on the contemporary African-American experience, and the music is aimed at a market consisting primarily, but not exclusively, of African-American youth. Rose described rap as a Black cultural expression that prioritized Black voices from the margins of urban America.

Even though Tricia Rose contends that rap music began in the mid-1970s in the South Bronx of New York City, Adam Sexton vehemently disagrees with Rose and contends that rap began in the 1850s. Sexton has written on music for Details, Rock and Roll Confidential, The Boston Phoenix, and the Philadelphia City Paper. Sexton contends that young Blacks were rapping much earlier than the mid-1970s. He contends that

"trading tall tales, handing out verbal abuse in rhymes, and providing our own rhythmic, chest-whacking, thigh-slapping accompaniment actually began in the mid-1850s" (Sexton, 1995, pp. 31-32). Back in the 1850s, the practice was termed "pattin juba." Juba faded, only to resurface a hundred years later under the guise of "signifying," "The Dozens," and epic tales which were termed "toasts." These acts were nothing less than present-day rap. "The Dozens" is best described as the dual of verbal wits organized around the linguistic violation of an opponent's mama. Black intelligentsia found "The Dozens" distasteful and totally void in substance. Signifying was not accepted by Black intelligentsia either. Signifying was not widely condoned among middle-class Black America. At least one well-known rhyme from the folklore, the Signifying Monkey, has its roots in West African tales. The tale is as follows:

Signifyin' monkey told the lion one day,  
 "There's a bad motherf--k-- comin' down your way  
 He talked about your family and I'm sorry to say,  
 But he talked about your mama in a hell of a way.  
 Talked about your sister and grandma too,  
 And he didn't show too much respect for you..."

Geneva Smitherman, author of Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America and Assistant Director of the Center for Black Studies at Wayne State University, defined signification as "the act of talking negatively about somebody through stunning and clever verbal put downs" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 82). Smitherman described signifying as more humane than "The Dozens." She further stated that the major differences between signifying and "The Dozens" is that in "The Dozens," an

individual comes down on an opponent's mother, whereas in signifying, the verbal duel is essentially between the two opponents and does not involve parents or relatives.

Rap music is believed to have a profound spiritual lineage. After the War of Independence (Oliver, Harrison, and Bolcom, 1986), the teachings of the Methodist churches and the Separatist Baptists were used for the instruction of slaves in southern plantation states. Slaves brought from Africa were expected both to learn to speak English and to adopt the professed religion of their owners. This requirement enabled slaves to learn many hymns and spiritual songs of the whites. With the learning of English, biblical teaching and participation in church services, Black slaves learned a great deal about the formal structure of white hymnody and were able to use the imagery and concepts expressed in sermons. The majority of slaves working under the overseer's lash were employed in cultivation that required unified effort; singing work songs provided a means of coordinating activities. Slave masters often encouraged slaves to sing fast-tempo spirited songs. Quite often slave overseers enjoyed the songs and actively participated in the singing. Fast-tempo spirituals tended to improve work productivity of field slaves. According to Fisher (1953), virtually all spirituals were codified songs of protest.

Frederick Douglas (c 1817-95) wrote of singing spirituals as a slave. Most Black spirituals were highly spirited. Counter-rhythms were marked by hand-clapping and, in these denominations that permitted it, by 'holy dancing.' It was not uncommon for members of the



congregations to 'get happy,' entering an ecstatic, trance-like state of being. 'Getting happy' was termed a "Godly-encounter" and was induced by the singing and rhythms of fast spirituals. Congregation members often engaged in 'speaking with tongues.' Black ministers typically termed the practice 'conversation with God.'

Frederick Douglas (c 1817-95) spoke of codified messages in spirituals. Douglas often spoke of slaves encouraging other slaves to escape slavery through song. Codified messages often encouraged slaves to maintain optimism about escaping slavery. Slaves tended to use 'song,' through fear of reprisal, to address social conditions. The codified messages of many spirituals gave slaves inspiration and hope for a better day. The resistive transcripts were often expressed in codified form to avoid negative repercussions from slave owners.

According to David Toop, author of The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop, "rap is part of a tradition of oral recitation that actually originated in Africa many centuries ago" (Toop, 1984, p. 1). This tradition was exemplified by the West African griot, pronounced gre-o, gre'ot. The griot was a storyteller in Western Africa who perpetuated the oral tradition and history of a village or family. To the accompaniment of drums or other percussive instruments, griots entertained and educated their audiences by reciting tribal history and current events. Abusive songs were often employed to gain the attention of village dwellers. The griot's performances were often embellished by satirical asides, proverbs, jokes, praise, and ridicule (Nicholls, 1991). As performers, griots overlaid their particular style, energy,

and interpretation on the essentials of the story. Griots challenged social transgressors to listen to the will of the people.

Houston A. Baker, Jr., Professor of English and Director of the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania, disagrees with Tricia Rose's notion that rap music began in the mid-1970s. Baker (1991) maintains that rap actually began in the late 1960s. In Black Studies, Rap, And The Academy, Baker maintains that "the most rudimentary scholarly effort shows that the form (rap) traces its history from the late 1960s" (p. 80). Baker contends that Kool DJ Herc introduced rap to mainstream America in 1967. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Kool DJ Herc introduced America to rap music on the streets of West Bronx in New York by using giant speaker boxes and mixing his own formulas through remixing prerecorded sound. Kool Herc became a DJ during the early 1970s, and deejayed for the people in his community, throwing parties on weekends.

Steven Stancell, author of Rap Whoz Who, supports Houston Baker's position that rap began in the late 1960s. According to Stancell, "the actual emergence of the DJ as a musician began in Jamaica during the late 1940s, but came to prominence during the early 1960s" (Stancell, 1996, p. 1). During this period there was a market in Jamaica for rhythm and blues (R&B) records from the United States. The records were played by DJs, who constructed mobile units called "sounds," or sound systems, consisting of a small truck or car outfitted with a turntable, an amplifier, a radio, and large speakers. In the various boroughs of New York City in the early 1970s, jam sessions in housing project

community centers, and particularly parks during the summer, were a source of entertainment for Blacks and Latinos. Rap spread quickly through New York's poor Black neighborhoods. Rap quickly spread from New York to Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, and other cities with substantial Black populations.

Even though rapping was initially a Black cultural practice, rap's appeal to whites (Sexton, 1995) rested in its evocation of an age-old image of Blackness: a foreign, sexually charged, and criminal underworld against which the norms of white society are defined, and by extension, through which they may be defied. Although rap is still proportionally more popular among Blacks, its primary audience is white and lives in the suburbs. During the winter of 1989, (Rose, 1994) Robert Van Winkle (aka Vanilla Ice) summoned the wrath of the hip hop community not only by successfully marketing himself as a white rapper but also by "validating" his success with stories about his close ties to Black poor neighborhoods. Vanilla Ice convinced music industry executives that rap music, for all of its "Blackness" in attitude, style, speech, music, and thematics, was a substantial success with white teenagers. According to Village Voice columnist Rob Tannenbaum, Vanilla Ice told Stephen Holden of the New York Times that "he grew up in the ghetto," comes from a broken home, hung out mainly with Blacks while attending the same Miami high school as Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew. Yet, in a copyrighted, front page story in the Dallas Morning News, a story released by Ken P. Perkins notes, among other fabrications, "that Mr. Ice is really a middle-class kid from

Dallas, Texas" ("Pop Life" column, New York Times, 17 October 1990, p. C17).

After the Perkins story and others, Vanilla Ice's publicist significantly revised Ice's biography, admitting that Mr. Ice had actually grown up in both Miami and Dallas and deleted all reference to Luther Campbell. Rap artists and Black communities nationwide found Vanilla Ice's fabrications both insulting and cruel. Vanilla Ice's single "Ice, Ice Baby" played a major role in acknowledging middle-class white teenagers' fascination with rap music and Black culture (Rose, 1994).

Consequently, the fact that a significant number of white teenagers have become rap fans is quite consistent with the history of Black music in America (Toop, 1984). Black culture in the United States has always had elements that have been at least bifocal-speaking to both a Black audience and a larger predominantly white context. Rap music (Rose, 1994) shares a history of interaction with many previous Black oral and music traditions. Like generations of white teenagers before them, white teenage rap fans are listening in on Black culture, fascinated by its differences, drawn in by mainstream social constructions of Black culture as a forbidden narrative, as a symbol of rebellion.

What began as a form of Black urban music performed primarily by Black men is no longer exclusively Black or male anymore. When rap music first appeared, women merely stood by the stage or performed on stage dancing and cheering the men on. According to Toop (1984, p. 6), however: "On all of the early rap records featuring women, the women

rap as well as the men and in some cases far better." The opportunity for female rappers began in 1985. Mercedes Ladies and the Zulu Queens were among the early female rappers, but they never made a recording. The first female to make rap records were Sha Rock of the Funky Four Plus One More and Dimples (DiPrima, 1990). Unlike male rappers, most female rappers do not dwell on their sexual skills or fling themselves at the center of violent escapades. Instead, the women of rap strive to best their musical competitors with colorful boasts, sly humor, and good-natured put-downs.

Although female rappers were a presence from the beginning of rap, the first to get serious airplay were a group Salt-n-Pepa. Their first 12-inch dance single, "Hot, Cool & Vicious" sold a million copies. Salt-n-Pepa's rap blends sex appeal with a definite level of feminist-minded independence. As Salt of the group (Salt-n-Pepa) contends, she would like to see women less dependent on men: "Women have brains and I hate to see them waste their lives walking in the shadow of a man" (Small, 1988, p. 544).

Queen Latifah appears to be doing battle in the rap arena. She started rapping when she was only 16 years old. Her music stands out because she combines rapping and singing talents and borrows from hip hop, house music, jazz, and reggae. Born Dana Owens and hailing from New Jersey, Latifah has been referred to as the "Aretha Franklin of rap" (Duncan, 1989, p. 14). Although she claims that she is not a feminist and that she does not aim solely at a female market, Latifah's work contradicts her personal position. Latifah's performances are

known to stress that image is important and for posing questions of Afrocentricity and conscience. In her view, rap is "a creative outlet ... and sometimes it can become like a newspaper that people read with their ears" (Duncan, 1989, p. 14).

It is not uncommon for Black rap artists to express surprise at seeing white rappers make their way up the Rhythm and Blues singles and album charts. Others express anger, seeing "Business as Usual" stamped all over it. White mimicry. While Black rappers feel they rap from their life experiences, they view white rappers as merely copying Black style. "A pale copy of the real thing" (Brown, 1991, p. 12). Among the white rap acts to emerge in recent years are the Young Black Teenagers, the Beastie Boys, 3rd Bass, Vanilla Ice, and platinum-blond Tairrie B. Unlike most of the Black rappers who come from families of low to moderate incomes, many white rappers come from more privileged backgrounds.

The first white rap group to capture rap's boastful quality was the New York trio known as the Beastie Boys. The Beastie Boys entered the music scene performing in a hard-core rock-and-roll band, but by 1983 they had moved on to rap. The groups' debut album sold 720,000 copies in six weeks, and reached the Number 7 position on Billboard's pop chart and Number 3 spot on its then-Black music list (Russell, 1987; DeCurtis, 1987).

As indicated earlier in this research, Vanilla Ice, a white male from Miami, Florida, played a significant role in popularizing rap in the lives of middle-class white teenagers. Even though accused of

flagrantly plagiarizing the Black sound, Mr. Ice prides himself on not utilizing profanity in his lyrics. Critics assert that Vanilla Ice is collaborating with the White-controlled music establishment and ruthlessly "ripping off" (stealing) Black music (Brown, 1991). Black rap artists see him as "softening rap's raw, rough edges, making it soft and bland and safe enough for mass market consumption but weak, without staying power" (Murphy, 1990, p. C-2). Vanilla Ice is indeed responsible for attracting a new audience to rap music. His popular single, "Ice, Ice Baby," became the first rap song ever to reach Number 1 on the Hot One Hundred singles list. Mr. Ice's accounts of his personal history have been inconsistent and the truth of his background has proven difficult to corroborate (Murphy, 1990).

Christian rap, popular with both Black and white audiences, first surfaced nationally in the mid-1980s with such recording artists as Stephen Wiley, the first Christian rapper to be signed to a major label. The popular Black gospel group The Winans, have also issued a popular dance single, "It's Time," that blends rap with gospel. Gospel rap groups, Rap DC Talk and Transformation Crusade, each originated at the Reverend Jerry Fallwell's Liberty Baptist University in Lynchburg, Virginia. According to a group member: "We're not like other rappers, rapping for ourselves. We're rapping for God and no one else. It's not just entertainment, it's ministry. We want to see sinners saved and saints released" ("Gospel with Beat," 1990, p. B-6).

Currently, rap is enjoying unprecedented success, but its reputation is not entirely positive. Some rappers' use of explicit

language and sexual references and imagery on their albums and music videos have created resistance to rap. The Reverend Calvin Butts, a noted African-American clergyman, attacked the lyrical content of rap as promoting violence and being disrespectful toward Black women (Stancell, 1996). Meanwhile, conservative politicians jumped on the antirap bandwagon, calling for record companies to cease profiting off of what they consider to be "obscene" recordings. Some critics say rap music has caused violence at concerts. There have been endless news reports of brawls, and even shootings, at rap concerts across the country (Waldron, 1996). Other critics contend "gangsta" rap is purely negative music because it glorified violence, sex, drugs and disrespect for Black women. Warner Bros. Records was particularly attacked, first in 1992 following the release of Ice-T's controversial single "Cop Killer" (which some people believed encouraged violence against the police). In late 1994, conservative former drug czar William Bennette headed a campaign to encourage Time Warner, the parent company of Ice-T's album label, to discontinue using gangsta rap recordings.

However, the popularity of rap continues to grow, despite conservative opposition. Dr. C. Delores Tucker, Chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women, Inc., is one of the most active critics of gangsta rap. She maintains "the music should not be sold in record shops or played on radio stations" (Waldron, 1996, p. 50). Tucker makes a distinction between rap music and gangsta/porno rap by maintaining that gangsta rap contains profanity and openly glorifies behavior such as drug abuse, gang rape and murder. She also purports



that some rap music is positive and some rap music reflects the reality of the ghetto. Tucker further notes that some rap music exhibits the creative genius of Black people and shows that Black children are poetic, creative and capable of unsurpassed artistic expression.

Regardless, Tucker maintains: "The problem is that the music industry has bastardized, pimped and exploited our young artists. No other group of people would be given a recording contract to call their mothers, sisters and girlfriends ho's, bitches and sluts" (Waldron, 1996, p. 50).

However, congresswoman Maxine Waters has a less conservative attitude toward rap music than Dr. Tucker. She represents much of the South Central section of Los Angeles, California, and believes it is "foolhardy" to single out rap artists as instigators of violence among young people. Waters does not believe that rap music leads to violence. She states, "It is not the music that will make them (young people) violent; it is a society that has not cared for its children" (Waldron, 1996, p. 50). Waters further contends that rap music leads to violence no more than violent rock music makes people commit crime.

Since the rise of rock'n'roll to a dominant position in western societies during the 1960s, the relationship of youth and popular music has been the subject of academic works. James Lull, author of Popular Music and Communication, maintains that popular music is a means of communication and an agent of socialization for young people. Popular music presents to the youth views which are not always consistent with those taught by parents and schools and thus the youth "use music to

resist authority at all levels, assert their personalities, develop peer relationships and romantic entanglements" (Lull, 1987, p. 152). Use of music as a means of resistance is most apparent in the case of "oppositional subcultural music (rap)," which has a definite purpose of resisting "particular social institutions or practices." Lull says:

There is an ideological convergence between the artists and listeners held by its creators and listeners. It legitimizes social and political ideologies and movements by reinforcing alternative rules and actions (Lull, 1987, p. 165).

Lawrence Grossberg, author of "Rock and Roll in Search of an Audience" in Popular Music and Communication, maintains that music which communicates a particular world view offers a listener a way of interpreting reality and his/her experience in it. Thus, Grossberg says that the relationship of music, meaning, and reality becomes a "domain of ideological struggle" (Grossberg, 1987, p. 77).

John Fisk, author of Reading the Popular and essayist on Madonna, maintains that "teenage female fans find in Madonna's videos and songs the power to challenge the male-dominated class system in England. The popularity of Madonna among teenage girls indicates their resistance to a patriarchal social system which does not allow them full participation" (Fiske, 1987, pp. 254-289; 1989a, pp. 95-114).

Youth's use of music as a means of resistance against the forces of domination, as discussed by Lull, Grossberg, and Fiske, is clearly seen in the relationship of rap music and its fans. Moreover, the enormous popularity of rap musicians who advocate Black nationalism or the Black Power Movement and openly question the existing social system among

Black youth indicates that rap music is oppositional subcultural music (Fiske, 1989). Rap informs the listener of the reality of African-American experience and thus raises social consciousness. Although rap seems to be everywhere today, listening to rap on radio was not easy in the fairly recent past. Afraid of alienating the listeners, radio stations, including a majority of urban contemporary stations, were reluctant to play rap, the appeal of which was limited mainly to Black teenagers (Pryce, 1989; Olson, 1988; George 1989).

Resisting through listening to rap music, fans experience pleasure. John Fiske attributes the popularity to popular texts to the opportunities they give to their audience "to make their own socially pertinent meanings out of (their) textual or discursive resources" (Fiske, 1989a, p. 183). When a popular text permits its audience to make sense of their own experience, apart from the meaning given by the dominant power, the text becomes popular because there is pleasure. This pleasure, says Fiske, is power to think differently: "The power of people in their various social formations of subordination and disempowerment to resist the colonization of their consciousness by the forces of social power" (Fiske, 1989a, pp. 178-179).

Rap's resistive transcripts (Rose, 1994) are articulated and acted out in both hidden and public domains, making them highly visible, yet difficult to contain and confine. Rappers act out inversions of status hierarchies, tell alternative stories of contact with police and the education process, and draw portraits of contact with dominant groups in which the hidden transcript inverts/subverts the public, dominant

transcript. Rap music offers young people opportunities to question the forces that control their lives by presenting an Afrocentric view of society which often contradicts or competes with the views they encounter daily in the classroom and in the media (Fiske, 1989).

Chuck D of Public Enemy (rap group) maintains that "Rap is our invisible TV network. It's the CNN that Black people never had" (Gold, 1989, p. 16). Rap music is, in many ways, a hidden transcript. It uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities. Rose metaphorically maintains that "rap music is a contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless" (Rose, 1994, p. 101). Rap music thus presents views that contradict those of middle-class white America. It informs the listener of the reality of African-American culture and thus raises his/her social consciousness.

Rap music continues to be a "controversial" music. Its history and evolution is at best suspect. It is not uncommon for rap critics to contend that rap requires no talent and lacks structure. There are those who never listen to the music who contend that it is loud, nonsensical, monotonous and difficult to understand.

There are others who maintain that rap music depicts the experience of Black youth in contemporary society. Moreover, "rap's beat, rhythm, and call-and-response delivery style clearly reflect African as well as African-American cultural traditions" (McClendon, 1976, pp. 20-25; Floyd, 1977, pp. 45-58; Burnim & Maultsby, 1987, pp. 109-136; Maultsby, 1983, pp. 51-66; Keyes, 1984, pp. 143-152; Allen, 1989, pp. 78-80+). Two most important means of communication in African-American culture,

spoken words and music, are thus combined in rap music. Noted author Ceola Ross Baber, maintains "master rappers of today are keeping alive and visible the tradition of African-American artistry in communication" (Baber, 1987, p. 104).

### Rap's Political Landscape

The landscape of contemporary rap music is highly polymorphic and polyvocal. According to Tricia Rose, Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies at New York University, "news media attention on rap seems fixated on instances of violence at rap concerts, rap producers' illegal use of musical samples, gangsta rap's lurid fantasies of cop killing and female dismemberment" (Rose, 1994, p. 1). Rap music and its impact on crime and criminality has been the subject of debate for years. Some of the more contentious debates center around the following questions: Can violent images incite violent action; can music set the state for political mobilization; do sexually explicit lyrics contribute to the moral "breakdown" of society; and finally, should rap be termed "music" anyway?

Currently rap is enjoying unprecedented success, but its reputation is not entirely positive. Catherine Tabb Powell, author of "Rap Music: Education with a Beat from the Street," in the Journal of Negro Education, vol. 60, no. 3 (1991), contends that

"Some rappers' use of explicit language and sexual references and imagery on their albums and music videos has created resistance to rap. Obscenity and freedom of speech issues have been raised in response to the recordings of certain rap artists, notable 2 Live Crew, Ice-T, NWA (Niggas with Attitude), Slick Rick, and Ice Cube" (p. 247).

However, Havelock Nelson and Michael Gonzales, authors of Bring The Noise: A Guide to Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture, contend that rap music was the initial introduction of popular culture to "outlaw culture."

Nelson and Gonzales (1991) contend that

"The term 'outlaw culture' embodies the media's and uninformed public's misconceptions about rap and the hip-hop landscape. To them the music isn't a legitimate art form that has influenced everything from fashion design to current slang, it's an open invitation for thugs and hoods to break wild" (p. xvii).

Rap's popularity in contemporary American culture was not an overnight success. For many years, major record companies and media agents labeled rap music as "forbidden fruit." According to Nelson and Gonzales (1991),

"Record companies masked their racism by stating that no one was interested in buying this 'Black thang.' By claiming that hip-hop was an underground movement whose low-income followers couldn't afford to buy records, the mainstream music industry could justify not signing any rap acts" (p. xix).

Adam Sexton, author of Rap on Rap: Straight-up Talk on Hip-Hop Culture, contends that rap has been on the defensive since the moment it burst into the public consciousness a decade and a half ago. Sexton (1990) maintains that due to the fact that even to this day rap is made predominantly by young Black males, our society's least trusted, least respected element by a long shot, one has a recipe for not just defensiveness but clinical paranoia.

Rap's controversial landscape tends to be endless. Rose (1994) maintains that rap music and hip-hop culture are cultural, political,

and commercial forms, and for many young people they are the primary cultural, sonic, and linguistic windows of the world. Rose further contends that the drawing power of rap is precisely its musical and narrative commitment to Black youth and cultural resistance, and nothing in rap's commercial position and cross-cultural appeal contradicts this fact.

### Rap's Media and Popular Culture Stereotype

Rap has a history of being heavily bombarded with negative stereotypes. According to Nelson and Gonzales (1991) the press has played an active role in painting negative images of rap and rap artists. Nelson and Gonzales (1991) maintain "The press is blatant with their race and class bashing, associating rap with gang violence, teenage illiteracy and drugs" (p. xix). Rap has had its struggles with the so-called Black press as well. While one might expect The New York Times or Newsweek to be ignorant of Black culture, magazines like Ebony and Essence, from whom Blacks have a right to expect more, showed their bourgeois contempt for revolutionary sound and style by completely ignoring rap.

Rap reached the heights of controversy in the early nineties, being attacked from both within and outside the Black community. Steven Stancell, author of Rap Whoz Who, contends that numerous noted Black leaders publicly denounced rap music and its artists. Stancell (1996) maintains,

"The Reverend Calvin Butts, a noted African-American clergyman, attacked the lyrical content of rap as promoting violence and being disrespectful toward Black women. Meanwhile, conservative politicians jumped on the antirap bandwagon, calling for record companies to cease profiting off what they considered to be 'obscene' recordings" (p. ix).

The attack on rap music was further accelerated when C. Delores Tucker, head of the National Political Congress of Black Women, delivered an impassioned attack against the misogyny and violence contained in recordings of rappers such as Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg. Tucker (Waldron, 1996) maintains "the music should not be sold in record shops or played on radio stations" (p. 50). Tucker further states

"There is a natural inclination of young people to imitate what they perceived as cool. Our young people's role models have always been those in the entertainment field and they are also the ones most likely to end up victims and perpetrators of the very actions portrayed in the lyrics and images of gangsta rap" (Waldron, 1996, p. 50).

According to Kevin Alexander Gray, author of "Gangsta Rappers Get A Bum Rap" in Emerge, November 1995,

"Gangsta rap did not create the 'thug' environment that many are forced to endure, it merely reports on conditions. Rap doesn't make young people sell drugs - 25 percent unemployment among young Black men is enough of an incentive. Rap doesn't make a child go out and get a gun and shoot another child, protecting market-share or defending your life in a drug economy is incentive enough" (p. 66).

During an appearance on McNeil-Leher News Hour in the summer of '96, C. Delores Tucker bemoaned, "Stop producing (gangsta rap) and selling it to our children." She further stated, "The greatest role models of Black children are Snoop Doggy Dogg, Tupac Shakur and all of



the other stars that are telling them to be cool, to go to jail." In conclusion, Tucker noted, "The art that comes with every Snoop Doggy Dogg album has a gun, has explicit sex lyrics and says 'kill da ho'."

The cultural politics of rap is indeed alive and well. Warner Bros. Records was particularly attacked, first in 1992 following the release of Ice-T's controversial single "Cop Killer" (which some people believed encouraged violence against the police). The song was later removed from Ice-T's album and Ice-T eventually left the record company. In late 1994, conservative former drug czar William Bennett headed a campaign to encourage Time Warner to discontinue issuing rap recordings.

Stancell (1996) maintains,

"The attacks on rap may be motivated by more than just concern over children being exposed to four-letter words. Many critics have pointed out the hypocrisy that the ultraviolent movies of white megastars such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger are rarely attacked by conservatives who seem so upset by the violent words of rappers" (p. ix).

### Explicit Lyrics

According to Gray (1995), the language of rappers is a product of their continuing war with the police (who view being Black as "probable cause" and "reasonable suspicion"). Rappers contend that they (themselves) are victims of an unjust society. 2 Live Crew, an X-rated, underground rap group, recently found themselves in court because of their explicit lyrics and their inclusion of scantily clothed female dancers in their act. Their album, "As Nasty As They Wanna Be," which graphically describes sexual acts and celebrates male lust and violence

toward submissive women, was blacklisted by a number of national parent's groups, and a judge in southern Florida threatened record store owners with arrest if caught selling the album (McFadden, 1990).

2 Live Crew was acquitted of obscenity charges on the grounds that the group's rights are protected by the First Amendment. The cultural politics of rap music did not end with the 2 Live Crew incident. It would serve as the beginning of on-going debate and controversy.

### Socially Conscious Lyrics

Public Enemy, a rap group hailing from Long Island, New York, drew heavily upon the philosophies and doctrines of Black nationalist organizations such as the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers (Pareles, 1989). Public Enemy gained national attention with their megahit single, "Terrodome." The lyrics of "Terrodome" centered on the denouncing of drug dealers, the activity of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), soap operas, and military recruitment practices. Many of Public Enemy's raps dealt consistently with racial injustices against Blacks and other minorities.

In 1989 the group came under heavy attack due to statements allegedly made by "Security of the First World," the group's on-stage bodyguards. Professor Griff, "Minister of Information," allegedly stated "The Jews are wicked. And we can prove this." Griff allegedly further held that "The majority of Jews are responsible for the majority of the wickedness that goes on across the globe" (Pareles, 1989, p. C-19). In response to Professor Griff's alleged comments, rabbis and

other leaders of Jewish groups brought pressure on the rap group in numerous press conferences and on radio and television talk shows. The Jewish Defense Organization (JDO) announced a boycott of Public Enemy. Numerous articles were written referring to Public Enemy as "bigots," "anti-Semitic," and "racist." Professor Griff's comments were too offensive for contemporary American culture. As a result, the group eventually dismantled. Cultural politics spearheaded by Mira Boland of the Anti-Defamation League of B'Nai B'rith asserted its strength and influence and Public Enemy became history (Zimmerman, 1989).

### Rap and Cultural Politics

Even with the demise of popular rap groups such as 2 Live Crew and Public Enemy, rappers and rap music refused to be eulogized. Negative images of rappers and rap music continued to invade the hip-hop landscape. Rose (1991) maintains "rap's cultural politics lies not only in lyrical expression but in the nature and character of its journey through the institutional and discursive territories of popular culture. The politics of rap music involves the contestation over public space, expressive meaning, interpretation, and cultural capital" (p. 176).

Angus and Jhally (1989) support Rose's position on cultural politics by noting,

"Cultural politics is the complex process by which the whole domain in which people search to create meaning about their everyday lives is subject to politization and struggle...The central issue of such a cultural politics is the exercise of power in both institutional and ideological forms and the manner in which 'cultural practices' relate to this context" (p. 2).

Rose (1991) supported Angus and Jhally's position on ideological power and resistance by offering the following example:

"If a Black teenage performer can draw 10,000 Black, Brown, and White teenagers into a major urban arena and they leave shouting 'My Addidas!', a significant moment in the politics of Black cultural production has occurred. 'My Addidas!', celebrates Hip-Hop style and street attitude: shoelaces untied, (shoe) tongues raised up, and sneakers clean as a whistle. Yet, sneakers are understood to be the shoe of choice for athletes, teenagers, and street criminals. Black teenage males sporting sneakers and other hip-hop gear are perceived as criminal equivalents. Loud, public celebration of an object that signifies one's alien status is an act of defiance and self-possession" (p. 277).

Ideological power and resistance is exercised through signs and language. The success of 2 Live Crew and Public Enemy opened the door to more politically and racially explicit material. As a result, rap's lyrical landscape is limitless. Resistive forces are more pronounced and rap's acceptance by popular culture less conceivable.

### The Birth of Gangsta Rap

In 1990, rap's cultural landscape was aggressively redefined due to the advent of "gangsta rap." According to Rose (1994), "Ice-T put the Los Angeles gangsta rap style on the national map" (p. 4). Gangsta rap was particularly attractive to young Black males due to its commitment to cultural resistance. Its symbolic prowess, sense of Black energy, and life-affirming rhythms appealed overwhelmingly to disadvantaged Black youth. Ronin Ro, author of Gangsta: Merchandizing the Rhymes of Violence, maintains that gangsta rap is about selling evil in a

marketplace already glutted with faulty, combustible goods. Roe (1996) maintains,

"Some people say this is Generation X, and for some white folks subsisting on fast-food paychecks, it may be; but for the majority of Americans - of all colors, income brackets, races and creeds - this is the Age of The Gangsta" (p. 6).

Ro further contends that almost every state in the union has a Crip or Blood or Crip/Blood styled-gang wreaking havoc on local communities.

Stancell (1996) maintains that it is a gross mistake to lump together all rappers as "gangstas" or purveyors of obscenity; many address issues of deep concern to the African-American community, from racism to politics to violence in the streets. Rap informs the listener of the reality of African-American experience and thus raises social consciousness. It offers young people opportunities to question the forces that control their lives by presenting an Afrocentric view of society which contradicts or competes with the views they encounter on a daily basis.

However, gangsta rappers, according to Stephen Rodrick, author of Hip-Hop Flop: The Failure of Liberal Rap, "gangsta rappers fashion themselves as angry, gun-toting outlaws, appealing to both urban Blacks and suburban whites seeking vicarious thrills" (Sexton, 1995, p. 114). Gangsta rap came under heavy attack in November 1993 when a handful of self-appointed Los Angeles "community leaders" threatened KPWR-FM with an advertiser boycott if it didn't ban all songs using the words "nigga," "bitch," or "ho." In essence, the frightened faces of cultural politics summoned enough courage to take a stand against what they

perceived as indecent language on public radio. On December 7, 1995, KPWR gave in and began to mask or delete the three words.

According to Stancell (1996), part of gangsta rap's lyrical appeal stems from its uncritical embrace of the youth abandoned by society. The propensity of rap artists to employ clinical descriptions of sex, revel in violence, and refer to women as "bitches" suggests an extraordinary decline of community standards and a brutalized vision of life. Sexton (1995) maintains "The journey from Otis Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness" to Slick Rick's "Treat Her Like a Prostitute" is not progress; it is a sad commentary on the decline of humanistic values in African-American communities and in American society as a whole" (p. 131).

Gangsta rap's seemingly mesmerizing appeal to young urban Blacks and suburban whites is both intriguing and myopic. Why is gangsta rap so appealing to America's young people? The following questions are posed to address the above question. The questions are as follows:

- (1) Why is "thug-life and criminality" appealing to America's Black youth?
- (2) Does "gangsta rap" incite acts of violence and criminality in today's youth?

### Gangsta Rap Attraction

Mike Davis, author of City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (Verso 1990) as well as Prisoners of the American Dream (Verso 1986), maintains that a large segment of America's youth are

attracted to "gangsta rap" because its lyrics are deemed representative of the Black experience. Davis (1992) maintains,

"The Rodney King case forged the link between the local history of police racism in L.A. and the plight of Black people all over North America. It has assumed an almost Dred Scott status, a kind of fundamental test of what Black citizenship means. Gangsta rap articulates the spirit and mood of inner-city youth and their quest for empowerment" (Social Text, 1993, pp. 19-33).

Popular music (gangsta rap included) presents to the youth views which are not always consistent with those taught by parents and schools and thus the youth "use music to resist authority at all levels, assert their personalities, develop peer relationships and romantic entanglements" (Lull, 1987, p. 152).

In response to Question #1 - Why is thug life and criminality appealing to America's Black youth? Grossberg (1987) contends "music which communicates a particular world view offers a listener a way of interpreting reality and his/her experience in it. Thus, the relationship of music, meaning, and reality becomes a "domain of ideological struggle" (p. 177).

Lull (1987) supports Grossberg's position on music, meaning and reality. However, Lull maintains:

"There is an ideological convergence between the artists and listeners held by its creators and listeners. It legitimizes social and political ideologies and movements by reinforcing alternative values and actions" (p. 165).

Gangsta rap is at best a means of communication and an agent of socialization for numerous disadvantaged urban youth. Due to its

recognition as an oppositional subcultural music, gangsta rap relies heavily on recorded music and live performances for the distribution of information. Youth's use of music as a means of resistance against the forces of domination is evidenced in the work of Fiske (1987); Weis (1985); Grossberg (1987); and Lull (1987). The enormous popularity of rap musicians who advocate Black nationalism or the Black Power Movement and openly question the existing social system among Black youth indicates that rap music is oppositional subcultural music. In lieu of rap's "oppositional subcultural" stigmatism, rap is often viewed in a negative perspective.

Yasue Kuwahara, author of Power to the People Y'All: Rap Music, Resistance, and Black College Students, maintains "Rap music enables Black youth to resist the forces that place them in a subordinate position. These forces manifest themselves in the form of various rules and regulations, knowledge, including standard English as well as authority figures" (Humanity-and-Society, 1992, p. 56).

Current themes of contemporary gangsta rap supports Kuwahara's notions on Black youth and cultural resistance. As William H. McClendon says, "Black music (gangsta rap included) is one area where Black people provide their own definitions and make their own judgments" (McClendon, 1976, p. 24). Moreover, its beat, rhythm, and call-and-response delivery style clearly reflect African as well as African-American cultural traditions (McClendon, 1976, pp. 20-25; Maulsby, 1983, pp. 51-66; Keyes, 1984, pp. 143-152; Floyd, 1977, pp. 45-58; Burnim and Maulsby, 1987, p. 109; Allen, 1989, pp. 78-80+).



### Rap's East Coast/West Coast Rivalry

In 1993, gangsta rap underwent a profound paradigm shift, "the rivalry between East Coast and West Coast rappers." East Coast rappers are termed rappers with a New York heritage (Bronx, Harlem, Brooklyn). West Coast rappers are identified as rappers with a California home base (Los Angeles and Compton). The perceived rivalry between East Coast/West Coast rappers is best described as "gang warfare." It is essentially inner-city turf protection and respect. Allen S. Gordon, author of Circle of Death, maintains,

"Far too many of the new school rappers from both coasts pay their bills by selling gun smoke to fans. Hardcore or 'reality' rap, despite its merits as a viable and integral description of life rarely seen by mainstream America, has injected a fierce negativity and violent undercurrent into hip-hop that has been constantly criticized but has yet to be sufficiently curtailed. It has become apparent that the music is now a powerful part of shaping young minds across America" (The Source, 1996, p. 110).

Many teenagers emulate rappers, declaring themselves thugs or gangsters. The acquisition of money and status appears to be the driving force for many young new school rappers. Commitment to family and community appears to be secondary to personal financial security.

Michael E. Dyson, author and Black Studies professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, maintains,

"Even though Black artists are often ripe for the picking - and thus susceptible to exploitation by White and Black record labels - many of them are sophisticated about the politics of cultural representation. Many gangsta rappers helped to create the genre's artistic rules. And they have

figured out how to financially exploit sincere and sensational interest in 'ghetto life'" (The Source, 1996, p. 108).

Many new school rappers contend that the so-called "East Coast/West Coast" rivalry as simply media hype and attempted political sabotage of rap music. Dr. Dre, noted rap artist and producer, contends,

"All this East Coast/West Coast sh-t has gotta be the most stupid sh-t ever heard in life. It's just another way for mutherfu--ers that don't have the skills they need to keep up with the times to sell records. So if you get on a record and you talking this East Coast/West Coast sh-t, it means you just trying to jump aboard this concept" (The Source, 1996, p. 75).

However, Brian Cross, author of It's NOT ABOUT A SALARY...Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles, addresses the East Coast/West Coast rivalry as if it is simply aggressive musical competition within the rap community. Cross (1993) notes that there is no violent hatred between coastal rappers. He contends that the major difference is musical style and demographics.

According to Lynn Hirschberg, contributing writer for The New York Times Magazine, the rivalry between East Coast/West Coast rappers is a serious matter. Hirschberg (1996) maintains the East Coast/West Coast rivalry actually began in August 1996 at the "Source Awards," an annual rap-world event held at the Paramount Theater in Manhattan. Suge Knight, C.E.O. of Death Row Records, went on stage to present an award and made a derogatory remark aimed at Sean Combs, the C.E.O. of Bad Boy Entertainment, a rival rap label based in New York. Knight allegedly disrespected Combs by suggesting to rap artists assigned to Bad Boy

Entertainment to join his label (Death Row Records). Without naming names, Suge allegedly announced from the stage, "If you don't want the owner of your label on your album or in your video or on your tour, come sign with Death Row." Hirschberg maintains, "Combs was shocked and amazed. When he took to the stage to give out an award, he made a speech about unity, yet the coastal rivalry had already begun" (The Source, July 1996, p. 28).

The violent demographic hatred allegedly between the East Coast and West Coast is truly controversial. Even though the East Coast/West Coast rivalry is deemed mythical by contemporary rappers, its alleged presence is another nail in the coffin of the much awaited rap/hip-hop funeral.

### **Gangsta Rap and Criminality**

In response to the second question - Does "gangsta rap" incite acts of violence and criminality in today's youth? Delores Tucker, chairwoman of the National Political Congress of Black Women, contends that there is a correlation between gangsta rap and criminality. After holding up as a prop an enlarged headline which read "Boy Shoots Sister - Says Snoop Said Do it!," Tucker laid the tragic, accidental death of a young child on the lyrics of the rap artist. Tucker maintains "The greatest role models to Black children are Snoop Doggy Dogg, the late Tupac Shakur and all of the other stars that are telling them to be cool, to go to jail" (Emerge, 1995, p. 67). The controversy surrounding gangsta rap and its affect on young people is an endless debate.

Russell Simmons, a rap impresario and C.E.O. of RAL/Def Jam Recordings, does not share Tucker's position on rap music. Simmons does not believe that any kind of rap music instigates any negative behavior. Simmons maintains

"There are all kinds of aggressive entertainment on television and everywhere else. I don't see how rappers' images can be any more aggressive or any different from James Cagney's image in his movies. You almost wanted the bad guy to win. Look at the cowboy movies, Jesse James was the hero. Nobody wanted to be the good man; they wanted to be Al Capone" (EM, 1996, p. 51).

The debate on gangsta rap will continue as long as rappers rap.

The rap group KRS-One maintains the following:

"The life of rap music is danger. Stereotypes are hurting rap immensely. It's stereotypes that all rappers are like; yo man, pass the gold! That stereotype is killing us. It's become poison. And 'by all means necessary' this has got to stop" (Henderson, 1988, p. 80).

### Gangsta Rap and Image

Henderson's notion that stereotypes are hurting rap music is founded on truth, especially with regard to gangsta rap. Gangsta rappers tend to exhibit many of the negative images popular culture has associated with rap and the hip-hop culture. Kuwahara maintains "the media's negative view of rap music and fans as well as musicians' reaction to it reflects the power relationship between two races in American society which has discriminated against Blacks" (Humanity and Society, 1992, p. 65).

Dr. Dre, rapper and former C.E.O. of Death Row Records, supports Henderson and Kuwahara's notion that rap is under attack and stereotypes are hurting the business. Dre contends,

"If I'm on the outside looking in and I don't like hip-hop, why do I need to f-ck with you and try to stop it when you're f-cking it up yourself? I can just sit back and watch. And wait for you to kill it. Same thing as gang banging - people sit back and watch n-ggas kill each other. People that don't like n-ggas can just sit back, without lifting a f-cking finger, and the sh-t that they want to happen is getting done. N-ggas is killing each other while they sit back and watch. The same thing goes for hip-hop. These Bob Dole and Delores Tucker m-therf-ckers, they can watch as it kills itself" (The Source, July 1996, p. 77).

### Music as Empowerment and Resistance

Kuwahara (1992) maintains that rappers equate rap with empowerment. The questions and resistance musicians express in their songs, as well as in interviews, make fans aware of the dominant power and moreover invite them to participate in resistance. The media's negative view of the music reflects the dominant group's effort to repress the resisting knowledge in order to maintain its power in society. Michael Foucault, author of Power/Knowledge, contends that the production of knowledge is a form of power. Foucault maintains "domination takes place when one knowledge is accepted as truth and further regarded natural in society" (Humanity and Society, 1992, p. 65). Competing knowledge, however, continue to exist and enable subordinate groups to resist domination (Foucault, 1980; Fiske, 1989, pp. 149-184; Patton, 1989, pp. 270-344).

In essence, according to Foucault, rap music is producing a "resisting knowledge" - a knowledge which contradicts "truth." If Foucault's notions are truth laden, his notions are a prime example of "cultural politics and its phobia" in regard to rap. Resisting through listening to rap music is a popular practice within the margins of many disadvantaged urban communities. John Fiske attributes the popularity of rap's popular texts to the opportunities the music gives to its audience "to make their own socially pertinent meanings out of (their) textual or discursive resources" (Fiske, 1989, p. 183). Fiske further contends "when a popular text permits its audience to make sense of its own experience, apart from the meaning given by the dominant power, the text becomes popular because there is pleasure" (Fiske, 1989, pp. 178-179).

Rap artists (gangsta rappers included) tend to derive pleasure in their performances. The dynamics of power-knowledge-pleasure that Fiske alludes to is clearly observed in the relationship of rap music and Black urban youth who identify with the music as a viable form of expression.

The cultural political landscape of contemporary America strongly associates rap music with violence, criminality, and misogyny. The notion that rap is associated with violence and criminality has been explored by numerous researchers and writers (Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984; Waldron, 1996; Dyson, 1994; Decker, 1989; Kitwana, 1994; Hooks, 1990; Gray, 1995; Ro, 1996; Sexton, 1995). However, the notion that rap music is misogynistic/sexist is less explored.

### Rap and Misogyny

Delores Tucker, chairwoman of the National Political Congress of Black Women, contends that rap music, especially gangsta rap, is anti-female. Tucker supports her position by noting "in the art work that comes with every Snoop Doggy Dogg album, it has a gun, it has explicit sex and it says, 'Kill da ho'" (Emerge, November, 1995, p. 67). Numerous rap artists (especially gangsta rappers) use terms such as "ho's, skeezers, bitches, and sluts" when making references to females. Females are typically viewed as sex objects and portrayed as mindless subservient derelicts. In response to the above depiction of women, Tucker maintains, "Black women are tired of their young sons and their young brothers calling them whores, bitches and sluts" (Emerge, November, 1995, p. 67). In response to the negative stereotype of women by rap musicians, Tucker and national Council of Negro Women President Dorothy Height picketed in front of a Washington, D.C. record store.

Tucker and Height's political stand against certain rap lyrics was not without controversy. According to Kevin Gray, author of Gangsta Rappers Get A Bum Rap, when Tucker attacks rappers for racial and sexual violence and the denigration of women, she misses the point and the opportunity to do something about the violence. Gray maintains "but rather than listen to the conditions described in gangsta rap and work to change them, Tucker is attacking the expression of those feelings" (Emerge, November, 1995, p. 66).

### Misconceptions Associated with Rap Music

O.J. Lima, author of Just the Facts: Murder Rates and Gangsta Rap, contends that the so-called war on gangsta rap - music that depicts the violent and sometimes criminal lifestyles of some urban youth - is a perfect example of mistaking an effect for a cause. Lima maintains "National murder rates began to skyrocket in 1985 - a year before the first gangsta rap single, Schooly D's "Psk-What Does it Mean?," and two years before Boogie Down Productions' "Criminal Minded," the first gangsta rap album. In fact, among the cities with the highest murder rates, none have prominent gangsta MCs - unless, of course, you count Gary, Ind.'s Native 'Smooth Criminal,' Michael Jackson" (Vibe, May, 1996, p. 113).

#### Ten U.S. Cities With the Highest Murder Rates in 1994\*

City (Population)	Total Murders	Murders Per 100,000 Residents
1. New Orleans, LA (493,990)	424	85.8
2. Richmond, VA (207,261)	160	77.2
3. Washington, D.C. (570,000)	399	70.0
4. Gary, IN (118,640)	80	67.4
5. St. Louis, MO (390,437)	248	63.5
6. Detroit, MI (1,022,283)	541	52.9



## Ten U.S. Cities With the Highest Murder Rates in 1994\* (Continued)

City (Population)	Total Murders	Murders Per 100,000 Residents
7. Birmingham, AL (270,978)	135	49.8
8. Atlanta, GA (411,204)	135	49.8
9. Jackson, MS (200,272)	91	45.4
10. Baltimore, MD (739,180)	321	43.4

\*In order to be included, a city had to have at least 100,000 residents and 50 murders in 1994.

## U.S. Cities Often Associated With Gangsta Rap\*

City (Population)	Total Murders	Murders Per 100,000 Residents
1. Philadelphia, PA (1,560,381)	404	25.9
2. Los Angeles, CA (2,550,381)	845	25.8
3. Houston, TX (1,758,016)	375	21.3
4. New York, NY (7,336,224)	1,561	21.3

\*Sources: American Demographics, U.S. Department of Justice.

The documented evidence that murder rates in ten of our nation's largest cities tended to escalate far before the inception of gangsta rap, lends support to the belief that rap is being unfairly targeted by "cultural politics." Gray (1996) maintains that the real purveyors of pain and vulgarity are those who perpetuate the economic and political status quo. America's moral dilemma lies in its inability to deal honestly with pressing social concerns. Gangsta rap does not create the "thug" environment that terrorizes popular culture; it simply addresses societal conditions in a perhaps harsh and vulgar fashion. Gangsta rap is at best a "political scapegoat."

## METHODOLOGY

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the affect that rap music has on the lives of adolescents. The literature review revealed conflicting and supporting data in regard to this inquiry. However, a preponderance of the literature supports the position that rap music is essentially the voice of the disadvantaged and the disenfranchised. Some of the more contentious disputes of this investigation revolve around the following questions: Can violent images incite violent action; can music set the stage for social unrest; do sexually explicit lyrics contribute to the moral "breakdown" of society; and finally, does rap music encourage American youth to engage in acts of criminality?

A qualitative research methodology was employed to conduct this investigation. The data were collected through the use of focus group interviews and analyzed through the constant comparative method, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Key concepts that are fundamental to qualitative research include human instruments and emergent design (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), in-depth descriptions of individual opinions, experiences, and perspectives (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1987; 1990), and a phenomenological perspective (Crowson, 1987). The goal when using the qualitative paradigm is to allow individuals to respond in their own words without preconceived notions imposed by the researcher.

As indicated earlier, focus group interviews were utilized for data collection. A focus group interview involves a homogeneous group

of people, convened by a researcher or interviewer, to participate in a focused discussion for the purpose of collecting data on a particular phenomenon (Morgan, 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Whatever is actually said in the opening few minutes of the interview, it must be demonstrated that the interviewer is a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest. It should be noted that respondents are not keen to reveal very much about themselves, or to take a chance with an idea, if there is any risk of an unsympathetic response (Rogers, 1945). Typically, the discussion lasts one to two hours and the participants are volunteers. Focus group sessions for this inquiry lasted approximately one and one half hours and each participant voluntarily participated.

An ideal number of participants for focus groups range from four to twelve (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988; Patton, 1987; 1990; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1991). "Focus groups are carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (Krueger, 1988, p. 18). Capturing data on the wing, and capturing it whole, takes patience and care. The investigator must listen for many things. The first objective is key terms. When these terms appear in the testimony of the respondent, they must be patiently pursued. What are the assumptions, the companion terms, and the interrelationships of the term? The investigator must also listen to many other things, including impression management, topic avoidance, deliberate distortion, minor

misunderstanding, and outright incomprehension, taking, in each case, the necessary remedy to deal with the problem (Briggs, 1986; Douglas, 1976; Salamone, 1977).

An average of six participants were involved in the focus groups for this study, which constitutes moderately sized groups (Morgan, 1988). Since both small and large groups present unique challenges, a group of six reduced the practical problems associated with either of the extremes.

The use of focus groups for this research project was appropriate for several reasons. First, focus group interviews tend to work extremely well with groups of people who have been traditionally disadvantaged or minority (Morgan, 1988). Students selected for this investigation came from diverse backgrounds, however, several were minority and disadvantaged. Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world. The objective of the method makes it essential that testimony be elicited in as unobtrusive, nondirective manner as possible (Brenner, 1985). While working with students at Jackson Middle and Grimsley High, the investigator adamantly encouraged respondents to address questions with utmost openness without fear of reprisal. The use of focus groups for this research was also appropriate because it allowed the investigator to gain a large amount of information in a brief amount of time. Furthermore, the data show that students contend that rap music has no negative affect on adolescent behavior. Focus group interviews were helpful in gaining an in-depth understanding of adolescent

attitudes and perceived stereotypes associated with rap music. Focus groups also allow for interaction among a number of participants to gain multiple perspectives on a single topic (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990) resulting in richer and more reflective data.

Finally, the focus group method allows the researcher to record data in the participants' own words and to seek clarification when needed (Krueger, 1988; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Morgan, 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). This was highly significant to the research because it allowed the participants to use their own linguistic styles in conceptualizing and expressing their viewpoints, and because it accorded the investigator an opportunity to explore ambiguous responses.

### Participant Selection Process

Qualitative research traditionally assesses a few cases versus numerous cases. A significant emphasis is placed on individual differences and context. According to Morgan (1988), a moderate sized group of from six (6) to ten (10) participants is most functional for focus groups. Twelve (12) is generally the largest size and four (4) the smallest. There is generally greater involvement of each participant in small groups. This allows for each participant to articulate his or her viewpoints more succinctly. Generally, in larger groups, individual participants tend to contribute less and are less participative. The moderator plays a vital role in keeping larger groups focused.

Krueger (1994) recommends that focus groups be conducted until no significantly new perspectives are rendered. Morgan and Krueger (1993) notes,

"At the beginning of a focus group, participants will not be immediately able to express all their feelings or motivations on a topic. As they hear others talk, however, they can easily identify the degree to which what they are hearing fits their situation. By comparing and contrasting, they can become more explicit about their own views" (p. 17).

Morgan (1988) states,

"The goal is to do as many groups as are required to provide an adequate answer to the research question. The best advice is to determine a target number of groups in the planning state, but to have a flexible alternative available if more groups are needed" (p. 43).

By comparing the different points of view that participants exchange during the interactions in focus groups, researchers can examine motivation with a degree of complexity that is typically not available with other methods.

Students enrolled in Guilford County Schools, Greensboro, North Carolina were selected for this study. Students selected came from diverse backgrounds and interest. Ethnicity and social class played an active role in student selection.

A letter was sent to the office of the superintendent of Guilford County Schools requesting permission to work with the students. A copy of the letter appears in Appendix A. The principal and assistant principal of each school played an active role in selecting students who would contribute significantly to the study.



Criteria used for participant selection included the following: ethnic group (i.e., African-American, White), social class, gender, grade, age, and willingness to participate. Effort was made to balance the ethnic representation in each group as much as possible. Student participation was representative of various cultural backgrounds.

Letters, as shown in Appendix A, were sent to the selected students and parents requesting their participation in the focus groups. The researcher visited and/or phoned the students and other participants two days after letters were sent to them to confirm their participation. If any student, or any other participant was unable to participate, the researcher chose another participant from the pre-developed list. Twelve different focus groups were formed and composed of at least six participants each, thus allowing for extensive individual member participation.

To ensure the desired number of participants for each focus group session, the researcher asked two extra participants over the required number to participate. If everyone showed up as requested, extras were thanked and allowed to remain if so desired. A total of seventy-two participants, twelve groups of students, each group consisting of at least six students comprised each focus group.

## FOCUS GROUPS

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS OF STUDY

Rap music and its affect on the lives of American adolescents have been a controversial issue since the mid-1970s (Rose, 1994). This chapter presents the results of a qualitative investigation on the affects of rap music on the lives of students attending Jackson Middle and Grimsley High schools of Greensboro, North Carolina. Focus group interviews were conducted in this study to ascertain student perspectives on rap music and its affect on their lives.

### Description of Interview Groups

Seventy-two students participated in this research project. The students were divided into twelve groups. Each group contained six students. For the purpose of this study, students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 were selected. Each student was given a personal profile data sheet prior to focus group formation. Personal profile data sheets provided the researcher with background information on each participant (see Appendix).

Student demographic data are included in this chapter along with ethnographic summaries from the interviews related to the research questions. Effort was made to present the exact voice of each speaker. Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) note that "focus group interviews have the potential to elicit a great deal of information in a short period of time" (p. 32). The researcher recognizes that there are many potential abuses of focus group interviews that can impact the validity

of results as well as the relationships with participants and target audiences.

### Student Profile Format/Focus Group Preconference

The investigator gained personal student data from each school's SIMS (Student Information Management System) program. The secretary of each school provided technical assistance when deemed necessary and appropriate. Prior to focus group discussions, each student met with the principal investigator and informally shared a brief perspective on rap music. The following questions were asked each participant:

- (1) What is your position on rap music?
- (2) Why do you like or dislike rap music?

The investigator hoped to enhance the comfort level of student participants by informally dialoguing with each student prior to the focus group sessions. A conference room near the assistant principal's office served as the meeting place. The initial endeavor centered on meeting with each participant one-on-one for approximately three minutes; however, due to time and class constraints, on five different occasions the investigator was required to dialogue with students in groups of four. Refreshments were served with each setting. At the end of each setting, students were escorted to their regular classes and a new student or group of students was summoned to the conference room. Students were allowed refreshments (cookies, soda, chips) only in the conference room. Refreshments were required to be consumed before exiting the conference room, even though several students requested

permission to take refreshments with them to classrooms or on school buses. Students dialogued with the principal investigator informally for approximately six minutes and returned to their regular classes. The sole purpose of the focus group preconference rested on the notion that it would serve as an "ice breaker" or precursor for the focus group sessions.

### Student Profile Group #1 - Sixth Graders

Group 1 consisted of three African-Americans, two Anglo-Saxons, and one Asian student. The three African-American students live in the lower socio-economic areas. Brian, an African-American male, lives in a project area known as "Florida Street Market." He stated that he enjoys playing basketball, listening to phat beats, and watching television. Brian further stated that he did not particularly like school. He adamantly stated that he comes primarily because his mom makes him get out of bed and takes him to the bus stop. Brian aspires to become a lawyer.

Amber, the sole African-American female in Group 1, lives near Brian. She stated that she enjoys listening to rap music and watching videos on BET. When not listening to rap music or watching videos, Amber stated that she enjoys reading love novels. Amber lives at home with two younger siblings and her mother and father. She aspires to become a model or computer programmer.

Kim-Lui, a bilingual student from Cambodia, lives in a middle-class subdivision in northern Greensboro. He stated that he enjoys playing

video games, listening to rap music, and going to the movies in his spare time. He further stated that he likes to dress really nicely as well. Kim-Lui's English teacher informed me that it is not uncommon for Kim-Lui to bring an extra pair of pants or shirt to school to give to his other Cambodian friends so they will fit in with the other students.

Larry, a white male from a lower socio-economic area of Greensboro known as "Eugene Street," loves rap music. In his spare time he listens to rap and watches rap videos. He particularly likes Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. Larry stated that he doesn't really like school because of its many rules. He stated that rap music causes him to "really think." Larry further stated that rap music helps him to solve his problems. He stated that he really got into rap music when his mother married his stepfather who is Black. Larry stated that his stepfather buys all the latest phat rhymes.

Robin, the sole white female in Group 1, comes from an upper-middle class background. Both parents are college-educated and employed by industry. Robin stated that she is only allowed to listen to "certain" rap music at home. When asked what she meant by "certain rap music," Robin responded by saying "rap music that is clean...it does not have cuss words." She identified her favorite artists as the late Tupac Shakur and The Fugees. Robin stated that she wants to attend college and become a flight attendant. She loves to travel.

Malcolm, a Black male from the "Florida Street Market" project area, particularly likes rap music because of its beat. He stated that he enjoys dancing and the beat in most raps are really phat. Malcolm

further stated that rap sort of helps him to deal with everyday life. However, most of all, he likes rap because of its phat beats. It allows him to be at peace with himself as well as with others.

### Group #1 Profile - Sixth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Brian	6	Black	Male	C
Amber	6	Black	Female	C
Kim-Lui	6	Asian	Male	C
Larry	6	White	Male	C
Robin	6	White	Female	B
Malcolm	6	Black	Male	B

Note: The overall academic standing is based on the following scale:

A = 93-100

B = 85-92

C = 77-84

D = 70-76

E = 69 and under

### Focus Group #1 - Sixth Graders

Focus group #1 consisted of the following students: Brian, Amber, Kim-Lui, Larry, Robin, and Malcolm.

Focus Group #1, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Brian, a Black male, initiated dialogue by saying,

The thing that I like best about rap music is it's beat. The beat is always live. Man, you know the beat is always phat.

Larry, a white male, shared Brian's position on rap. He entered the discussion by noting,

I like the beat and rhythm. I like what they do in videos. I like the bad grammar, the beat, and all the singing. Man, it really makes me hype. I just want to move...I gotta move!!!

Larry further indicated that he loves to dance. He described rap music as good "dance music" because the beat is always easy to find.

Robin, a white female, re-emphasized the fact that she is only allowed to listen to "certain" rap music at home. She described "certain rap" as rap that does not have cuss words. Robin noted,

I agree with Brian and Larry. A good rap to me is one that has a good beat.

Robin continued her dialogue by noting,

It is really hard to find a good rap with a good beat that does not use a lot of cussing.

Malcolm, a Black male, indicated that he agreed with Brian, Larry, and Robin; the beat in rap music is really phat. Malcolm noted that he loves to dance. He described rap music as being easy to dance to and



very energizing. Malcolm stated that he particularly likes Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls.

Kim-Lui and Amber did not respond to focus group question #1.

Kim-Lui attempted to comment on two occasions and simply said that he agreed with what everyone said. Amber simply smiled and nodded her head a few times as if she agreed with what was stated.

Focus Group #1, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Brian responded to Question #2 by noting,

I think older people blame rap for too much stuff. Some rap lyrics or rap videos might have some violence, but that doesn't make me want to do what's in the video. Old people are just scared and just look for excuses.

Malcolm supported Brian's position on rap and violence and made the following observation:

Of course there is violence in rap lyrics and rap videos. Violence is everywhere. You look at television, the movies, or simply drive down Florida Street, you can find violence. Simply because violence is going on does not mean that you want to do it too. The violence in rap lyrics and rap music simply "keeps it real."

Kim-Lui reluctantly raised his hand and added,

You see where I live there is always something goin' on. I hear gun shots every night. I just ignore it and do what I'm doing. Most of the time, I'm in my room chilling to Method Man. Just because I'm listening to Method Man and chilling, that don't mean that I'm goin' to do what he says. To me, the violence in rap lyric simply tell you about what's happening around you.

Larry interrupted Kim-Lui and noted,

Man, old people are silly. They think just because you listen to Method Man or Tupac that you're bad. Just because violence is in some videos that don't make you want to do it. I got a mind of my own. I know right from wrong.

Amber raised her hand and commented,

The violence in rap music don't bother us. It simply tells us about what's happening in our neighborhood. Old people might get scared and stuff. But we (young people) just chill. We ain't goin' to do all the stuff you might see in rap videos.

Robin did not respond to Question #2. She often smiled and nodded her head occasionally as an indication of support.

Focus Group #1, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Larry began dialogue by noting,

To me, Black people are usually depicted as gangstas or thugs. I really don't like this but that's the way most videos are. The brothas are portrayed as criminals and sistas always look like hoochie mamas.

Brian interjected by noting,

In the videos that I watch, Black guys always look like thieves and Black women look like whores. I think it makes Black people look bad. Black people basically look hard and mean. Women basically look like they'll do anything for a few dollars.

Robin agreed with Brian's observation and added,

I really get upset when I watch rap videos and see women acting like they're loose and have no brains. It's like Black women are only after dollars. It makes Black women look bad.

Amber supported Robin's position on women in videos by stating,

I agree with Robin. Black women aren't given much respect in rap videos. They look real cheap and they act real cheap. It is like Black women are a piece of meat or decoration.

Malcolm nodded his head in agreement with Amber and stated,

I agree with Amber; however, Black males look bad too. They are never working, simply hustling. Black males are viewed as gangstas and women are viewed as witches with a capital 'B'.

Kim-Lui supported Malcolm's notions and added,

There's a group called Whores With Attitude. They really look like hoochies. Then there's Lil' Kim and Da Brat, man they are wild. They make Black women look like they easily "give it up."

Focus Group #1, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Malcolm began dialogue by stating,

I don't know about role models but you know I like Tupac a lots. I think he has a lots of good views and stuff. I don't know about if I would say he's a good role model or not.

Brian engaged in the discussion by saying,

No, I don't think rappers should be called role models. I don't think they should be placed in that category. They are not in the same category as Michael Jordan.

Robin expressed agreement with Brian and noted,

I agree, rappers are not in the same category as Michael Jordan. To me, role models should be someone you look up to. It should be someone you really respect and who really respects you.

Amber agreed with Robin's position on role models and added,

To me, role models should be someone you really know. Even though none of us really know Michael Jordan, we kinda know him. Rappers do a lots of frontin'. It's hard to tell what's really real. I don't think rappers should be called role models.

Focus Group #1, Question #5 - Why do you like rap music?

Larry began dialogue by stating,

I like rap music because it relaxes me and causes me to think. When I have personal problems, I can always listen to Tupac or Method Man and feel better about things. It helps me to stay real.

Robin responded by saying,

I like rap music because everyone else likes it. All my friends like it. So I hang around with them and now I like it. I like its beat also.

Malcolm responded to Question #5 by noting,

Rap music helps me to deal with everyday stuff and stay positive. It sort of eases headaches and helps me to relax.

Amber noted the following,

I like rap music because it always has a good beat. Rap music is easy to dance to and the lyrics deal with everyday stuff.

Kim-Lui stated the following reasons why he likes rap,

I like rap music because I like the beat and rhythm. It is easy to dance to. Rap music helps me to relax and think about things.

Brian responded by saying,

I like rap music because of its phat beats. It helps me to think right. I am able to forget about all the bad stuff in my life. I don't know, I just like rap music.

Focus Group #1, Question #6 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Malcolm began dialogue by stating,

I can't speak for nobody else, but rap music helps me to relax...you know really chill. If things aren't goin' too good for me, I can always listen to Tupac or Method and I'm alright. Rap music helps me to calm down.

Amber entered into the discussion by noting,

As for me, rap music helps me to ease up when I'm hype. It sort of makes me happy inside. I don't know, it just helps me to feel good.

Larry entered into the discussion by saying,

I agree with Malcolm and Amber. Rap music simply relaxes me and helps me to feel positive. It makes me want to move, to dance. It doesn't make me want to do bad things like old people think.

Brian agreed with Larry and contributed to the discussion by saying,

I agree, most old people think that rap music causes us to do bad things. That's not true, rap music is simply music and we enjoy it. It don't make us thugs or gangstas.

Kim-Lui and Robin did not voluntarily comment on Question #6.

However, Kim-Lui nodded his head several times as if he agreed to what was being said. On one occasion, he even engaged in a "high-five" with Larry as a show of approval. Robin nodded several times and smiled as if she agreed with what was stated.

### Student Profile Group #2 - Sixth Graders

Focus Group #2 consisted of two white males, three Black males and one Black female. Floyd, a white male, stated that he likes rap music because of its beat and rhymes. He indicated that he likes poetry and rap music is basically "putting together rhyming words." Floyd stated that he sometimes creates his own rhymes (raps) at home and pretends that he is a rapper while playing with his younger siblings. He enjoys listening to rap, playing video games and playing basketball in his spare time. Floyd lives in a middle-class community. His father is college-educated and his mother works part-time at home. Floyd's favorite artist is Tupac Shakur.

Charles, a white male, stated that he doesn't buy rap music but he listens to it because his friends are into it. He stated that he doesn't have a favorite rap artist. His parents are divorced and he lives with his mother in a townhouse near Jamestown. Charles stated that rap music is alright, yet he doesn't always understand the message in rap. He indicated that he reads, draws, and roller-blades for enjoyment. Charles further stated that he usually likes the beat in popular raps. He doesn't pay attention to lyrics because they are too fast-paced at times.

Richard, a Black male, stated that he loves rap because he likes the rhymes and the beat. He stated that he likes to dance and the beat in most raps are good dance music. Richard further stated that he likes his music extremely loud so he can feel the vibes. He indicated that he likes rap because he finds the lyrics easy to learn and he takes pride

in being able to recite rhymes to popular artists. Richard lives near Eugene Street and often attends rap concerts at the Greensboro Coliseum. He is the youngest of two other siblings and they live with their mother in a two bedroom apartment. Richard's mother works in a Greensboro shirt factory.

Jasmin, a Black female, stated that she doesn't really like rap music because it is the "devil's music." She further stated that rap music only talks about sex, drugs, and hatred. Jasmin indicated that the message in most rap music does more to separate people than to unite them. She doesn't like gospel rap and described it as nothing less than Satan trying to get into the church. Jasmin lives with her mother and older brother in southeast Greensboro. Her mother is a daycare worker at a private daycare center. Jasmin described her family as "born-again Christians who love Jesus."

Leroy, a Black male, stated that he likes rap music because it deals with everyday life experiences. He indicated that when he watches rap videos, he sees similar things happening right in his community. Leroy noted that he particularly likes rap music because the beat is phat. He indicated that he likes the way it makes him feel. Leroy adamantly stated "Rap music causes me to have hope and feel positive. It is a great deal more than stories about sex, crime, and police hatred. It's relating to everyday life." Leroy lives in a middle-class Black community near North Carolina A&T State University. Both parents are college-educated and employed. Leroy has a younger sister and an older brother enrolled in Guilford County Schools.

Pompey, a Black male, stated that rap music is okay, yet he prefers R&B music. He indicated that some rap music is okay but most of it sounds about the same. It is basically the same beat and the same message. Pompey further stated that rap music is always played too loudly. He noted that some rap music should be called "noise" because that's all it really is. Pompey stated that he prefers R&B music because the message is clearer and more understandable. He described rap as being hard on the ears and hard to understand. Pompey further stated that he doesn't buy rap music and he doesn't have a favorite rap artist. Pompey lives with his mother and father in a middle-class Black community near North Carolina A&T State University. His mother is college-educated and his father is self-employed.

### Group #2 Profile - Sixth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Floyd	6	White	Male	B
Charles	6	White	Male	B
Richard	6	Black	Male	B
Jasmin	6	Black	Female	B
Leroy	6	Black	Male	B
Pompey	6	Black	Male	B



### Focus Group #2 - Sixth Graders

Focus group #2 consisted of the following students: Floyd, Charles, Richard, Jasmin, Leroy, and Pompey.

Focus Group #2, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Floyd began dialogue by saying,

Rap music is fly. You know, the beat is always phat. To me, I really get into the rhyming. I like the way rappers put words together that sound alike and make sense. You can't beat the beat.

Richard supported Floyd's position on rap and added,

I love the beat and the rhymes also. Yet, most of all, I like rap music because it is easy to dance to. I like the lyrics a lot too. To me, the lyrics tell a story. I especially like lyrics that make sense.

Leroy agreed with Richard and stated,

Some rap lyrics are really silly. I, personally, like rap music that have a good beat and positive lyrics. When I hear a rap with a good beat and good lyrics, man, I really chill. I just want to move....I just wanna dance.

Charles, Jasmin, and Pompey did not respond to Question #1.

Information gained in student profiles indicate that Charles seldom buys rap music. Jasmin doesn't really like rap, and Pompey prefers R&B music.

Focus Group #2, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Richard began the discussion by stating,

I think people over thirty are trying to give rap a bad name. Simply because some rap words are kinda hard or talk about banging someone up, that doesn't make us want to do it.

Leroy supported Richard's position by noting,

My parents are like that. Every time they hear about some kid getting into trouble, they say 'I bet they were listening to that rap mess.' Rap don't cause nobody to do nothin. They do dumb stuff because they want to.

Pompey disagreed with Leroy and stated,

Come on man, you know some kids with weak minds try to be like the stuff you see in videos. They try to talk like rappers and try to be hard. Rap music might not cause kids to do dumb stuff, but it does give a message.

Jasmin agreed with Pompey and added,

Most rap music talks about sex, drugs, and hatred. I think it can cause kids that aren't real smart to get in trouble. Some kids want to be like the gangstas in videos. They think it is popular to look rough and tough.

Floyd engaged in the discussion by saying,

I agree with what most of you said. Regardless, I think old people are putting too much blame on rap and not on the way things really are. Rap music is just something we listen to. It don't make you or me do nothing. We do stuff because that's what we want to do at that moment.

Charles did not respond to Question #2. However, he nodded his head on several different occasions as if he agreed and supported the varied positions on rap music and violence.

Focus Group #2, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Leroy began discussion by saying,

I don't know, but sometimes Black people look like hustlers. It's like Black people don't really have regular jobs. They live by shooting pool, playing craps, or gambling when everybody else is working.

Jasmin agreed with Leroy and added,

Black people have regular jobs like everybody else. But you don't see this in videos. To me, women really look trashy in videos. They look like hoochies. I get real mad when I watch a video and Black women are in the background almost naked.

Richard supported Jasmin's position and noted,

Now you got to admit, we all know someone in some of the videos that are like that. We can sit here and say that videos make us look bad. As for me, I know a lots of people that act like what you see on videos.

Charles agreed with Richard and stated,

I know these two Black guys who are always asking me for money. When I don't have any money, they try to push me around. They are always messing with me.

Floyd interrupted Charles and stated,

That ain't got nothing to do with all Black people. We don't just try to pick fights. There are hoodlums everywhere. You just got to hold your own.

Pompey engaged in the discussion and noted,

To me, Black women are made to look cheap in videos. They look like they'll do mostly anything for the right dollar. I also agree with Leroy when he said that Black people are made to look like hustlers. It's like Black people don't have no real jobs.

Focus Group #2, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Floyd began discussion by saying,

I don't look at rappers as role models. I look at it like this, I don't really know Snoop Doggy Dogg, Method Man, or Dr. Dre. I can't look at them as role models if I really don't know them. As far as I know, they could be just frontin'.

Pompey agreed with Floyd and added,

Rappers are musicians, not role models. Role models should be someone you really know. We don't really know rappers no better than we know Michael Jordan or Shaq.

Jasmin interrupted Pompey and stated,

Don't go there, don't be puttin' Michael Jordan in the same category as Method Man and Snoop. Mike ain't like them. He ain't nothin' like no Method Man and no Snoop.

Pompey anxiously interrupted Jasmin and explained,

I didn't say M.J. was like Method Man. I used M.J. as an example, we really don't know M.J. We only see him on television.

Richard engaged in the discussion by saying,

I just don't look at athletes, movie stars or rappers as role models. We don't know them good enough to call them role models. To me, role models should be people you really know. People you see and can talk to.

Charles agreed with Richard and noted,

To me, role models are people like you see everyday in your community helping other people. It's like Coach Hollands. He is always helping somebody. My dad and my Uncle Charles are my role models.

Leroy did not respond to Question #4. However, he often nodded his head and made statements like, "I agree, that's true."

Focus Group #2, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Jasmin began dialogue by stating,

Rap music hasn't affected me at all. I don't buy the trash. It's too dirty.

Leroy interrupted Jasmin and stated,

As for me, I don't see rap as trash or dirt. It helps me to relax. Rap music makes me sort of happy. You know it makes me feel good inside.

Richard agreed with Leroy and noted,

Rap music calms my nerves when I'm having a bad day. It helps me to chill. It don't make me want to bang nobody up or rob nobody.

Charles engaged in the discussion by saying,

Some rap music is okay. But some rap music uses too much cursing.

Floyd interrupted Charles and stated,

Man, he didn't ask you about cussing. He asked how rap has affected you. As for me, rap affected me by calming me down when I get upset. I can always listen to Tupac or Biggie and I'm chilled.

Charles responded to Floyd by saying,

Oh, I forgot the question. Rap don't really bother me because I don't buy it. And really, rappers talk so fast I don't always understand it.

### Student Profile Group #3 - Sixth Graders

Group #3 was extremely active and talkative. Sean, a white male, was particularly vocal about his appreciation for rap music. He began his dialogue on rap music by saying that rap music is the only music that he enjoys. Sean stated that his uncles like country music but he personally finds country music boring and silly. Sean smiled and reluctantly stated that when he listens to rap music around his uncles, they respond by saying "why are you always listening to that 'nigger music'?" Sean lives in a poor lower-class predominantly white neighborhood in south Greensboro. His mother and father never married and he has lived in the states of Florida, Mississippi, and Georgia. In closing, Sean stated that his best friend is Black and they do everything together. Sean aspires to become a police officer.

Adira, a white female, stated that she likes "some" rap music; however, she doesn't really understand most of it. She stated that she particularly likes the beat of rap music even though she can't always understand the words. Adira stated that rap music motivates her to dance and tap on things to its beat. She is not allowed to buy rap music or play it at home. Adira lives in an upper middle-class community that is predominantly white. Her father works for American Express and has an upholstery business at home for extra money. Adira's mother helps with the upholstery business when she is not caring for the younger siblings. Adira aspires to become a flight attendant. She does not have a favorite rap artist.

David, a white male, does not like rap music. He stated that rap music is hard to understand. David stated that he likes country music because he can understand the words and relate to it. He further stated that he finds rap music too loud and noisy. David indicated that he doesn't watch videos and he does not dance. He enjoys roller-blading, driving his go-cart, and playing video games. He lives in a middle-class community that is predominantly white. Neither parent attended college, however, both parents are employed. David aspires to become a race car driver. He doesn't have a favorite rap artist because he doesn't listen to rap enough to have one.

William, a Black male, stated that he particularly likes rap music; however, he is beginning to like a lot of R&B music as well. His favorite rap artist is the late Notorious B.I.G. He doesn't care much for female rap artists, especially ones like Lil' Kim. William stated that most female artists are always "downing the brothers." When asked what he meant by downing the brothers, William stated, "You know, making the brothers look bad." He stated that he does his homework listening to Notorious B.I.G.'s Life After Death cassette. William stated that rap music gives him relaxation, peace. He lives with his mother and father in a townhouse near North Carolina A&T State University. His father is a college graduate and his mother is currently attending North Carolina A&T State University.

Raymond, a Black male, stated that he only listens to rap music. He described rap music as phat, uplifting, and energizing. Raymond further stated that he rides his bike, wearing his walkman listening to

Redman's Muddy Waters. His favorite rap artist is Redman. He indicated that he studies better when he is listening to rap. Raymond stated that most homework assignments are so boring that one needs something to stay awake. For him, rap music gives him energy. Raymond lives with his mother and two younger siblings in a predominantly Black community near the Four Seasons Mall.

Ebony, a Black female, stated that she really likes rap music. She indicated that rap music makes her happy. Ebony stated that whenever she is feeling down, listening to rap music makes her feel positive. Her favorite rap artist is LL Cool J. Ebony stated that she likes LL Cool J because he does not do a lots of cussing and he is easy to understand. She stated that she does not have a favorite female rap artist, even though Queen Latifah is good. Ebony lives with her mother in south Greensboro. She is an only child and aspires to become a writer.

### Group #3 Profile - Sixth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Sean	6	White	Male	B
Adira	6	White	Female	B+
David	6	White	Male	B
William	6	Black	Male	B
Raymond	6	Black	Male	C
Ebony	6	Black	Female	C



### Focus Group #3 - Sixth Graders

Focus group #3 consisted of the following students: Sean, Adira, David, William, Raymond, and Ebony.

Focus Group #3, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Sean began dialogue by stating,

I just like rap music. It always has phat beats and phat rhymes. It's easy to dance to and the lyrics are hype. Man, I just like rap music, that's it.

Raymond agreed with Sean and added,

Rap music makes me want to move. You know, it gives me energy. It helps me to stay focused when I'm doing something boring like homework. Rap music helps me to think clear.

Ebony engaged in the discussion by stating,

Rap music makes me feel good. It makes me happy when I'm kinda down. It makes me smile and kinda hype. Rap music helps me to relax.

William entered the discussion by adding,

I agree some rap music is very positive. I like positive lyrics because it helps me to be positive. That's when I get upset. I don't like rap lyrics that put people down.

David and Adira did not respond to Question #1. Adira smiled and stated "I agree," and "Yes" while other students dialogued. David was quiet and virtually non-expressive.

Focus Group #3, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Raymond began dialogue by saying,

To me, I think the news and people over thirty are putting rap down. It seems like old people are always blaming rap for stuff. It's like rap causes all this bad stuff to happen. Rap don't make nobody do nothing.

Adira agreed with Raymond and added,

My Mom and Dad won't allow me to play rap at home. They think the words in rap might cause me to do something stupid. The words in rap aren't going to make me do anything. I know right from wrong.

William engaged in the discussion by stating,

I think old people are afraid of young people. They don't understand rap, so they think it's about robbing people or hurting someone. They act like we don't have minds of our own.

Ebony agreed with William and added,

I think all the talk about rap and violence is stupid. Kids know right from wrong. We got brains. Ain't no rap lyric going to cause nobody to do nothing. Old people are just scared and want to blame somebody or something.

Sean supported Ebony's opinion and stated,

Rap ain't about violence. It's about talking and dealing with everyday stuff in our lives. It ain't about hurting people or robbing people. Rap is just music that young people like. The problem is that old people just don't understand rap.

Focus Group #3, Question #3 - In your opinion, how are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Ebony began dialogue by stating,

Really, I don't like the way women and Blacks are seen in videos. It's like women are sluts and Black people don't work. We all know that's not true. Some videos really make us (Black people) look bad.

William agreed with Ebony and noted,

I know a lots of the videos that I watch, it looks as though Black people are always just hanging around. They don't do nothing for a living. Women look like hoochies trying to scam a dollar from a brotha. Brothas seem to be happy doing nothing.

Raymond supported William's observation and noted,

Man, it makes me mad when I look at a video and the only thing you see is someone trying to rip someone off. It makes Black people look like they're pimps and women are prostitutes. Some of the videos that I watch, just ain't right. It's really misleading.

Adira agreed with Raymond and stated,

My Mom will watch a little bit of a video and think that's the way life really is. I try and tell her that it's only a video. You can't believe everything you see in a video.

Sean supported Adira and added,

My uncles are always asking me why I always watch BET (Black Entertainment Television). They will see a scene in a video that gang related and comment "That why I don't want you visiting your so-called homies." They (my uncles) think I'm trying to be a thug. I'm just enjoying the music and the dancing.

Focus Group #3, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Raymond began dialogue by noting,

Really, I don't see rappers as role models. Role models to me are people like you really know. It could be your big brother, sister, Dad, Mom, teacher, or coach. We don't really know rappers to call them role models.

Sean agreed with Raymond and added,

To me, rappers are musicians. We only know what we see on television or read in books or magazines. It's not like we can go up to them and talk to them about our problems.

William agreed with Sean and noted,

Man, rappers are like movie stars, we don't know them. To me, role models are people you know and see doing stuff. It ain't done for hype or publicity.

Ebony shared William's position and purported,

As a sista, I think role models should be around so you can talk to them. Not some stranger on television talking a lots of good stuff. We don't know if it really real or whether it for show. Rappers shouldn't be called role models if you ask me.

David nervously raised his hand and noted,

I agree with what has been said. I think role models should be someone you really know. We don't really know rappers.

Focus Group #3, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

William began dialogue by noting,

I can't say rap music has really affected me. Well maybe, if I'm feeling down, some rap music sort of makes me happy. It makes me want to move.

Raymond engaged in the discussion by saying,

Rap music makes me want to dance. I don't know, it sort of puts you on a high. It's relaxing, that's it.

Ebony agreed with Raymond and noted,

Rap music makes me hype. I want to dance...I want to move. It just makes me feel good.

Sean engaged in the discussion by saying,

Some people think that rap music causes kids to get into trouble. That's not true. I just like rap music because of its phat beats and its phat rhymes. It ain't about causing me or nobody to do nothing.

#### Focus Groups #1, 2, and 3 Summary - Sixth Graders

Each focus group interview responded to the following Questions:

- (1) Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?
- (2) What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?
- (3) How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?
- (4) What is your position on rappers being called role models?
- (5) Why do you like rap music? (Focus Group #1 only)
- (6) In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

In response to Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music? Data indicates that students like rap music primarily for its beat and rhythm. The second most popular

response as to why rap music is liked, centers on the notion that rap music is very relaxing. Rap music allegedly helped interviewees to relax and think more clearly. Thirdly, interviewees alleged that rap is liked because it is good dance music. Interviewees indicated that rap music is easy to dance to and energizing. It makes them want to move.

Three relevant themes emerged from Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music is liked because of its beat and rhythm.
- (2) Rap music is very relaxing. It enables respondents to think more clearly.
- (3) Rap music is good dance music and very energizing. It makes you want to move.

In response to Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence? Data indicates that interviewees believe parents and old people (individuals over thirty) blame rap for the problems in today's society. Interviewees expressed the notion that parents and older people view rap as causing or encouraging young people to engage in acts of criminality. The second most popular response to rap music and its association with violence centered on the notion that rap music does not cause anyone to do anything. People have brains and know right from wrong. They (people) do things because of desire. The third popular response rested on the notion that rap music

does give a message. People with weak minds can be influenced by the message. Some young people want to be like the characters portrayed in some videos. The fourth popular response rests on the belief that rap music is "just something to listen to." It doesn't make anyone do anything.

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Parents and old people (individuals over thirty) view rap as causing or encouraging young people to engage in acts of criminality.
- (2) Rap music does not cause or influence young people in doing anything. People do things because of desire.
- (3) People with weak minds can be influenced by the message in some rap music. Some people want to be like characters portrayed in rap videos.
- (4) Rap music is "just something to listen to." It doesn't make anyone do anything.

In response to Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? Data suggests that interviewees view Blacks and women as being depicted very negatively in rap videos. Blacks in general are depicted as unemployed and hustling. Women are depicted as whores or sluts. One student described women as being depicted as "witches with a capital B." Males are typically depicted as hustlers or gangsters.

Women are made to look loose and brainless. Black women are not given much respect in rap videos. In regard to Black men, Black men are viewed as never working, trying to get an easy dollar. They never have so-called "regular jobs."

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Blacks and women are depicted very negatively in rap videos.
- (2) Blacks are depicted as unemployed and hustling.
- (3) Women are depicted as whores or sluts.
- (4) Black males are depicted as hustlers or gangsters.

In response to Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? Students essentially revealed consensus in regard to responses. Interviewees concluded that rappers should not be called role models. Role models should be someone that one really knows. Someone that is seen regularly and interacted with on an almost daily basis. Interviewees labeled rappers in the same category as professional athletes and actors.

Three relevant themes emerged from Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rappers are not role models. Role models should be people that one really knows.
- (2) Rappers are musicians. We only know what we see on television or read in books or magazines.



- (3) Rappers are like movie stars. We don't really know them.

In response to Question #5 - Why do you like rap music? Data indicates that interviewees liked rap music for various reasons. Interviewees stated that they liked rap music primarily for its beat and rhythm. Secondly, rap music is liked because it is relaxing. Thirdly, rap is liked because it helps interviewees to deal with everyday problems. It eases tension. And fourthly, rap music is liked because everyone else likes it, peer pressure.

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #5 - Why do you like rap music? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music is liked because of its beat and rhythm.
- (2) Rap music is liked because it is relaxing.
- (3) Rap music is liked because it helps interviewees in dealing with everyday problems.
- (4) Rap music is liked because my friends like it (peer pressure).

\*Question #5 was dropped after Focus Group #1 due to similar responses to Question #1.

In response to Question #6 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you? Responses were varied and very personal. The primary response to Question #6 centered on the notion that rap music enabled interviewees to relax or ease up when feeling hype. The second most popular response to rap and its affect on interviewees centered on the

belief that rap music made interviewees happy. The third notion on rap and its affect rested on the notion that rap does not cause young people to do bad things (acts of crime).

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #6 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you? These themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music eases tension. Interviewees are able to relax.
- (2) Rap music makes interviewees happy.
- (3) Rap music does not cause young people to engage in acts of criminality.
- (4) Rap music makes interviewees want to move. Interviewees desire to dance.

#### Student Profile Group #4 - Eighth Graders

The eighth grade students selected for this study appeared more vocal and more rambunctious than the sixth graders. Albert, a Black male, began dialogue by stating that he really likes rap music. He qualified his position by saying that a lots of people think that rap music causes kids to do bad things. Albert disagrees with this notion and contends that rap music is just music for enjoyment. His favorite rap artist is Heavy D. Albert particularly likes Heavy D because he is big and he knows how to rhyme and move. He indicated that rap music gives him hope and inspires to want to become somebody. Albert stated that rappers like Heavy D inspires him personally because being a big person himself, Heavy D makes him believe that he can become somebody important too. Albert aspires to become a professional football player. He comes from a single-parent household. Albert is being raised by his father in south Greensboro.

Brenda, a Black female, stated that she likes rap music because of its phat beat. She further stated that she likes the lyrics when they are positive. Brenda indicated that she likes to dance and most rap tracks are good for dancing. She identified LL Cool J and the late Tupac Shakur as her favorite artists. Brenda stated that she likes to watch rap videos and fix delicious desserts in her spare time. She aspires to become a nurse and visit Africa to help the sick people. Brenda lives with her mother and father in a predominantly Black middle-class community near Moses Cone Hospital.

Chris, an inter-racial male, who refers to himself as African-American, likes rap music because of its African heritage. He particularly likes the rhymes and the beat of most rap music. Chris stated that he likes poetry and sees rap as poetry with music and a beat. He enjoys playing basketball, watching rap videos, playing video games, and writing rap lyrics in his spare time. Chris aspires to become a song writer. He lives at home with both parents and an older brother. Chris lives in a middle-class racially-mixed community near North Carolina A&T State University.

Angela, a white female, stated that she likes rap music but she is not allowed to play it at home around her younger sister and brother. She stated that her parents hate rap music and refuses to allow her to play it in her room or anywhere around the house. Angela stated that her parents refer to rap as "Black people's music." She further stated that she not only likes rap music, she likes R&B music as well. Angela smiled as she stated that her parents will allow her to listen to music by Whitney Houston and Toni Braxton. When asked when and where she is able to listen to rap music, Angela responded by saying "I listen to rap music at school, on weekends when I visit friends and when I go to the mall." Angela lives in an upper middle-class community near Moses Cone Hospital. Both parents are college-educated and employed by industry. Angela aspires to become a lawyer.

Alfred, a Black male, stated that he likes rap music because it makes him hype. He stated that rap music makes him want to move, to

dance, to be happy. Alfred indicated that he listens to rap while riding his bike and doing homework. He contended that rap music allows him to relax and enjoy whatever he is doing. His favorite rap artists are the late Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. Alfred stated that he aspires to become a lawyer. He smiled and stated that he wants to represent rap artists so they can get more of their hard earned money. Alfred is an only child and he lives with both parents near North Carolina A&T State University in a predominantly Black middle-class community.

Missy, a white female, stated that she likes the beat of rap music. She further contended that rap music is easy to dance to and it always has a good beat. Missy also indicated that she doesn't pay particular attention to the words in rap as she does the beat. When asked why she doesn't pay attention to the words in raps, Missy responded by saying, "To me, the words are not so important, the beat, the sound of the music is more important." Missy's favorite rap artist is the late Tupac Shakur. She indicated that she doesn't have a favorite female artist. Missy lives in a predominantly white community near The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G). She is the only child. Missy's father is an accountant and her mother is a nurse. Missy ended the interview by noting that she is not allowed to listen to rap music at home. She basically listens to it at school and on weekends when visiting friends. Missy aspires to become a nurse like her mother.

Group #4 Profile - Eighth GradersGeneral Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Albert	8	Black	Male	B
Brenda	8	Black	Female	B
Chris	8	Black	Male	C
Angela	8	White	Female	B
Alfred	8	Black	Male	C
Missy	8	White	Female	B

Note: The overall academic standing is based on the following scale:

A = 93-100

B = 85-92

C = 77-84

D = 70-76

E = 69 and under

### Focus Group #4 - Eighth Graders

The first eighth grade focus group consisted of the following students: Albert, Brenda, Chris, Angela, Alfred, and Missy.

Focus Group #4, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Brenda began dialogue by stating,

I like rap music because of its beat and its phat rhymes. It makes me feel good and want to dance. Rap music just sounds good. I like it, that's it...

Chris engaged in the discussion by adamantly stating,

Rap music is the only music that I like. I like the rhymes and the beat. As for me, rap music helps me to chill. When somebody is tryin' to get my grill, I listen to Method Man or Biggie so I can chill.

Albert entered the discussion by noting,

I like rap music because it is good to dance to. It's like the beat is easy to find. I like to dance and rap music has a good beat.

Alfred, Missy and Angela did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #4 - Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and it's association with violence?

Angela began dialogue by stating,

I think some rap music and rap videos encourage young people to do stupid stuff. Some rap videos are basically about drugs, sex, and violence. I think it's a real negative message.

Alfred interrupted Angela and noted,

That's wack, that's really wack. Rap music simply keeps it real. If you see a rap video and it has scenes of drugs or violence so what, crime is everywhere. To me, it just showing life how it really is.

Chris laughed at Angela's response and added,

Girl, you need to get real. Just because you see a rap video that deals with drugs and sex, that don't mean nothing. It don't make you want to do it just because it is on the video.

Brenda agreed with Alfred and noted,

I like rap music because of its beat. In response to rap videos, Girl, get real. That's just a video and don't mean nothing. It don't mean that I want to do what's on the video.

Alfred interrupted Brenda and added,

Well, some people do try to be like some of the stuff on videos. Some kids try to dress like the people on videos. And some kids try to be hard and tough like some of the homies.

Missy and Albert did not respond to Question #2.

Focus Group #4, Question #3 - In your opinion, how are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Brenda began dialogue by stating,

To me, Black people and women are made to look bad in rap videos. Black people are made to look really dumb. Black women look like sluts or ladies of the night. It's like Black people just hang around and have fun.

Albert entered the conversation by saying,

I guess I agree with Brenda this time. Some rap videos do make us look like we're a bunch of bums.



It's like Black people shoot craps and shoot pool to have money. As for Black women, you know what most of them look like.

Alfred agreed with Albert and added,

Albert, you're such a chicken. Simply say what you mean. As for me, I think Black women look like prostitutes and Black men look like thugs or gangstas. You just as well tell the truth. It don't mean I'm like what's in the video.

Brenda smiled at Alfred and responded with,

Well, I just didn't want to use the word in the classroom. But you're right.

Missy, Angela and Chris did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #4, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Albert began dialogue by noting,

As for me, I don't know a rapper that I would consider a role model. I might like the way a rapper raps but being a role model...I don't know nobody that I would call a role model.

Alfred responded to the question by stating,

I agree. I can't name a rapper that I would call a role model. To me, liking the way somebody raps and wanting to be like them is two different things.

Chris agreed with Alfred and noted,

To me, a role model is somebody like a favorite uncle, your big brother, somebody that you see and spend time with. I don't look at rappers as role models.

Brenda entered the discussion by saying,

My Mom is my role model. I know what she does and what she is about. My Mom works hard and is

always helping somebody. To me, that's what a role model should be like.

Angela and Missy nodded as a sign of agreement with Brenda.

However, they elected to not make a personal statement.

Focus Group #4, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Albert began dialogue by noting,

Rap music has not really affected me. I listen to rap music because I like it. It makes me feel good inside. You know, it encourages me when I'm down.

Brenda entered the discussion by saying,

Rap music is just enjoyable to me. I listen to it when I'm cooking or doing housework. It's really uplifting to me. I just like rap music.

Angela engaged in the discussion by adding,

I like rap music but I can't play it at home. I guess I have to sneak around to listen to it. It's like I'm doing something behind my parent's back.

Chris addressed Question #5 by stating,

Rap music has not really affected me. I listen to rap music everyday. Some rap lyrics by Tupac and Biggie are really hard. But it don't make me want to do what they say. I like the rhymes and the beat in rap music. That's it...It don't really affect me.

Missy entered the discussion by saying,

I like the beat in rap music too. I don't really listen to the lyrics. As for how rap music has affected me, it really hasn't. I know I dance more and it makes me kinda happy. That's it.

### Student Profile Group #5 - Eighth Graders

The second group of eighth graders appeared anxious and excited about talking about rap music. Tom, a Black male, initiated dialogue by stating that rap music is the only music that he likes and that he buys. He stated that when he listens to rap music he is able to forget about his everyday problems. Tom stated that rap music helps him to relax and feel good about regular everyday stuff. He described rap music as some type force that makes him happy. When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Tom responded by saying "I don't have a favorite rap artist, but I really like Method Man, Biggie Smalls and Busta Rhymes." When asked why he liked Method Man, Biggie Smalls and Busta Rhymes, Tom laughed and stated that they have phat rhymes and they "keep it real." Tom explained that the phrase "Keep it real" simply means telling the truth as stuff in your community or in life. Tom lives with his mother and two older siblings in south Greensboro. His mother works in a nursing home and earns extra money babysitting on some weekends. Tom aspires to become a news reporter.

John, a white male, doesn't care for rap music but really likes country music. When asked why he doesn't really like rap music, John replied by stating "I don't understand what they're saying. They (rappers) speak so fast that it is hard to understand." John stated that he likes country music because the words are plain and you don't hear cussing. He stated that he doesn't dance and he is not really into poetry. When asked if he liked anything about rap, John responded by

saying, "Yes, I like most of the clothes that rappers wear." John lives in a predominantly white community near Moses Cone Hospital. His father is a landscaper and his mother works as a secretary for a doctor. John aspires to finish high school and help his father with the landscaping business.

April, a Black female, stated that she really likes rap music. She adamantly stated that rap music is the only music that she buys and likes. When asked what she particularly liked about rap music, April responded by saying "I like everything about rap music. I like its beat, its rhythm, its flow. It's all good!!!" April stated that her parents don't like rap music and doesn't allow her to play it at home. She indicated that she basically listens to rap music at school or on weekends when visiting friends. April stated that her favorite rappers are the late Tupac Shakur and LL Cool J. When asked what she particularly liked about the artists, April responded by saying "They (Tupac and LL Cool J) always have phat rhymes and good beats." April aspires to become a model. She lives at home with two younger siblings and her parents. April lives in a predominantly Black middle-class community near North Carolina A&T State University.

Alex, a white male, stated that he likes R&B better than he does rap. He stated that it is easier for him to understand the words because most rappers speak real fast. Alex further stated that there is too much bad language in rap and his parents will not allow him to buy it or play it at home. He indicated that if he had a favorite rap

artist, it would be LL Cool J. When asked why he would choose LL Cool J, Alex responded by saying "LL Cool J does not put down white people and he doesn't do a lot of cussing." Alex aspires to become a dentist. He lives in an upper middle-class community near Moses Cone Hospital. His father is a dentist and his mother works as a secretary.

Bonnie, a white female, indicated that she likes rap music because it is good dance music. She stated that rap music usually has a good beat and good rhymes. Bonnie stated that she doesn't really listen to the words in raps because the beat is what she really likes. She identified Redman and Tupac Shakur as her favorite artists. When asked if she had a favorite female artist, Bonnie responded by saying "I really don't like female rappers because they are always saying the same thing and looking trashy." Bonnie aspires to become a nurse. She lives in a predominantly white middle-class community near the Four Seasons Mall. Her father is a manager at American Express and her mother works at home.

Monica, a Black female, stated that she doesn't like rap music because it is "the devil's music." She further stated that rap music causes problems between Black people and white people. Monica continued her dialogue on rap music by saying that even gospel rap is another way in which the devil is trying to get in the church. Monica stated that she doesn't hate anyone; however, she does hate some of the poison that some rappers tell young people. In closing, Monica stated "All this rap mess is nothing but the devil making a move to get young people."

Monica's mother and father are ministers. They live in a predominantly Black community near North Carolina A&T State University. Monica aspires to become a nurse.

Group #5 Profile - Eighth Graders

General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Tom	8	Black	Male	B
John	8	White	Male	B
April	8	Black	Female	C
Alex	8	White	Male	A
Bonnie	8	White	Female	B
Monica	8	Black	Female	B

### Focus Group #5 - Eighth Graders

The second group of eighth graders consisted of the following students: Tom, John, April, Alex, Bonnie and Monica.

Focus Group #5, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Tom began dialogue by stating,

I like rap music because of its beat and its rhymes. Rap music picks me up when I'm kinda dragging. It sort of gives me a buzz. You know, happy.

April supported Tom's position and added,

I like the beat and rhymes in rap music too. But, you can't forget the lyrics either. If you got a phat beat, phat rhymes and words that make sense, it really live. I mean, it's really goin' on!!! It's hard to find a rap with all three.

Bonnie entered the discussion by noting,

Really, I don't get into the lyrics. I just like a good beat and good rhymes. I like to dance; so to me, the beat is very important.

John, Alex, and Monica did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #5, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and it's association with violence?

Tom began dialogue by noting,

Well, for me, I think rap music don't make nobody do nothing. We listen to rap music because we like it. It's not about gang banging or robbing nobody. Rap music don't pull no gun on nobody to make them do nothing. It's just music!!!

Monica disagreed with Tom and added,

How can you say that? Rappers are always putting people down. They talk about disrespecting the police and getting over on people. I think rappers do encourage young people to do stupid stuff.

Tom responded by saying,

You know Monica, you need to stop looking at things one way. I bet you don't even listen to rap. Yet, you act like you know all about it.

April interrupted Tom and stated,

Well, I like rap music but it doesn't make me want to do stupid things. I have a brain and I know how to stay out of trouble. To me rap music is no different from stuff that you see on "New York Under Cover." You know what's right from what's wrong.

Bonnie entered the discussion by saying,

Like I said, I don't pay the words no mind. I don't think rap music causes anyone to do anything. That's just a stupid excuse. You blame rap for stupid stuff that kids do.

Alex and John did not respond to Question #2.

Focus Group #5, Question #3 - In your opinion, how are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Monica began dialogue by saying,

I think rap videos really make Black people look stupid. It's like Black people are always shaking their butts and trying to sell drugs. And women, you don't want me to get on that!!!

April agreed with Monica and added,

As for women, they do look sleazy. Most women are almost naked and shaking their booty. It makes Black women look real cheap. I don't like it but guys do.



Tom interrupted April and adamantly stated,

Hold up, there you go talking like Monica. You can't speak for all guys. You don't know what we like. If women look bad in some videos, it's because they choose to do so. Nobody makes nobody do nothing. They know all along what they are expected to do in videos.

April interrupted Tom and stated,

You know I'm right, all you guys want to see is skin. And somebody shaking their booty. You can pretend all you want to, but I know better. I know how guys are.

Due to the sensitivity of the question and the perceived temperament of some respondents, the investigator elected to place closure on Question #3 without additional dialogue.

Alex, Bonnie, and John did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #5, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

John began discussion by saying,

To me, I don't see rappers as role models. My Dad and my uncle are my role models. Rappers curse too much and talk like they're mad. I don't think role models should be someone who tries to scare people.

Tom interrupted John and adamantly asked,

Homie, where you been hiding, in a hole???

Rappers aren't mean, they just use the face to bring about the message. It's just facial expression. It don't mean nothing. You just judge somebody based on looks.

April entered the discussion by adding,

Well, my Mom and my grandmother are my role models. I know what they're about. I don't think

rappers should be called role models because they let you see what they want you to see. We don't know them like we know relatives or people in our 'hood.' Rappers are entertainers.

Bonnie agreed with April and stated,

My Mom is my role model too. She is the person that I want to be like. My Mom can be hard at times, but it's usually for my own good.

Monica engaged in the dialogue by saying,

I agree with John, rappers should not be called role models because of their nasty mouths. They look like bums and act like thugs. It's like they think it is cool to look like a gangster. No, definitely not, rappers are not role models.

Alex did not respond to Question #4.

Focus Group #5, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Monica began dialogue by adamantly stating,

Rap music has not affect me at all. I just don't like the mess. You can say what you want to say, rap music is nothing but "the devil's music." It leads young people to destruction.

Tom entered the discussion by saying,

Hold up Monica, there you go again looking at things one way. As for me, rap music has helps me to relax and chill on bad days. It don't make me want to do nothing to nobody. You need to trash all that. Just because I like it and you don't is no reason for you to condemn the music.

April interrupted Tom and stated,

Well, I like rap music and it helps me to chill, too. It don't make me want to be no hoochie or nothing like that. It just makes me feel good. It's just music.

Bonnie agreed with April and noted,

Yes, I like rap music but I am not somebody's hoochie. I just like the beat and rhymes in rap. I don't think that makes me a bad person. I don't try to be like the women in rap videos. I am me, and I have my own interests.

Monica re-entered the discussion by noting,

That may be true for you. But some kids might not be as smart as you. They might think what they see in videos is the way to be. Some kids are slow and it is hard for them to know right from wrong. I think rap music does affect some kids.

John and Alex did not respond to Question #5.

### Student Profile Group #6 - Eighth Graders

The third group of eighth graders was very excited about talking with me about rap music. Donald, a white male, began the dialogue. Donald stated that rap music is his favorite music. He stated that he only buys rap music and listens to rap while studying, riding his go-cart, and riding his bike. Donald indicated that rap music makes him feel good and happy. When asked what he particularly liked about rap music, Donald responded by saying "Everything, I like the beat, the rhymes, the flow, I like everything." Donald identified Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. as his favorite artists. When asked why he particularly liked Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G., Donald responded by saying "They have phat beats and phat rhymes." Donald aspires to become a lawyer. He lives with his mother in a townhouse near Moses Cone Hospital.

Mary, a white female, indicated that she likes "some rap music." When asked what she meant by "some rap music," Mary responded by saying "I like rap music that has a good beat and a good message. I don't like rap music that has a lot of bad language, you know cussing." She further indicated like raps that make women look loose or hoochies. Mary stated that she doesn't really have a favorite rap artist, even though she really likes LL Cool J. She stated that she likes LL Cool J because his raps always have a good beat. Mary continued by noting that she is not allowed to play rap music at home because her father goes "ballistic." She stated that her father sees rap music as Black people's music and he gets angry if she plays it at home. Mary stated

that she has an older brother and he likes Tupac Shakur and Redman. She lives in a predominantly white middle-class community near the Four Seasons Mall. Her father works for the Guilford County Police Department and her mother works as a bookkeeper for a travel agency.

Cynthia, a Black female, stated that she likes R&B better than she does rap. She stated that she used to really like rap until everybody started cussing and acting like gangsters. Cynthia stated that rap used to be very positive; now it is all about looking and being tough. She stated that it really makes her mad when she sees "sistas" trying to act like gangsters. Cynthia stated that she really doesn't have a favorite rap artist because they all sound and talk about the same stuff. She especially dislikes Lil' Kim and Da Brat. Cynthia contended that Lil' Kim and Da Brat makes "the sistas" look bad. She stated that her younger brother likes Tupac Shakur and Redman. Cynthia aspires to become a model. She lives with her mother and father and younger brother in north Greensboro in a predominantly Black middle-class community.

Rachel, a Black female, stated that rap music really relaxes her. She stated that she listens to rap music when doing homework and working around the house. Rachel stated that her stepfather buys all the latest CD's, yet her mother can't stand rap music. She identified Snoop Doggy Dogg and Wu-Tang as her favorite artists. When asked what she particularly liked about these artists, Rachel responded by saying, "They have phat beats and phat rhymes." Rachel stated that she aspires to become a flight attendant. She enjoys attending rap concerts and

"dressing fly." Rachel lives with her mother and stepfather in a townhouse near North Carolina A&T State University.

La Tanya, a Black female, adamantly stated that rap music is the only music that she listens to. She identified Lil' Kim and The Notorious B.I.G. as her favorite artists. La Tanya stated that rap picks her up when she is feeling sort of down. She further indicated that she reads and at times watches television listening to rap music. La Tanya stated rap music really "energizes her." When asked what she liked about the music of Lil' Kim and The Notorious B.I.G., La Tanya responded by saying "You know, the beat, the rhymes, the total flow." She stated that she really doesn't like "The Fugees" because they are soft. When asked what she meant by soft, La Tanya responded by saying "The Fugees don't deal with everyday things in the hood." La Tanya lives at home with her mother and older brother. Her father died when she was three years old. La Tanya stated that she lives in a Black community near North Carolina A&T State University.

Leon, a white male, stated that he likes some rap music; however, he doesn't always understand it. Leon stated that rap music is loud and fast. He indicated that the words are hard to understand, yet some of it sounds good. When asked if he had a favorite rap artist, Leon responded by saying "I don't really have a favorite rap artist. I kinda like Shaquille O'Neal a lot." He stated that he doesn't buy or listen to rap at home. When asked what he listens to at home, Leon responded by saying "Well, we, my mom and dad, listen to country and sometimes rock music." Leon stated that he doesn't listen to music a lot. He

really enjoys playing action video games. Leon is an only child and he lives with his mother and father in a predominantly white community near The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He aspires to become a computer programmer.

Group #6 Profile - Eighth Graders

General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Donald	8	White	Male	B
Mary	8	White	Female	B
Cynthia	8	Black	Female	B
Rachel	8	Black	Female	B
La Tanya	8	Black	Female	B
Leon	8	White	Male	B

### Focus Group #6 - Eighth Graders

The third group of eighth graders consisted of the following students: Donald, Mary, Cynthia, Rachel, La Tanya and Leon.

Focus Group #6, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Donald began dialogue by stating,

Like I said earlier, I like everything about rap music. The beat, flow, rhymes, they're all good. It just hypes me up.

Rachel agreed with Donald and shared,

Yes, rap music does kinda put you in a different mood. You know like kinda happy. It kinda gives you energy. I just like rap music...

La Tanya engaged in the discussion by stating,

I agree. Rap music sorta gives me a boost. It makes me calm and full of energy at the same time. It's kinda hard to describe. Well, it's like rap music can make me want to move, to dance, or it can help me to chill and think about stuff.

Donald re-entered the discussion by saying,

I agree with that. Personally, I think rap music affects people in different ways. Some people want to lay back and chill and somebody else might want to dance. I don't care, I just like rap music!!!

Mary, Cynthia, and Leon did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #6, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?



Donald began discussion by stating,

I don't know about nobody else. But I don't think rap music has nothing to do with violence. When I hear old people saying stuff like that... I get pissed off because it ain't true. How can music cause somebody to rob a bank or bang somebody up? That's just wack!!! I mean really wack!

Cynthia agreed with Donald and noted,

Well, my grandmama thinks some kids are bad because they listen to what she calls that "old mess." I think Donald is right, music can't make nobody do nothing.

La Tanya interrupted Cynthia and stated,

Right, that's true. But some kids don't think too smart. They think what they see on television and videos is the way to be. They ain't smart enough to know it's just television and not real.

Donald re-entered the discussion and added,

Well, that may be true, but I still don't think rap music should be blamed for somebody being stupid.

Rachel adamantly interrupted Donald and asked,

How can you call them stupid? They might not be as smart as you, but that doesn't mean they're stupid. Some rap videos do have a lots of violence. And some kids do try to be like what they see on television. They think it's cool. They don't see nothing wrong with being a bully.

Leon entered the discussion by stating,

I agree some kids think what they see on television is the way to be. They try to be tough and act like gangsters. To me that's being violent. So, I guess rap music is kinda associated with violence.

Mary did not respond to Question #2.

Focus Group #6, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Rachel began discussion by stating,

Well, to me, I think women look kinda sleazy in rap videos. The only thing they do is shake their behinds. It's like a bunch of guys hanging around looking at women like they're for sale. I think some rap videos really make Black people look bad.

La Tanya agreed with Rachel and added,

Some videos make Black people look like we all live in the ghetto. It's like all Black people live in the ghetto. Some videos make it look as though Black people are really happy being poor and not working.

La Tanya entered the discussion by saying,

I agree, some videos make us look bad. It's not like we are made to be in the video. Some videos do make Black people look bad but it's not like somebody has a gun on us making us do something we don't want to do.

Cynthia interrupted La Tanya and stated,

You know Black people are just like everybody else...we're trying to get paid. That don't make it right. I hate seeing Black women on videos shaking their butts and guys acting like they're God's gift to women.

Donald, Mary, and Leon did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #6, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Cynthia began discussion by noting,

I don't look at rappers as role models. Rappers are just that, "rappers." My role model is my

Mom and my cousin Linda. How can a rapper be your role model if you don't really know them?

Rachel entered the discussion by saying,

Simply because somebody is popular don't make them a good role model. I might like Snoop or Puff Daddy, that don't mean they're a good role model for me.

Donald agreed with Rachel and stated,

To me role models should be someone you see in your neighborhood or school doing things to help people. Not somebody you see in videos or television. You can't really talk to these people.

Leon entered the discussion by stating,

I agree with Cynthia, rappers are not role models. How can you look at somebody on television and say you want to be like them? My role model is my Dad. I see him everyday and we do things together.

Mary agreed with Leon and added,

My role model is my Mom. She is the person I want to be like. I really don't know the people in videos or on television, so how I can say I want to be like them?

La Tanya agreed with Mary and noted,

My Mom is my role model too. Even though I like Lil' Kim, that don't mean I want to be like her. I just like the way she raps. But for a role model, my Mom is the person I want to be like.

Focus Group #6, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

La Tanya began discussion by saying,

As for me, rap music hasn't really affected me. I mean, I like it, but it don't cause me to do stupid stuff. Rap music just kinda picks me up when I'm down. It relaxes me.

Rachel engaged in the discussion by noting,

Rap music don't really affect me either. It helps me to chill, that's all.

Cynthia responded to Question #5 by stating,

I really like R&B better than rap. But I do listen to some rap music. It doesn't affect me one way or another. It's just music.

Donald responded to Question #5 by saying,

The only way rap music has affected me is that it helps me to feel good. I don't know why, but when I listen to Tupac or Notorious B.I.G., I just feel happy and full of energy.

Mary and Leon did not respond to Question #5.

#### Eighth Grade Focus Group Summary

The eighth grade students selected for this investigation were very talkative and rambunctious. They appeared anxious and excited about sharing their views on rap music. As the investigation progressed and each group of students expressed their views, the following themes emerged as per question:

Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

- (1) Rap music is liked because of its beat and rhymes.
- (2) Rap music is good dance music.

(3) Rap music make interviewees feel good.

(4) Rap music helps interviewees to relax (chill).

Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

(1) Some rap music and rap videos encourage students to engage in acts of violence.

(2) Just because violence is seen in some rap videos, it doesn't affect young people.

(3) Depending on the artist, rap music may have the potential to influence decisions young people make. It depends on the artist.

(4) Just because rap videos or rap lyrics are inundated with violence, interviewees contend that rap music does not influence the decisions they make.

Question #3 - In your opinion, how are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

(1) Blacks and women are depicted negatively.

(2) Black males are depicted as hustlers.

(3) Black females are depicted as promiscuous.

(4) Blacks in general are depicted as unemployed and ruthless.

Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

(1) Rappers are not role models.

- (2) Individuals like parents or local people should be role models, not strangers.
- (3) Rappers are entertainers, not role models.
- (4) Rappers are like actors and professional athletes. You don't really know them, therefore, they are not role models.

Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

- (1) Rap music has not affected interviewees negatively.
- (2) Rap music helps interviewees to relax.
- (3) Rap music has no affect on the decisions interviewees make.
- (4) Rap music makes interviewees feel good (positive).

### Student Profile Group #1 - Tenth Graders

The students at Grimsley High appeared very enthusiastic about the opportunity to speak with me about their notions on rap music. Mr. Wesley, a history teacher, allowed me to speak with his first-period history students. He had spoken to the class about my visit and they were extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity to voice their opinions on rap.

Bernard, a Black male, began dialogue by stating that he really likes rap music. He then became very defensive by stating "All this talk about rap music causes young people to commit crimes is simply media hype. If someone wants to rob you or disrespect you, they're going to do it regardless." Bernard continued by saying that rap music is simply music and it does not make anyone do anything. He continued his dialogue by saying "Rap music helps me to deal with everyday stuff. It helps me to stay positive when everything is all messed up." When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Bernard responded by saying "I really like Wu-Tang and Biggie Smalls." Bernard stated that he likes Wu-Tang and Biggie Smalls because they "keep it real." When asked what he meant by "keep it real," Bernard responded by saying "You know, they don't sugar coat nothing. They tell you how life really is. They don't be frontin."

Bernard lives in south Greensboro in a predominantly Black community. His father works for the City of Greensboro and his mother is a receptionist at a nursing home. Bernard has an older brother and they both plan to attend Wake Forest University and play football.

Thad, a Black male, shared Bernard's perspective on rap music. He stated that rap music is the only music that he buys and actually enjoys. Thad stated that he does homework and cleans up his room listening to rap. When asked to name his favorite rap artist(s), Thad adamantly stated, "Wu-Tang and Snoop Doggy Dogg are the best rappers on the planet." He stated that he likes Wu-Tang and Snoop Doggy Dogg because that have phat beats and rhymes. Thad further stated that he likes Snoop Doggy Dogg because his videos are always phat. Thad lives with his mother and two younger siblings in an apartment near North Carolina A&T State University. He aspires to enter the military to save money for college. Thad aspires to become an accountant.

Jessica, a Black female, stated that she likes "some" rap music; however, she prefers R&B. She indicated that she doesn't have a favorite rap artist because they basically all sound alike. Jessica stated that most rappers are talking the same old junk, "getting paid and getting laid." She indicated that she likes R&B because it gives you more variety to choose from. Jessica stated that she really can't stand it when she looks at a video and she sees a sista in the background half-naked and acting dumb. She stated that she used to really like rap, but then everybody wanted to start acting like a thug or hoochie. Jessica lives in a predominantly Black community near North Carolina A&T State University. Her father is a minister and her mother works in radiology at Moses Cone Hospital.



Kenny, a white male, began dialogue by noting that some rap music is okay, yet some of it is too obscene. When asked what he meant by obscene, Kenny responded by saying, "When I say obscene, I mean that there are too many cuss words in the song." Kenny further explained by stating "I don't like cussing and most of the really popular rap people cuss almost all the time." When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Kenny responded by saying, "I don't really have a favorite rap artist, yet if I were going to buy some rap, I would probably choose LL Cool J. Kenny stated that he really doesn't really listen to rap or any other music at home. He really enjoys playing video games and riding his new bike. Kenny lives in a predominantly white community near the Four Seasons Mall. His father is a policeman and his mother works as a salesperson in Dillard's at Carolina Circle Mall.

Ashely, a white female, stated that she really likes rap music. She indicated that she particularly likes Tupac Shakur and LL Cool J. When asked what she particularly liked about Tupac Shakur and LL Cool J, Ashely responded by saying "I really like the beat and the rhymes of their raps." Ashely stated that she likes to dance and Tupac and LL Cool J always have raps with beats that are good for dancing. Ashely stated that her parents don't like for her to play rap at home, especially around her younger sister. When asked why her parents get upset when she plays rap music, Ashely responded by saying "They call rap music 'Black people's music'." Ashely stated that she doesn't really play some of Tupac's hard rap around her younger sister. When

asked why she is selective about the music she plays around her sister, Ashely responded by saying, "Some raps have too much cussing and talk about sex too much. I don't want my little sister asking a lot of questions or repeating something that could be embarrassing around family or friends." Ashely lives at home with her mother and father and younger sister. They live in a predominantly white community near The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her father is a podiatrist and her mother works part-time as a receptionist. Ashely aspires to become a pediatrician.

Sheila, a Black female, began dialogue by stating that rap music is the only music that causes her to relax. She stated that she studies, does homework, and baby-sits listening to rap music. Sheila indicated that her favorite rap artists are the late Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. When asked what she particularly liked about these artists, Sheila smiled and stated, "I like their rhymes and the beat to their raps. I really like their videos, they are always full of fun." Sheila stated that her mom does not like for her to listen to rap or to watch rap videos; however, she does it almost everyday. Sheila stated that she likes rap because it causes her to feel good, to be positive. She is an only child and lives with her mother in an apartment near North Carolina A&T State University. Sheila aspires to become a nurse.

Group #1 Profile - Tenth GradersGeneral Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Bernard	10	Black	Male	B
Thad	10	Black	Male	C
Jessica	10	Black	Female	A
Kenny	10	White	Male	B
Ashely	10	White	Female	B
Sheila	10	Black	Female	B

Note: The overall academic standing is based on the following scale:

A = 93-100

B = 85-92

C = 77-84

D = 70-76

E = 69 and under

### Focus Group #1 - Tenth Graders

Focus group #1 consisted of the following students: Bernard, Thad, Jessica, Kenny, Ashley, and Sheila.

Focus Group #1 - Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Jessica began dialogue by stating,

I like rap music because you can relate to it. It's like growing up in the project. You know, it's about stuff that happen everyday.

Bernard entered the discussion by saying,

Yeah, that's right. It's like the rapper is actually talking to you. It's like your life story or something.

Thad agreed with Bernard and noted,

To me rap is about real life. It talks about the initiation you go through to make it. You know what I'm saying, it's like you gotta do what you gotta do to stay real.

Sheila entered the discussion by stating,

Rap is music like any other music. It means different things to different people. It depends on your flavor.

Bernard adamantly re-entered the dialogue by demanding,

Hold up! Hold up! It's music like any other music, that's true. But it's kinda different because we grew up with rap. Really, we were born with rap music...that's basically what we know. It was kinda planted in our minds from the beginning.

Ashley and Kenny did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #1, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Bernard responded to Question #2 by noting,

To me a lots of rap critics think that rap music and especially gangsta rap cause corruption in the Black community. But a lots of people don't realize that a lots of things were happening in the Black community before we started listening to rap.

Thad agreed with Bernard and noted,

Yeah, the people who talk this corruption stuff, got it implanted in their minds that rap music causes it. Rappers are just displayin' how they feel. They ain't making nobody do nothing.

Sheila entered the discussion by saying,

That's right. Rappers just talk about everyday things. It's about surviving. The things we go thru, just to make it.

Jessica agreed with Sheila but noted,

Some rappers aren't keeping it real. Some rappers be frontin' or hypin' it up. When you watch a video and they're driving expensive cars and rolls of money...that's just frontin'. That ain't how things really are in the hood.

Bernard interrupted Jessica and added,

It might not be real to you. But it's real to me. You see a lots of rappers were in gangs before they started rapping. Some rappers make their video based on what they actually experienced. It's real...

Thad agreed with Bernard and noted,

Matter of fact, most of the stuff that rappers did before they became famous, they're still doing. That's how they make their money...they're making money from rapping and selling drugs. Instead of selling small amounts of drugs, they're selling

keys. So yeah, some rappers are associated with violence.

Kenny and Ashley did not actually verbally engage in the discussion. However, Kenny and Ashley often nodded as if they agreed with what was said. Kenny actually raised his hand to make a contribution; however, his contribution was lost due to several students attempting to state their opinions.

Focus Group #1, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Jessica began dialogue by noting,

Well, I personally don't like the way women are viewed in rap videos. They all look like hoochies.

Sheila agreed with Jessica and added,

You got that right? Sistas look skank. It's look they'll do anything for a little attention. They make us look real cheap and stuff.

Bernard agreed with Jessica and Sheila, then added,

I think it's not restricted to the sistas. The brothas look bad too. It's like all Black people are about set, gambling, and hustling. It's like we're pimps. You know what I'm saying...

Thad interrupted Bernard and adamantly stated,

It's like the videos give the message that Black people don't work from 8-5 like everybody else. If you didn't know better, you'd think that we (Black people) are paid to hit the streets. We work just like everybody else.

Sheila agreed with Thad and stated,

It's makes me mad when I see sistas shaking their butts. It's like if you're a Black female, the

only role you can have in a video is be almost naked and shake your butt. That's not right... it's really stupid.

Jessica supported Sheila and noted,

You guys are just as bad as anyone else. You dog us out too. Do you remember the video to "Rump Shaker?" You guys thought it was the best video ever made. To me, the video was nasty and shouldn't be on television.

Bernard interrupted Jessica and noted,

I didn't see where "Rump Shaker" was so bad. It showed a little skin, so what? You can see skin just walking in the mall. Better than that, you can see skin right here on campus. If they show it, I'm gonna look. So, you need to chill with that...

Kenny and Ashley smiled several times during discussion of Question #3. However, neither actually offered a verbal contribution.

Focus Group #1, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Jessica began discussion by adamantly stating,

Well, rappers might disagree but I think every time you're seen on television, especially with young kids, rappers have a responsibility to keep the message positive. Some young kids believe everything seen on television. So you have a responsibility to young kids to show them the right way.

Sheila agreed with Jessica and added,

That's right, a lots of young kids look up to rappers. It's like they want to be like them. They try to talk like them, dress like them, and even act like them. So to me, rappers are role models to some kids.

Kenny entered the discussion by saying,

I don't see how rappers can be called role models. Rappers are entertainers like actors, you know, like people you see on television. I don't see how rappers can be called role models.

Bernard entered the discussion by noting,

Rappers may be role models to some kids. If so, it's probably because they don't have anyone positive or anyone they really respect in their lives. But for me, my Dad is my role model. I can't choose somebody that I see on television or the movies. I don't really know those guys and they don't know me.

Thad agreed with Bernard and added,

Well, for me, I think you just can't choose 'anyone' for a role model. Just because you like the way someone looks, the way someone dressed, or the way someone raps doesn't make them a good role model. To me, you don't really see rappers in the real. They're like entertainers. We don't really know what they're about.

Ashley entered the discussion by stating,

That's right. How can you choose a stranger for a role model? My role model is my Mom. My Mom works hard and she is kind to everyone. To me, that's what a role model is like. Not someone only seen on television or the movies.

Focus Group #1, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Bernard began dialogue by defensively stating,

It hasn't affected me in a bad way. I haven't robbed anyone or banged anyone up because I like rap music. The only affect rap has had



on me is that it helps me to chill. It helps me get through the day when things are goin' bad. You can give me a little "Wu-Tang" or a little "Biggie" and I'm in a different zone. It's like nothing can touch me.

Thad agreed with Bernard and added,

I don't know about nobody else, but rap music helps me to relax. It's like when I listen to Wu-Tang or Snoop, I can deal with mostly anything. I don't know, it's hard to describe. It's not like I want to do something stupid. It's more like I can handle whatever you throw at me.

Sheila entered the discussion by stating,

I like rap music a lot. But I can't say that it puts me in no kind of zone. I feel good when I listen to rap. It makes me want to move or dance. That's it...I don't know what you guys been listening to, but it's scary.

Jessica entered the discussion by adding,

Some rap music does have a good beat and rhythm. That's the kind that I like. It helps me to be positive. I just don't like rap that has a lots of cursing. I like clean rap.

### Student Profile Group #2 - Tenth Graders

The second group of tenth graders appeared ready to talk and anxious to share their views of rap music. Louis, a Black male, began dialogue by stating that he really likes rap music, always has and always will. He prefaced his statement by saying that a lot of people are trying to kill rap by saying that rap music causes young people to do crazy things like robbing and shooting people. Louis stated that rap music does not cause young people to do bad things. He adamantly defended rap by saying "If young people or anybody wants to do something they're going to do it regardless. Rap is not the reason that young people get into trouble." When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Louis responded by saying, "I really like Redman, Redman is always live." When asked why he liked Redman, Louis replied "I like Redman because he talks about real life situations and stuff. Redman is always real." Louis stated that his dad is always getting on his case about listening to "poison." He stated that it really irritates him because he does not condemn the music his father plays. Louis lives in a two-bedroom apartment with his mother and father. They live in a complex near Moses Cone Hospital. His father works as a welder and his mother is employed at a shirt factory. Louis aspires to become a lawyer.

Martin, a Black male, also began the discussion on rap music defensively. He began by firmly stating, "I like rap music, I don't apologize for liking rap music and that's that." When asked to name his favorite rap artist(s), Martin replied by saying "I like Notorious B.I.G. and Wu-Tang." Martin quickly stated that he liked Notorious

B.I.G. and Wu-Tang because of their rhymes and their beat. He indicated that he really doesn't pay much attention to lyrics; he is more into the beat. Martin stated that he gets to sleep listening to rap music. When asked if he is allowed to listen to rap music at home, Martin replied "Allowed, I pay rent just like my Mom, I listen to what I want to." Martin indicated that he works at Hardees and gives his mother money on rent every two weeks. Martin is an only child. He plans to go in the Air Force after high school.

Alexus, a white female, cautiously stated that she doesn't really like rap music. She stated that she is not allowed to listen to it at home nor watch rap videos. Alexis stated that her parents look at rap music as music for Black people. She stated that she listens to rap occasionally on weekends when visiting friends; however, she really doesn't understand it because everybody speaks so quickly. When asked if she had a favorite rap artist, Alexis responded by saying "I like Whitney Houston a lot." Alexis is an only child and she lives with both parents in an upper middle-class community near the Four Seasons Mall. Her father is a banker and her mother works at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. in Winston-Salem. Alexis aspires to become a flight attendant.

Justin, a white male, stated that he likes "some" rap music but not all of it. He stated that he likes rap music that has a good beat and doesn't put down white people. When asked what he meant by the expression "Rap that don't put down white people," Justin responded by saying "Some rap music talks about white people as if they are bad. I

don't like raps like that." Justin stated that he doesn't buy rap music and he doesn't have a favorite rap artist. He further stated that he isn't really into music and he does not dance. Martin further indicated that he is really into video games and riding his dirt bike. Justin has a younger sister and they live in a middle-class predominantly white community near The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He aspires to become a computer programmer.

Luther, a Black male, emphatically stated that rap music is his favorite music and he really enjoys it. He stated that he enjoys watching rap videos and writing raps himself. Luther identified Tupac Shakur and Wu-Tang as his favorite artists. When asked what he liked about these artists, Luther responded by saying, "The brothers know how to speak the truth. They don't be frontin." Luther further stated that he is not allowed to watch rap videos or listen to rap at home. He prefaced his statement by noting that his father is a minister and his mother is a school teacher. When asked what he particularly liked about rap, Luther responded by saying, "I really like the rhymes and the beat." He stated that he went to one rap concert at the coliseum and saw Tupac Shakur. Luther described Tupac as the best rapper ever. Luther plans to attend Carolin and become a dentist.

Charlotte, a Black female, adamantly stated that she doesn't like rap music because it puts women down. She stated that if she had to choose between rap and R&B, she would choose R&B. Charlotte stated that she doesn't like rap because most raps have the same story line and she really doesn't like a lots of cussing. She further stated that rap

music is usually played very loudly and it is hard to make sense of it most of the time. Charlotte stated that she really gets angry when she sees sistas in the background of rap videos shaking their booty.

Charlotte is an only child and she lives with her mother in a townhouse near North Carolina A&T State University. Her mother works as a bookkeeper for a lawyer. Charlotte aspires to become a lawyer.

### Group #2 Profile - Tenth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Louis	10	Black	Male	B
Martin	10	Black	Male	B
Justin	10	White	Male	B
Luther	10	Black	Male	B
Charlotte	10	Black	Female	B
Alexus	10	White	Female	B

### Focus Group #2 - Tenth Graders

Focus group #2 consisted of the following students: Louis, Martin, Justin, Luther, Charlotte, and Alexis.

Focus Group #2, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Louis began dialogue by stating,

I like rap music because of its phat beat and it's lyrics. Rap music kinda makes me happy. It's like I can really chill with rap. It's kinda like I can block out stuff that bothers me when I listen to rap.

Martin entered the discussion by saying,

I like rap music because it deals with reality. The lyrics of rap music are basically a story about what's happening around us everyday. Rap is like the news report in the 'hood'.

Luther entered the discussion cautiously by stating,

I like rap music because it is easy to dance to. To me, the beat and the rhymes are more important than the lyrics. I don't really listen to the lyrics. I just like the rhymes and the beat. Rap is good dance music.

Justin, Charlotte, and Alexis did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #2, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Louis began dialogue by defensively stating,

Rap music does not cause anyone to do anything. Rap music is music and it doesn't have anymore power than jazz or gospel. It's just music and it can't make anybody do nothin'.

Charlotte interrupted Louis and added,

Well, I don't know if that's really true. Some kids look at rap videos and try to be like just what they see on television. Some kids are easier to lead than others.

Luther somewhat agreed with Charlotte and noted,

To me, if somebody wants to jack you, they're goin' to do it regardless. You can't blame it on rap music. It's like some people are goin' to try to get over on you regardless. You just got to hold your own and be strong. It has nothing to do with rap music.

Martin agreed with Luther and added,

I like 'Notorious B.I.G. and Wu-Tang'. Some of their lyrics are kinda hard but it doesn't make me want to do something stupid. I use my brain. I know right from wrong. Rap can't make anyone do nothin'. That's old people talking and the news.

Justin and Alexis did not respond to Question #2.

Focus Group #2, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Charlotte began discussion by stating,

I really don't like the way women are portrayed in rap videos. They're always showing a lots of skin and shaking their butts. It really makes Black women look cheap.

Luther agreed with Charlotte and added,

Well, to me, most videos make Black people look bad. They make the 'hood' look like it's made up of gangstas and thugs. It's like living in a poor Black neighborhood is like living in a Vietnam war zone. Man, you know, some people really believe that stuff.

Martin interrupted Luther and noted,

Now, you got to admit some of the stuff you see in rap videos is really what's happening in the 'hood'. It's just that we never see anything positive about the 'hood' in videos. I agree Black women look kinda loose in the videos. But you can see the same outfits in the mall. I don't have no problem with looking at a little skin, myself.

Charlotte interrupted Martin and added,

You see, you're just like everybody else. Why do women have to show skin to get attention. It's not rap that makes some of you foolish. Some of you are doggs from "jump street." There's no hope for you. Where is the respect for the sistas?

Closure was placed on Question #3 due to tension. Alexis, Justin, and Louis did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #2, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Louis began discussion by stating,

I don't see how rappers could be called role models. To me, role models should be people in your community, people you actually know. Rappers are on television, we don't really know them.

Alexis entered the discussion by saying,

I agree. How can you refer to someone as a role model, if you don't really know that person? My aunt is my role model. She's always doing stuff for people. I can see everyday what my aunt is about.

Martin interrupted Alexis and added,

That's a good point. I don't see how anyone could call someone only seen on television as their role model. You don't really know what that person is about. I don't see how rappers could be called role models.



Luther agreed with Martin and stated,

I think some people take this role model stuff too light. To me, I personally think role models should be someone who you see almost on a daily basis. You can't say that you can have that type relationship with someone only seen on television.

Charlotte entered the discussion by stating,

I agree with what has been said. But for me, my Mom is my role model. I couldn't choose Lil' Kim or Foxy Brown as a role model. I really don't know what they're about but I know what they look like they're about. How can anyone call a rapper a role model? That's really wack...

Justin did not verbally respond to question #4. However, he nodded on several occasions as if he supported what was being said.

Focus Group #2, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Luther began discussion by stating,

Rap music has not really affected me. I mean it doesn't make me want to do something stupid. It helps me to relax. It makes me want to move, you know, kinda happy. That's it...nothing negative...

Martin entered the discussion by saying,

Rap music helps me to go to sleep. It kinda calms me down when I feel sorta hyper. It's soothing to me.

Louis responded to Question #5 by adamantly stating,

I like rap music and I don't apologize for it. It helps me to deal with everyday problems. Whenever I listen to Redman, I am able to deal with another day. How has rap music affected me? It helps me to stay real.

Alexus, Charlotte, and Justin did not respond to Question #5.

### Student Profile Group #3 - Tenth Graders

The third group of tenth graders interviewed appeared to be less defensive in regard to their position on rap music. Sean, a Black male, initiated discussion by stating that he really likes rap music. He continued his dialogue by noting that most people over thirty don't really like rap music. Sean stated that other people don't understand rap because they really don't take time to really listen to it. When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Sean responded by saying, "I don't really have a favorite rap artist. They are all good in their own way. I basically look for a good beat and lyrics that make sense." When asked to name his favorite female rap artist, Sean smiled and stated, "I really don't look at rap in terms of male and female; I simply like good music...a good beat and phat rhymes." Sean stated that he studies, cleans his room, and occasionally fixes his breakfast listening to rap. He indicated that rap music puts him in a happy mood. Sean stated that he has an older brother who is more into R&B than rap. When asked if he liked R&B, Sean responded by saying, "Yes, I like some R&B. I would choose R&B any day over jazz or hard rock." Sean lives in a predominantly middle-class Black community near Moses Cone Hospital. His father works in security at North Carolina A&T State University and his mother works in sales at a local furniture company. Sean aspires to attend Wake Forest University to become a lawyer.

Evelina, a Black female, adamantly stated that she doesn't like rap because rap has too much cussing and most rappers treat women as if they are "sex objects." She further stated that most rappers are trying to

look tough and be bad. When asked what she meant by "most rappers are trying to look tough and be bad," Evelina responded by saying, "Well, you know, they are always wearing oversized pants, no shirt, and showing tattoos on their arms and chest." When asked if she had a favorite rap artist, Evelina responded by saying, "I don't have a favorite artist. They all sound alike and say the same old tired stuff...'I want to sex ya; I got my hand on my nine'...the same old tired lines." Evelina stated that she really likes R&B and reggae. She indicated that R&B and reggae have cleaner and more positive messages than rap. Evelina identified Whitney Houston and Bob Marley as her favorite artists. She is an only child and lives with both parents in a predominantly Black middle-class community near North Carolina A&T State University.

Marcus, a Black male, tended to approach rap from a somewhat defensive perspective. He began by saying that he really gets mad when these "so-called religious folks" put down rap music. Marcus continued by saying that rap is simply music and it doesn't make anybody do anything. When asked what he meant by "so-called religious folks," Marcus looked very perturbed and responded by saying, "you know what I mean. It's people who pretend that they are real good and religious, but are just like everybody else when certain people aren't looking." When asked if he had a favorite rap artist, Marcus responded by saying, "Yes, I do. I like Redman and Tupac Shakur." When asked what he particularly liked about these artists, Marcus responded with, "I just like them. I like their rhymes, and their beats...I just like them." When asked if there were anything else he would like to share with me

about rap, Marcus responded by saying, "Yes. I want to say that rap is simply music and it doesn't make young people or anybody else do anything." Marcus lives in a lower socio-economic area of Greensboro commonly referred to as "Florida Street Market." He lives with his mother and two younger siblings in a three bedroom apartment. Marcus' mother works in maintenance at Moses Cone Hospital. Marcus aspires to become an engineer.

Rupert, a white male, began dialogue by stating that he really likes "some" rap music. When asked what he meant by the phrase "some rap music," Rupert rather apologetically responded by saying, "There are some raps that I really don't understand. They are either too loud or the rappers speak too fast." Rupert indicated that he prefers raps that don't have cuss words. When asked if he had a favorite rap artist, Rupert responded with, "I really like Heavy D and LL Cool J." When asked why he liked these artists, Rupert responded with, "I just like their raps because they are always clean. You don't hear a lots of cussing." Rupert indicated that he doesn't play rap at home because his parents don't like it. He indicated that he basically listens to rap at school or on Saturdays when hanging at the mall with friends. Rupert is an only child. He lives in a middle-class neighborhood near Moses Cone Hospital. Rupert's father is employed with the Greensboro Transit System and his mother works for a local television cable company.

Aisha, a Black female, began dialogue by noting that she likes some rap music but not all of it. When asked to explain what she meant, Aisha responded by saying, "I don't like rap music that does a lots of

cussing or talk about females as if they are 'hoochies'." When asked to explain what she meant by the term "hoochies," Aisha embarrassingly smiled and stated, "It's like saying that women are easy to get in the bed...you know what I mean, 'loose females'." When asked if she had a favorite rap artist, Aisha responded by saying, "No. I don't have a favorite rap artist because most rappers sound the same anyway." When asked if she plays rap music at home, Aisha responded with, "My mother and father would have a fit. They see rap music as trash and not deserving to be played on radio or television." Aisha's father is a minister and her mother works at American Express. Aisha aspires to become a computer programmer. She is an only child and lives in a middle-class Black community near the Four Seasons Mall.

Megan, a white female, stated that she likes rap music because it is good dance music. She stated that she really got into rap when she became friends with Corlissa and Komesha, Black schoolmates. Megan stated that she really didn't listen to rap much before meeting Corlissa and Komesha. When asked why she didn't really listen to rap before meeting Corlissa and Komesha, Megan responded by saying, "Well, all my friends were white and we just didn't listen to rap 'much'." When asked what she meant by "much," Megan responded by saying, "I mean we would go to the mall and listen to some of it when our parents weren't looking and have fun." Megan further explained that she and her friends would go to a Record Bar and go to the listening center and listen to "some real hard rap" for fun. When asked if she had a favorite rap artist, Megan responded with, "I really like Tupac Shakur

and Biggie Smalls." When asked what she particularly liked about these artists, Megan responded by saying, "I really like the way they rhyme and the beat to their raps." Megan stated that she doesn't play rap at home because her parents hate rap music. Megan lives in an upper-class predominantly white community near the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G). She is an only child and she aspires to become a flight attendant. Megan's father is a dentist and her mother works at home.

### Group #3 Profile - Tenth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Sean	10	Black	Male	B
Evelina	10	Black	Female	A-
Marcus	10	Black	Male	C
Rupert	10	White	Male	B
Aisha	10	Black	Female	A-
Megan	10	White	Female	B+

### Focus Group #3 - Tenth Graders

Focus group #3 consisted of the following students: Sean, Evelina, Marcus, Rupert, Aisha, and Megan.

Focus Group #3, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Sean began discussion by stating,

I, myself, like rap music because of its beat and lyrics. It puts me in a real positive mood. It's like the sound track to Space Jam, "I believe I can fly." Rap music just makes me feel good.

Marcus entered the discussion by stating,

Well, for me, Redman and Tupac just puts me on a different plane. It's like when I listen to them I can deal with all the craziness around me. It's like you know that something good is going to happen even though everything looks grim. Rap music helps me to be real, that's why I like it.

Megan entered the discussion by noting,

I like rap music because it is easy to dance to. The beat is always easy to find. Really for me, I like to dance and rap music is good dance music. I don't really get into the lyrics. The beat is more important to me.

Evelina, Rupert, and Aisha did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #3, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Evelina began discussion by saying,

I think some of this hard rap and gangsta videos do encourage kids to do violent things. Some

kids try to imitate what they see and hear. If you look at some of these rap videos, it's like they're glorifying violence. It really scare me.

Marcus interrupted Evelina and defensively stated,

Girl, you need to get real. When you look at New York Undercover or N.Y.P.D., you see some of the same things that you see in videos. So why dog-out rap videos, when violence is seen everywhere. That's not right.

Sean agreed with Marcus and added,

Rap music ain't no worse than some of the stuff seen on television or at the movies. It's like you blame rap music for all the craziness out here. That ain't right. Rap is music and it can't make nobody do nothing. I get pissed off whenever I hear older people or so-called religious folks put down rap. We don't put down what they like.

Evelina re-entered the discussion by saying,

You don't have to get so huffy. Ain't nobody scared around here. I gave my opinion and that's that. To me, rap music and rap videos puts poison in the minds of young kids. That's my opinion and I don't care if you don't like it.

Aisha entered the discussion by stating,

I kinda agree with Evelina. Some kids do try to be like some of the rappers. They think it is cool to do all that cussing and looking like gangstas. It's like they can't choose right from wrong.

Marcus re-entered the discussion and defensively stated,

You know, you need to get real. The music, the videos, it's all entertainment. Kids know what they're doing when they do it. It's not like rap or any other music make them do anything.

Rupert and Megan did not respond to Question #2.



Focus Group #3, Question #3 - In your opinion, how are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Evelina began discussion by stating,

I think Blacks and women are depicted very negatively in rap videos. It's like Black women are sleazy and Black men don't work. I get disgusted when I watch rap videos. All the cussing don't help either.

Aisha agreed with Evelina and added,

That's right! Black women are always in the background like they're some fancy decoration. And you know what they're doing...they're shaking their booty. And the Black guys, you know them...they're acting like they've never seen a woman before in their entire life. It's like a meat market...

Sean entered the discussion by saying,

Oh, come on. It's not that bad. What guy ain't goin' to look at a nice looking "sweet thang." If he don't, something is wrong. I agree, some videos make Black people look bad. But you got to agree, some of the stuff you see on video do happen in the 'hood'.

Marcus agreed with Sean and added,

Even the lyrics in some videos are true. They're just talkin' about stuff where we live. Some of it might make Black people look bad. But some of it is really true. There's a lot of stuff goin' on in the 'hood'.

Megan and Aisha did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #3, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Evelina began discussion by stating,

I don't see how rappers can be called role models. Well, not positive role models. Most rappers look and act like thugs. They can't even talk right. They have tattoos on their arms and chest and think "they're all that."

Sean interrupted Evelina and added,

I don't see anything wrong with tattoos. If that's how a brotha wants to identify himself, what's wrong with that? I agree with you about rappers not being role models. But not for the reasons you gave. Role models to me should be people around you. People you see regularly in person. Not somebody only seen on television.

Marcus agreed with Sean and added,

Role models should be someone you look up to, someone you really respect because you really know what they're about. Not somebody only seen on the tube.

Megan entered the discussion by saying,

I agree with Marcus. Role models should be people you actually know. My Aunt Jessica is my role model. She is the person that I want to be like.

Rupert entered the discussion by stating,

My Uncle Randolph is my role model. He has his own business and he gives me a job every summer. He's a hard worker and he treats people good.

Aisha entered the discussion by saying,

My Mom is my role model. She goes to school and she works real hard. Whenever I really need something, she is always there for me. She's my role model, not somebody on some T.V. screen.

Focus Group #3, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Sean began dialogue by noting,

Rap music hasn't really affected me. Well, not in a bad way. It hasn't made me do nothin' stupid. It helps me to relax, you know, chill. Rap basically puts me in a real positive mood.

Marcus entered the discussion by stating,

Rap music is like a motivation for me. It kinda picks up my spirit when I'm having a bad day. It's almost like some kinda high...it's hard to explain.

Megan responded by stating,

Rap music makes me want to move. I enjoy dancing and rap music makes me want to dance. That's it...

Evelina entered the discussion by saying,

Rap music affects me. It makes me mad when I hear all that cussing. Rap videos make me mad when I see women acting like sluts or hookers. That's how it affects me. I get upset...and I don't like it.

Rupert and Aisha did not respond to Question #5.

### Focus Groups #1, 2, and 3 Summary - Tenth Graders

Each focus group interview responded to the following questions:

- (1) Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?
- (2) What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

- (3) How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?
- (4) What is your position on rappers being called role models?
- (5) In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

In response to Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music? Student responses indicate that students like rap music for virtually the same reasons as students in grades six and eight. Students identified beat and rhythm as the main reason they like rap music. As in grades six and eight, the second most popular response as to why rap music is liked, rested on the notion that rap music is relaxing. And again as in grades six and eight, the third most popular response is that rap music is good dance music.

Three relevant themes emerged from Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music is liked because of its beat and rhythm.
- (2) Rap music is relaxing.
- (3) Rap music is good dance music.

In response to Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence? Data indicated that interviewees believe that rap music does not cause young people to engage in acts of criminality. However, the second most popular response suggests the notion that "some" young people may be influenced by what is seen on television and attempt to imitate what is seen in rap videos. The third

most popular response to Question #2 suggests the notion that "kids do what they want to do. Rap music does not affect the action of kids." And, the fourth popular response among interviewees suggests that rap music is simply music. It doesn't affect the listener anymore than jazz or hard rock.

Four themes emerged from Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music does not cause kids to engage in acts of violence.
- (2) "Some" young people may be influenced by what is seen in videos and may attempt to imitate what is seen.
- (3) Young people do what they desire. Rap music does not influence the actions of young people.
- (4) Rap music is simply music. It has the same affect as jazz or hard rock on the listener.

In response to Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? Data indicated that interviewees believe that rap videos depict Blacks and women negatively. It was adamantly stated that women are depicted as sleazy. Women are generally shown in the background of videos shaking their butts. Black men, however, are typically shown as unemployed and hustling. They are always trying to seduce a female and trying to be cool. Even though rap videos depict Blacks very negatively, some rap videos depict a realistic view of what's happening in some Black neighborhoods.

Five themes emerged from Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Blacks and women are depicted negatively in rap videos.
- (2) Women are depicted as sleazy in rap videos.
- (3) Black males are always trying to seduce women in rap videos.
- (4) Black males are depicted as unemployed and hustling in rap videos.
- (5) Some rap videos depict a realistic picture of what's actually going on in some Black neighborhoods.

In response to Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? Student responses were identical to those of students in grades six and eight. Interviewees concluded that rappers should not be called role models. Group responses support the notion that role models should be someone well-known by the selectee. Role models should be someone seen almost on a regular basis. Rappers are more like movie stars or people seen on television.

Three relevant themes emerged from Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rappers are not role models. Role models should be someone well-known by the selectee.
- (2) Role models should be someone highly visible in the selectee's life.

- (3) Rappers are like actors. You only see what they want you to see.

In response to Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you? Responses were similar to those of grades six and eight. The primary response centered on the notion that rap music enabled interviewees to relax. The second most popular notion expressed the belief that rap music made the interviewee happy. The third and final notion centered on the belief that rap music does not influence young people to engage in acts of mischief or crime. Acts of mischief or criminality are done primarily out of desire and has nothing to do with rap music. Rap music induces the desire to dance.

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music enabled the interviewee to relax.
- (2) Rap music makes interviewee happy and induces movement.
- (3) Rap music does not cause young people to engage in acts of violence or criminality.
- (4) Acts of mischief or criminality are committed primarily out of desire. Rap music is not the inducement.

### Student Profile Group #1 - Twelfth Graders

The first group of twelfth graders appeared very anxious, yet very defensive in regard to their perspective on rap music. Emanuel, a Black male, began discussion by stating, "I, personally don't see nothing wrong with rap music. Rap music simply tells you how things are in the 'hood'. We know that everything is not perfect in the 'hood', so why pretend that things are." When asked what he really likes about rap music, Emanuel responded by saying, "I really like the beat, the rhythm, the flow of rap. Rap makes me feel good inside. It helps me to be more positive." When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Emanuel smiled and stated, "To me Tupac and Biggie are the kings of rap. Tupac and Biggie always have the phattest rhymes and the phattest beats." When asked to name his favorite female rap artist(s), Emanuel responded with, "I don't have a favorite female artist. I don't really like female rappers because they are really soft. They front the 'real'." When asked what he meant by "they front the real," Emanuel responded by saying, "Female rappers pretend that they are tough, you know, pretend that they can handle almost anything." Emanuel lives in south Greensboro in a low-income community. He lives with his mother and two younger siblings in a two-bedroom apartment near the "Florida Street Market" area. Emanuel plans to attend college to become a sports announcer.

Joshlyn, a Black female, contributed to the discussion by saying, "I like rap music. I simply like the beat and the rhymes in most rap." When asked what she didn't like about rap, Joshlyn responded with,



"Well, some rap lyrics are kinda hard and disrespectful. I don't always like the way women are used in some rap videos." When asked what she meant by the statement, "the way women are used in some rap videos," Joshlyn responded by saying, "You know, in some rap videos women are seen almost naked shaking their butt. To me, that looks so sleazy." When asked to name her favorite artist(s), Joshlyn responded with, "I really like The Fugees and LL Cool J." Joshlyn stated that she likes The Fugees and LL Cool J because they are very positive and they don't do a lots of cussing. When asked to name her favorite female artist(s), Joshlyn responded with "I really don't have a favorite female artist because most female artists look and act too sleazy." Joshlyn lives in a low socio-economic area of Greensboro near Elm Street. She lives with her mother and younger brother in a two-bedroom apartment near North Carolina A&T State University. Joshlyn plans to attend college to become a cosmetologist.

Rakeem, a Black male, began dialogue by stating that he likes some rap but not all rap. When asked what he meant by "he likes some rap but not all rap," Rakeem responded by saying, "I like rap that have positive messages. You know, like The Fugees." Rakeem further stated that some rap is too hard core. When asked what he meant by the statement "some rap is too hard core," Rakeem smiled and responded with, "It's like some rappers get off on downing white people and talking bad about the police. I don't hate nobody, so I don't like hearing all this negative stuff about people." Rakeem identified The Fugees as his favorite rap group. He stated that he really doesn't like rap that has a lots of

cussing. He stated that he is not allowed to listen to rap at home. He indicated that his Dad sees rap as "trashy music." Rakeem lives in a middle-class predominantly Black community near North Carolina A&T State University. His mother is a receptionist at a nursing home and his father works for the City of Greensboro. Rakeem plans to attend college to become an engineer.

Rosary, a white female, stated that she likes some rap music but not all of it. When asked to explain her statement, Rosary responded by saying, "Some rap music have too much cursing. I don't like to listen to a lots of cursing." Rosary stated that she likes clean rap. Rap that is clean enough that you don't mind your younger sister or brother listening to. When asked if she listens to rap at home, Rosary responded with, "Not really, my parents don't like rap. They get upset if I play it around my younger sister and brother." Rosary identified LL Cool J and The Fresh Prince as her favorite artists. She lives in an upper middle-class predominantly white community near Moses Cone Hospital. Rosary's father is an accountant and her mother is a school teacher. Rosary plans to attend college to become a pediatrician.

Jason, a white male, stated that he doesn't really listen to rap because he doesn't understand it at times. He further stated that usually rappers talk too fast. Jason followed his statement by noting that some rappers curse too much. When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Jason responded with, "I don't have a favorite rap artist because I don't hardly listen to rap music." Jason contended that he

really isn't into music. He enjoys action video games and wrestling. Jason lives in a predominantly white middle-class community near Moses Cone Hospital. His father is a policeman and his mother works as a secretary for a dentist. Jason aspires to become a computer programmer.

Antoine, a Black male, stated that rap is his favorite music. He indicated that rap motivates him. When asked how rap motivated him, Antoine responded by saying, "Rap music sort of picks him up when he's sort of down. It just makes me happy." Antoine named Tupac Shakur and Wu-Tang as his favorite artists. When asked what he particularly liked about these artists, Antoine adamantly stated, "Well Tupac and Wu-Tang keep the message live and real. They don't be frontin. You know Tupac and Wu-Tang's message is 'all about truth'." When asked to explain what he meant by "Tupac and Wu-Tang's message is all about the truth," Antoine hesitated and responded by saying, "They simply tell you how life really is without no apology." Antoine stated that he is not allowed to play Tupac or Wu-Tang at home. When asked why he is not allowed to play Tupac and Wu-Tang at home, Antoine smiled and stated, "My Dad thinks Tupac and Wu-Tang cuss too much. He doesn't want my younger brother to be influenced by their lyrics." Antoine lives in a lower socio-economic Black community near Florida Street. He lives with both parents and a younger brother. Antoine's father works for the City of Greensboro and his mother works at Wrangler. Antoine aspires to attend college and become a famous cartoon artist.

Group #1 Profile - Twelfth GradersGeneral Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Emanuel	12	Black	Male	C
Joshlyn	12	Black	Female	B
Rakeem	12	Black	Male	B
Rosary	12	White	Female	A-
Jason	12	White	Male	A-
Antoine	12	Black	Male	C

Note: The overall academic standing is based on the following scale:

A = 93-100

B = 85-92

C = 77-84

D = 70-76

E = 69 and under

### Focus Group #1 - Twelfth Graders

Focus group #1 consisted of the following students: Emanuel, Joshlyn, Rakeem, Rosary, Jason, and Antoine.

Focus Group #1, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Rakeem began discussion by stating,

If the message is positive...I like it. Some rap uses so much cussing that it loses the message. It's like the rapper thinks using a lots of four-letter words make it hype. I don't like rap that put other people down. If the lyrics are positive and the beat is good...we can deal.

Emanuel entered the discussion by noting,

I agree with Rakeem. And as for me, I look for the beat, the rhythm, you know the total flow. I like rap that bring the real message home. Rap that's real, you know what I mean. It has a message that makes me feel like they're talking directly to me.

Joshlyn entered the discussion by stating,

Like Rakeem and Emanuel, I like a good beat, too. But to me, the thing I like most about rap music is its poetry. If you get some phat rhymes and a phat beat, that's live, that's all the way live!

Antoine interrupted Joshlyn and added,

I'm down with that. But the thing that I like about rap music is the way it makes me feel. Man, it puts me on a serious high. It's like I can throw on some Tupac or Wu-Tang and I can handle whatever. Man, I feel good. I feel really good.

Rosary and Jason did not respond to focus group Question #1.

Rosary smiled and said "I agree" several times. However, she never

provided a direct statement. Jason looked at Rosary and Antoine and said, "That's right, I agree with that." However, he never made a direct statement in regard to Question #1.

Focus Group #1, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Antoine responded to Question #2 by saying,

I think people who think rap music causes kids to do bad stuff are wrong. That stuff you see on television in the video is simply studio violence. We know the difference. Rap music doesn't make me or anyone else do anything. People that say rap music caused this or caused that are simply trying to find something to blame.

Rakeem interrupted Antoine and added,

That's true. People over thirty are always looking for excuses. It's like they want to blame somebody or something for all the craziness in society. I think it's stupid to blame rap music or any other music. Music can't make nobody do nothing.

Joshlyn entered the discussion by saying,

You know a lots of older people think rap music causes us to do stupid stuff. Well, to me it's not the music. Some kids are stupid so they do stupid stuff and rap gets the blame.

Emanuel agreed with Joshlyn and stated,

Now you gotta agree some kids are easily influenced. Some kids can't separate studio violence from real-life violence. They think what they see on the screen is real-life. But still, you can't blame rap music for somebody's loose marbles. Music can't make anyone do anything. That's a cop-out.

Rosary and Jason did not respond to Question #2.

Focus Group #1, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Joshlyn began discussion by saying,

I hate the way women and Black people are depicted in rap videos. To me, rap videos contribute to the bad stereotype of Black people. It's like we're all hustlers. We never look like business people in the dark suit and ties. Black women especially look bad. They look so sleazy...

Rakeem agreed with Joshlyn and added,

You know nobody makes us get in those videos. We know what we're doing. I agree, we look bad but that's our fault.

Emanuel interrupted Rakeem and stated,

Man, it's all about gettin' paid. They (people in videos) know what the director wants them to do beforehand. The brothas and sistas do the cheap videos for the money. It's about getting paid. Money talks.

Antoine entered the discussion by saying,

I agree, rap videos do make the Black community look bad. It's like the whole community is made up of pimps and prostitutes. In reality, we know the 'hood' is about a lot more than that. It's like only the negative is shown about the 'hood'.

Rosary and Jason did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #1, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Jason began discussion by saying,

I don't see how rappers can be called role models. It's not like we really know rappers. They're seen on television and that's about it.

Emanuel entered the discussion by saying,

I think KRS could be called a role model. He comes to you hard with hard-core rap. But at the next light, he always positive uplifting in his message...

Rakeem interrupted Emanuel and stated,

KRS is positive but I couldn't call him a role model. To me, it takes more than a positive message. You know words are cheap. We don't really know KRS. I wouldn't call him a role model.

Rosary entered the discussion by saying,

I don't see how anyone could call rappers role models. You don't really know them. They're on television and that's it.

Antoine agreed with Rosary and added,

To me, rappers are studio role models. Busta Rhymes and Puff Daddy may talk a good talk, but are they goin' to hang with you on weekends? I don't think so. They are not goin' to sit down and really talk to you and spend time with you.

Joshlyn engaged in the discussion by saying,

My role model is my Aunt Jackie. She's a nurse and she is always caring for somebody. I want to be like her. I don't see how rappers can be called role models. How can we model after them? We only see them on television.

Focus Group #1, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Jason began discussion by saying,

Rap music hasn't really affected me. I really don't listen to it enough for it to affect me.



It's just music...I don't see how it could affect me.

Emanuel entered the discussion by saying,

Well, rap music does affect me. It makes me feel good. It makes me happy. I like it because it motivates me.

Rakeem agreed with Emanuel and added,

Rap music only affects me if the lyrics are positive. When the lyrics are positive, I feel motivated, energized.

Antoine entered the discussion by saying,

Rap music really energizes me. I feel good and relaxed. It's not like I want to bang nobody up. It's like a natural high. You know what I'm sayin'. I feel really pumped up. It's hard to explain.

Joshlyn agreed with Antoine and added,

When I clean up my room or dusting, rap music sorta gives me a boost. It's like all of a sudden I'm energized to do what I gotta do. Rap music is like my wheaties...you know what I mean. It's like I can function better.

Rosary did not respond to Question #5.

### Student Profile Group #2 - Twelfth Graders

The second group of twelfth graders entered the classroom and appeared rather defensive in regard to rap as well. Wallace, a white male, began dialogue by stating that he really likes rap music because of its beat. He indicated that he really got into rap music about three years ago when he met Akeem and Rufus. Wallace described Akeem and Rufus as his best friends. Akeem and Rufus are Black males who he met when he entered Grimsley High School. Wallace stated that before he met Akeem and Rufus, he listened to hard rock and a little country music. When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Wallace responded by saying, "I really like Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls." Wallace stated that he liked Tupac and Biggie because they have good lyrics and a good beat. When asked to name his favorite female artist(s), Wallace responded with, "I really don't have a favorite female artist. Female rappers are too soft. They try to be hard but they are not." Wallace explained by saying, "Female rappers just carry the same message or beat as male rappers." When asked if he listens to rap at home, Wallace responded by saying, "My Dad doesn't like rap music and refers to it as Black people's music. He really gets upset when he enters my room and I'm blasting Tupac or Biggie." Wallace lives in an upper middle-class community near the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G). Wallace's father is an architect and his mother is a nurse. Wallace plans to attend Wake Forest to become a lawyer.

Mia, a Black female, stated that some rap music is okay and some of it is trash. When asked to explain what she meant by "some rap music is okay and some is trash," Mia responded by saying, "Well, when I hear rap lyrics that refer to women as (excuse the expression) bitches and ho's...I call that trash." Mia described okay rap as rap that gives a positive message. She identified The Fugees as being very positive. Mia stated that she doesn't really buy rap music. She stated that she prefers R&B music. Mia further stated that she used to be really into rap until it got to be too nasty and too violent. When asked what she meant by "until rap got to be too nasty and too violent," Mia responded with, "Well, rap started referring to women as ho's and bitches and basically treating women as 'sex objects'. Now rap is too cold and hard core." Mia lives in a lower socio-economic Black community near North Carolina A&T State University. She lives with her mother and two younger siblings. Mia's mother works at a nursing home. Mia aspires to attend college to become a nurse.

Vanessa, a Black female, stated that she really is not into rap. She stated that she likes gospel music but not necessarily gospel rap. Vanessa stated that she is a born-again Christian and that rap music is simply too much like Satan's work. When asked what she particularly disliked about rap music, Vanessa responded by saying, "Rap music basically uplifts Satan's work. It encourages you to dislike or hate people of other races. Rap music tells young people that it is alright to disrespect women." Vanessa stated that she doesn't really like anything about rap music. Vanessa is an only child who lives with her

mother in a lower socio-economic area of Greensboro commonly known as "Florida Street Market Place." Vanessa aspires to attend college to become a nurse.

Robin, a white female, stated that she is not really into rap because there is too much cursing in it. She further stated that she has a hard time understanding the message in most rap because the rappers speak so fast. Robin stated that she really doesn't have a favorite rap artist. When asked what she liked about rap music, Robin responded by saying, "I guess I like the beat to some rap music. I don't know, I guess I like the beat best." Robin stated that she never plays rap at home. When asked why she doesn't play rap at home, Robin smiled and stated, "My parents would have a fit. They can't stand rap music." Robin is an only child and she lives in a middle-class community near the Four Seasons Mall. Robin plans to attend college to become a physical therapist. Robin's father is a radiologist and her mother works part-time as a secretary.

Fondella, a Black female, stated that she really likes rap music; however, she doesn't like the way females are seen in rap videos or the way female rappers are portrayed in general. When asked to explain her position, Fondella frowned and stated, "Well, Black males are portrayed somewhat like thugs or gangsters and females are portrayed as sex objects or prostitutes." Fondella followed up her position by saying, "It seems as though if a person wants to be in a video, he or she has to be a prostitute or gangster and that is not right." When asked to name her favorite rap artist, Fondella stated that she likes KRS. When asked

why she likes KRS, Fondella responded with, "To me, KRS is very positive. They are about treating everybody right and looking out for the community." Fondella stated that she doesn't have a favorite female rapper. She indicated that most female rappers are trying to be too much like male rap artists. When asked if she plays rap music at home, Fondella responded by saying, "No, I don't really play rap music at home because my parents don't like rap and they get upset when I play it." Fondella lives in a middle-class predominantly Black community near the North Carolina A&T State University. Her father works for the City of Greensboro and her mother is employed at Moses Cone Hospital. Fondella aspires to attend college and become a computer programmer.

Darren, a Black male, stated that he doesn't really get into rap music. He indicated that he doesn't like all the cussing that goes on in most rap music. When asked if he had a favorite music, Darren responded by saying, "I really like contemporary gospel music." When asked what he particularly liked about contemporary gospel, Darren stated, "I like contemporary gospel because the music is uplifting and the lyrics are full of hope, like real positive." Darren stated that he doesn't buy rap music at all. He stated that most rap music is loud, disrespectful to women, and uses too much foul language. Darren described himself as a born-again Christian and he doesn't like "music of the world." When asked what he meant by "music of the world," Darren responded by saying, "If you listen to most rap lyrics, the rapper is talking about gettin high, having sex, or jamming somebody up." He concluded by saying, "Rap music plants too many devilish

ideas in young people's heads." Darren lives in a lower socio-economic area of south Greensboro. His father is deceased. He lives with his mother and older brother in a two-bedroom apartment. Darren's mother works at Wrangler. He plans to attend college and become a computer programmer.

### Group #2 Profile - Twelfth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Wallace	12	White	Male	B
Mia	12	Black	Female	B
Vanessa	12	Black	Female	A-
Robin	12	White	Female	A-
Fondella	12	Black	Female	A-
Darren	12	Black	Male	B+

### Focus Group #2 - Twelfth Graders

Focus group #2 consisted of the following students: Wallace, Mia, Vanessa, Robin, Fondella, and Darren.

Focus Group #2, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Wallace began discussion by saying,

To me, I really like the beat in rap music. It's always thumping. You know, it's like you can feel the beat. It just makes you move automatically. You find yourself bopping and you don't even realize it.

Robin entered the discussion by stating,

I like the beat in most rap, too. But I don't like the cursing and name-calling. The beat is basically okay...but some of the lyrics are way out there.

Fondella interrupted Robin and added,

Yes, some rap lyrics are kinda bad. I don't listen to that stuff. I look for a good beat and good lyrics. I can't stand rap that puts down women or called them bad names.

Mia, Vanessa, and Darren did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #2, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Wallace began discussion by stating,

Rap music and violence? To me it's all about using common sense. Just because somebody in a song said they gonna shoot somebody don't mean you gotta follow them and do it. You gotta use common sense.

Vanessa responded to Question #2 by saying,

Like I said, I'm not really into rap. I could be wrong, but I don't see how anyone could listen to some of the trash in rap and not be affected. To me, it's simply the devil talking. I believe it can influence some kids.

Fondella responded by saying,

Yes, I think some rap music can influence kids. Whether it can cause someone to shoot or rob somebody I don't know. Some raps talk about gettin' high...smoking blunts. I think some kids see that as being cool. Then they want to do it.

Mia entered the discussion by saying,

I don't think rap music per se can lead kids into trouble. I think it is more the rap artist than the lyrics. Take for instance Redman and Tupac, a lot of kids think "they're all that." So they want to be like them. If they talk about banging somebody up like it's cool, I think there are kids who will try it.

Robin and Darren did not respond to Question #2.

Focus Group #2, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

Mia began discussion by saying,

I think rap videos really make Black people look bad, especially women. Women are always half naked and acting sleazy. To me, rap videos really dog us out.

Vanessa agreed with Mia and added,

It's like it's not a phat video unless you're wearing a bikini. And the brothas, they ain't got it goin' on unless they got a forty, a convertible, no shirt, and a tattoo. It's really stupid...really stupid.



Fondella entered the discussion by stating,

I agree, some rap videos make us look really stupid. It's like if you're a Black female, you're a prostitute. If you're a Black male, you're a thug or gangsta. You never see anything positive. It's like there's not anything good happening in the 'hood'.

Darren interrupted Fondella and added,

You know, people are paid to be in those videos. It's all about gettin' paid. It's like acting. That doesn't make it right, but it's the truth.

Wallace and Robin did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #2, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Darren began discussion by stating,

I really don't see how rappers could be called role models. It's not like we really know them personally.

Mia agreed with Darren and added,

How can you call a rapper a role model. It's not like they're goin' to come around and hang out with you. We don't really know rappers. We only know the image that we see on T.V. or in magazines.

Fondella agreed with Mia and stated,

Role models should be people you actually know. It's like people you sorta know because you know what they're about. I like KRS because I like their lyrics. But I can't call them role models because I've never had a real conversation with them or spent any time around them.

Wallace entered the discussion by saying,

I agree, I don't see how rappers can be called role models. Not only that, I don't see how anyone you don't really know can be called a role model. Some people look at Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods as role models. I like Michael Jordan, but for me to say he's my role model, I'll need to spend some real time with him. And I know that's not goin' to happen. It's like if you got a lots of money, you're a good role model. I don't agree with that.

Vanessa entered the discussion by saying,

The only true role model we need is found in the Bible. You can talk about Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, but Jesus is the only role model that we need. If you follow after him, you'll be alright...

Robin did not respond to Question #4. However, she nodded on several occasions and said "Yes, I agreed with that."

Focus Group #2, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

Wallace began discussion by stating,

Well, rap music has not really affected me. I like rap music but it hasn't cause me to do anything stupid.

Mia responded to Question #5 by saying,

Rap music doesn't affect me because I don't buy it. Some rap is okay, but I like R&B better.

Vanessa entered the discussion by stating,

I guess it does affect me. It upsets me when I see young people reciting lyrics that put us down. The cursing upsets me.

Robin responded to Question #5 by saying,

Rap music hasn't affected me. I choose what I want to listen to. I basically like the beat in rap music. Rap doesn't bother me unless there's a lot of cursing. I like rap okay.

Darren entered the discussion by stating,

Well, for me, I don't really like rap music. It hasn't affected me, personally. But some of my friends try to talk and act like rappers. I just don't like the cussing in most raps.

Fondella did not respond to Question #5.

### Student Profile Group #3 - Twelfth Graders

The third group of twelfth graders interviewed are members of a group called Hip-Hop To Success. Hip-Hop To Success is best described as a group of Grimsley High students who use rap music as an incentive to be successful in school and in life. The goal of Hip-Hop To Success is to positively affect student achievement and classroom behavior of at-risk youth. Students are provided with conditional access to state of the art studio disc jockey and music production equipment. Hip-Hop To Success accords students opportunities to develop broadcast speaking skills as well as enhance disk jockey techniques and electronic music production capabilities.

Chris, a white male, began discussion on rap music by defensively stating that he likes rap music and it is the only music that he plays. He indicated that he likes rap music because of its beat and its rhymes. Chris further stated that he dee jays on weekends to earn extra cash. When asked to name his favorite rap artist, Chris responded by saying, "Wow, I like a lots of rappers; Tupac, Wu-Tang, Biggie...Buff Daddy... I really don't have a favorite. They are all good in their own way." Chris continued his dialogue by noting that he is more into the lyrics now than ever.

George, a Black male, stated that he has always liked rap music. He indicated that rap music helps him to relax. When asked what he meant by "rap helps him to relax," George replied with, "Rap music is soothing. It helps you to deal with everyday problems." George stated that the program Hip-Hop To Success has been real positive for him.

When asked to explain how Hip-Hop To Success has affected him, George stated, "Had it not been for Hip-Hop To Success, I would probably be on the streets hangin with my homies." George further stated that Hip-Hop To Success has helped him gradewise, because one has to keep up one's grades to be in the program.

Jackie, a Black female, stated that Hip-Hop To Success has really helped her to stay out of trouble at school. When asked to explain her position, Jackie responded by saying, "I used to get into a lots of fights...I would fight for almost any reason. Now because if I want to stay in Hip-Hop To Success, I can't be tryin to ball nobody up." Jackie concluded by saying, "If you get in a fight, you are automatically kicked out of Hip-Hop To Success."

Bryan, a white male, stated that Hip-Hop To Success has given him motivation to do well in school and gain more friends. When asked to explain, Bryan stated, "Hip-Hop To Success reminds me to be good and keep my grades up. I used to play around a lot. Now, I know that I must take my work seriously and stay out of trouble if I want to use the studio to make music."

MeChelle, a Black Female, stated if it had not been for Hip-Hop To Success, she would probably almost live in the principal's office. She stated that when she is having a bad day at home or at school, she can always look forward to going to the studio to chill by listening to some phat rhymes. MeChelle concluded by saying, "Hip-Hop To Success is the best thing to happen to Grimsley since school busses."

Laura, a white female, stated that she really likes Hip-Hop To Success and she really likes rap music. She further stated that rap music helps her to stay focused. Laura stated that rap music simply helps her be positive and have a fun-life. She concluded that rap music/Hip-Hop To Success has been a positive experience for her.

### Group #3 Profile - Twelfth Graders

#### General Student Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Overall Academic Status</u>
Chris	12	White	Male	B
George	12	Black	Male	B
Jackie	12	Black	Female	B
Bryan	12	White	Male	A-
MeChelle	12	Black	Female	B+
Laura	12	White	Female	B

### Focus Group #3 - Twelfth Graders

Focus group #3 consisted of the following students: Chris, George, Jackie, Bryan, MeChelle, and Laura.

Focus Group #3, Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?

Chris began discussion by stating,

It's more than rap music...it's hip-hop. It's a culture, you know, rap music is just a little part of the hip-hop culture. Rap is like break-dancing. It's just one little pillow of hip-hop. We like rap because it is easy to relate to. Yes, it sorta makes you happy. It makes you happy because somebody else is feeling the same thing you're feeling...

George responded by saying,

I agree with Chris. You see music is a universal language. It makes you feel good. It's not restricted to rap music. Music relates to people regardless of their culture, ethnic group, race, color and so forth.

Jackie entered the discussion by noting,

Well, to me, rap music is a way of expressing what's going on around you and how you feel. That's why if you listen to someone like KRS-1 or NAS or someone like that. You can hear what he's saying. It relaxes you and tells you stuff about your 'hood'. Rap kinda tells you that you're not the only one with struggles. It's like you're not all alone because they've been there, too. You can tell by their message that it's real. You can kinda feel it.

Bryan entered the discussion by saying,

Well to me it's like just what everybody has been saying. It sorta makes you feel better

because you know that someone else has been there too. It just makes you feel good.

MeChelle engaged in the discussion by adding,

Rap music brings out what you're really feeling. All the stuff that you have bottled up inside, rap music brings it out. And you can relate to it.

Laura did not respond to Question #1.

Focus Group #3, Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?

Chris began discussion by noting,

Rap doesn't cause violence. Rap is a release of what other people sees. You know, violence was around before rap music. Rap music has been around since about the '80s. Then Too Short, Ice Cube, Ice T sorta changed rap. Back in the '80s in New York, crowds were shouting "My Adidas" because that's what they saw and what they could relate to. Then out in Compton and Los Angeles, rappers started talking about poverty and no jobs. Then the message changed to violence, crime, gang banging and survival by any means necessary. That's what they saw, so that's what they talked about.

George engaged in the discussion by saying,

In terms of rap and violence. I think rap music is gettin' a bum deal. It's like if something is not going right...blame rap music. Like Chris said, violence was going on before rap was even popular.

MeChelle agreed with George and added,

It's like if you've gotta blame somebody or something, blame rap. To me, it's just an excuse. It's people, old people can't understand the message, so think it's bad. I don't think rap music has anything to do with crime. It's entertainment...it's enjoyment, that's all.



Jackie, Bryan and Laura did not make a personal statement in regard to Question #2. However, they often nodded and said "Yes, that's true," as George, MeChelle and Chris provided statements.

Focus Group #3, Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

MeChelle began discussion by stating,

I think Black people are depicted very negatively in rap videos. It's like we are hustlers, gangstas, and thugs. And Black women, we are depicted as if we are "around the way girls." It's like Black women are sleazy and always scheming.

George responded to Question #3 by saying,

OK, in my opinion women are portrayed as being low. They're not portraying themselves as real women. They're not showing themselves respect. It's like they'll do anything for the dollars.

Jackie responded to Question #3 by noting,

I agree. But don't all Black women are like that. In videos, most Black women are almost naked and shaking their bottoms. But it's not any better for Black guys. They usually look like thugs or pimps. It's really sad...but it's the truth.

Chris, Laura, and Bryan did not respond to Question #3.

Focus Group #3, Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models?

Bryan began discussion by saying,

I don't see rappers as role models. We only see them on television.

Chris agreed with Bryan and added,

A role model to me is someone you respect who you can go up to and get advice. Someone you really trust because you know "they're down with you." It's like you know they've got your back. It's someone you know and trust.

George agreed with Chris and stated,

Yes. A role model just can't be anyone. Just because someone has fine clothes, a nice car, or have money doesn't make them a good role model. It should be someone that you really respect because you know for a fact where they're coming from I don't see rappers as role models. They're really strangers.

Laura stated that she agreed with George and added,

To me a role model should be someone like your Mom, Dad, aunt, uncle, or relative. Then again it could be a teacher, minister... basically someone you really respect because you can see what they're about.

MeChelle and Jackie did not make a personal statement in regard to Question #4. However, they often nodded in agreement with what was being said.

Focus Group #3, Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

George began discussion by stating,

Rap music has not affected me in a dumb way. It helps me to relax. Whenever I'm stressed, I listen to rap music to calm down. It's very soothing.

Jackie entered the discussion by noting,

Rap music has affected me. I used to get in fights. Now, I chill and listen to some Biggie and Lil' Kim and I'm okay. I don't

know why, but rap music just makes me feel sort of excited...kinda happy.

Chris interrupted Jackie and added,

I know what you mean. I feel the same way. It's like nothing can pull you down. It's like you're in your special zone...and everything is alright.

MeChelle entered the discussion by saying,

Well, I don't know about some kinda zone. I do know that rap music is very positive to me. It makes me feel more confident.

Bryan entered the discussion by saying,

I have more friends because of rap music. We exchange CDs and have fun just listening to the lyrics. The beat in rap makes it easy to like.

Laura stated that she agreed with MeChelle and noted,

Just before doing my homework, I listen to LL Cool J or Busta Rhymes. I don't know why, but I find myself smiling and feeling happy. My Mom looks at me strangely sometimes as if she is wondering what's going on. I like rap music because it makes me happy...

#### Focus Groups #1, 2, and 3 Summary - Twelfth Graders

Each focus group interview responded to the following questions:

- (1) Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music?
- (2) What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence?
- (3) How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos?

(4) What is your position on rappers being called role models?

(5) In your opinion, how has rap music affected you?

In response to Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music? Data indicates that students like rap music primarily for its beat and rhythm. The second most popular response centered on the notion that rap is a way of expressing what's going on around you and how you feel. The third most popular response to Question #1 asserts the belief that rap music attests to commonalities in struggle or life experiences. Rap music essentially comforts the listener in knowing that he/she is not alone. And fourthly, rap music is liked because of its poetic flavor.

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #1 - Tell me about rap music. What do you particularly like about rap music? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music is liked because of its beat and rhythm.
- (2) Rap music is a way of expressing what's going on around you and how you feel.
- (3) Rap music conveys to the listener that he/she is not alone. It comforts the listener by conveying the message that whatever is going on is not a first-time experience.
- (4) Rap music is liked because of its poetry. The rhyming in rap music makes it popular.

In response to Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence? Data indicates that interviewees adamantly stated that rap music does not cause young people to do anything. Data further indicates that interviewees believe people who think rap music causes young people to get into trouble are simply looking for something to blame. However, one participant noted that there are some young people who are easily influenced. There are those who cannot separate real-life violence from studio violence.

Three relevant themes emerged from Question #2 - What thoughts do you have on rap music and its association with violence? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music does not cause or encourage young people to engage in acts of crime.
- (2) There are those who are looking for something to blame for the ills in society and rap is the chosen culprit.
- (3) There are young people who are easily influenced. There are young people who cannot separate studio violence from real-life violence.

In response to Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? Data suggest that interviewees view Blacks and women being depicted very negatively in rap videos. Blacks are typically depicted as unemployed and hustling. Women are depicted as prostitutes and men are depicted as pimps. Black women are depicted as sleazy and Black men are depicted as willing to do whatever is necessary to "get paid." It's all about dollars.

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Blacks and women are depicted very negatively in rap videos.
- (2) Blacks are typically depicted as unemployed and hustling.
- (3) Women are depicted as prostitutes and men are depicted as pimps.
- (4) Black women are depicted as sleazy and Black men are depicted as willing to do mostly anything for money.

In response to Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? Students revealed consensus in regard to their responses. Role models should be someone that one really knows. There is a real difference between studio role models and real-life role models. KRS was identified as a role model by one interviewee. However, after additional dialogue among the focus group, the interviewee changed his position.

Three relevant themes emerged from Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rappers are not role models. Role models should be people that one really knows.
- (2) Rappers are studio role models. There is a big difference between studio role models and real-life role models.

- (3) There is a difference in liking a rapper because of the way he/she raps and desiring to be like the artist. Just because one likes the way an artist raps, doesn't mean that the rapper is the listener's role model.

In response to Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you? Responses were varied and very personal. The primary response to Question #5 centered on the notion that rap music had not really affected them. The response was followed with "It makes me feel good." The second most popular response centered on the notion that rap music energizes and motivates them. The third most popular response expressed the belief that rap music helps interviewees to relax.

Four relevant themes emerged from Question #5 - In your opinion, how has rap music affected you? The themes are as follows:

- (1) Rap music does not affect interviewees.
- (2) Rap music makes interviewees happy.
- (3) Rap music energizes and motivates interviewees.
- (4) Rap music helps interviewees to relax.

### Summary of Findings

The beginning of this chapter described the procedures for data collection. The remainder of the chapter summarizes data from each group through common themes. The themes are as follows: (1) positive inner-feelings, (2) high appreciation for a "good beat and good rhythm," (3) perceived realistic articulation of societal conditions/"keeping it real," (4) enhanced feelings of hope, (5) promotion of positive self-concept/self-expression, (6) social infrastructure (the relationship and interaction patterns that occur between peers and family), and (7) generation gap issues (the perceived notion that individuals over thirty are unable to comprehend the inner messages and appreciate the true beauty of rap music).

In reviewing the data among groups, findings suggest that the students had similar attitudes and values in regard to rap music. Although there were some differences, groups closely resembled each other in response to focus group questions. Differences essentially centered on students' ethnicity and religious background. In terms of ethnicity, it was not uncommon for white students to say that they don't always understand the message in rap. However, the beat and rhythm was deemed more important than the message. African-American students who identified themselves as "born-again Christians" readily described rap as "the devil's music." Additional dialogue on this notion among students revealed that their reference to "the devil's music" attributed to students' parents' position on rap music. It



appeared that the "born-again Christian students" mirrored their parents' position on rap music and its affect on adolescents.

One issue evolved among the focus groups that was inconsistent with data collected from other groups. A participant expressed concern that some rap artists appear to be really angry and look "hard." This factor was not common throughout the focus groups.

The data most important to this study was gained from students who were pro-rap. Anti-rap students were an obvious minority (in terms of the total number of students who participated in this investigation) and at times appeared intimidated by the majority. Social infrastructure was important to all the students interviewed. Three factors emerged. One had to do with peer influence on music choice/appreciation. Three students indicated that they liked rap music because their friends liked it. Further discussion on this notion revealed that the students actually began listening to rap music to gain acceptance among peers. Based upon dialogue among the three students, rap music appreciation appeared to be a rite of passage among their peers. Group acceptance rested on espousing a high appreciation for rap music and the hip-hop culture. Students who were termed "religious" (students who professed to be born-again Christians) were often deemed outcast or nerds.

The second theme regarding peers had to do with social class. It appeared that rap music appreciation exceeded race and class lines. Students who contended that they liked rap music tended to come from diverse backgrounds. It was not uncommon for students who came from upper-middle class backgrounds to be strong advocates for the art form.

Seven students who, according to peers, were "rich kids" were more than avid consumers of rap music.

The third theme regarding rap music and its affect on adolescents is centered on family relationships and deception. Four students indicated that they often frequent the local malls on weekends to purchase rap music and sample new releases. Each student indicated that this is done incognito because their parents would have a fit if they knew what they were actually doing. In lieu of their parents' negative position on rap music, the students of this investigation felt the need to craft opportunities to listen to their favorite rap artists. This practice placed students in the awkward position of having to lie to their parents about what they were actually doing during mall visitations. In essence, the students felt the need to be deceptive in order to avoid confrontational relations with parents.

The findings of this study suggest that rap music has no negative influence on the lives of adolescents. Rap music is a basic art form that adolescents enjoy but has no significant impact on the lives of adolescents in regard to acts of violence or criminality. As per conclusion, after conducting this study, it is believed that adolescents engage in acts of violence or criminality out of desire or poor judgment and nothing to do with lyrical content of rap music. Adolescents primarily listen to rap music for pleasure and relaxation. According to research findings, adolescents find rap music soothing, life affirming, lyrically/politically correct, and representative of the common struggles of daily life experience.

In conclusion, the findings of this study validate the postulation that rap music is simply music and does not impact decisions that adolescents make. Research findings reveal that crime among youth was escalating far before rap music entered the mainstream of contemporary American culture. Rap music is at best a scapegoat and is unfairly targeted as a catalyst that leads adolescents to a life of criminal activity.

In response to Theme #1, positive inner-feelings, participants of this study overwhelmingly stated that rap music makes them feel good. It was not uncommon for participants to readily state that rap music made them happy. Rap music served as an incentive that allowed participants to calm down or energized them to be more productive with daily school assignments or home chores.

The typical response to Theme #2, participants' high appreciation for a good beat and good rhythm, lead the researcher to conclude that participants associated "good rap" as rap that has a good beat and good rhythm. It appeared that lyrical content was secondary to beat and rhythm. The presence of a good beat or good rhythm encouraged participants to dance or simply move to the beat. Participants often expressed the belief that rap music with a good beat and rhythm was uplifting to them. It provided them with a positive attitude.

In response to Theme #3, perceived realistic articulation of societal conditions/"keeping it real," six participants on this investigation used the expression "keeping it real." After additional dialogue and probing, it was determined that the expression "keeping

it real" simply meant that rap music paints a realistic picture of societal conditions. It was further determined that the expression was not solely attributed to activities that occur in Black neighborhoods. The expression is wholistically applied to society in a general sense.

Theme #4, enhanced feelings of hope, appeared to be a popular response among the focus groups. However, the actual term "hope" was only used on four different occasions. Fifteen participants of this study implied that rap music made them feel as though their quality of life will improve. One participant, who considers himself large (somewhat overweight) stated that when he listens to rap music or watches rap videos, he feels as though he can make it too. The participant attributed this notion to the fact that the artist Heavy D is overweight, yet he was able to become successful in spite of his weight.

Theme #5, promotion of positive self-concept/self-expression. Data from the focus groups support the notion that participants of this study contend that rap music helped the participants feel good about themselves. Nine students indicated that rap music made them feel good about themselves. It appeared that rap music somewhat encouraged them to be positive. They identified Wu-Tang as their favorite artists and noted that whenever they listened to the artists, they feel really good and positive.

Theme #6, social infrastructure (the relationship and interaction patterns that occur between peers and family), was often evidenced when participants alluded to their parents referring to rap music as the

"devil's music" or "Black people's music." It was further evidenced when seven students indicated that they often visited the malls on weekends and listened to rap music while their parents thought they were simply shopping for clothes or other personal items. It appeared that the participants' appreciation for the art form lead them to be deceptive with their parents. The seven participants indicated that playing rap music at home was taboo. However, they found ways to listen to rap by frequenting malls, visiting friends, or by simply attending school. Even though walkmans were not permitted on school grounds, students indicated that everyone has one, so it's easy to listen to music right at school.

Theme #7, generation gap issues (the perceived notion that individual's over thirty are unable to comprehend the inner messages and appreciate the true beauty of rap music), appeared to be a constant articulation among the focus groups. Participants of this investigation expressed the belief that old people (people over thirty) don't really understand rap. They contend that people over thirty years old grew up on soul music and rock and roll, therefore, they cannot relate to rap music. One participant stated that rap music is popular because it is the music he grew up with; it's the only music that he knows. Another student stated that people over thirty liked artists like Luther Vandross, the Winans, Al Green, and Elvis. The student further stated, "We don't like that. But we don't try to condemn what you like...so why condemn us." It appeared to be an absolute consensus among each group that the major reason individuals over thirty don't like rap is

anchored on the notion that they don't understand it, so they elect to condemn it.

The influence that rap music has on the lives of adolescents continues to be a debatable issue. Additional research and investigation is necessary. The investigator makes no claim to offer a complete history of rap music, nor has the investigator explained every facet of rap's potential affect on the lives of adolescents. The investigator has described, theorized, and critiqued elements of rap, its culture, lyrical content, and style. Rap music and its social context is too massive to be reduced to a mere dissertation. The landscape of rap music and hip-hop evolves continuously; therefore, new themes and social concerns evolve as well. Rap music is at best a smorgasbord of social issues. The social politics associated with the art form makes it complex and easily targeted as an agent to negatively influence the lives of adolescents.

\*Revisit dialogue on the negative perception of women in rap videos.

### Revisiting the Purposes of the Study

This study explored popular perceptions of rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents attending Jackson Middle and Grimsley High schools of Guilford County, North Carolina. The following section will discuss findings of the study in the context of the purposes as identified in Chapter I. The purpose is as follows:

- . To discover and explore popular perceptions of rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents attending Jackson Middle and Grimsley High schools of Guilford County, North Carolina.

This study was successful in the purpose of revealing and exploring numerous notions, stereotypes, and misconceptions about rap music and its affects on adolescents. From the findings of this study, seven thematic factors emerged. The factors are as follows:

- (1) Positive inner-feelings.
- (2) High appreciation for a "good beat and good rhythm."
- (3) Perceived realistic articulation of societal conditions/"keeping it real."
- (4) Enhanced feelings of hope.
- (5) Promotion of positive self-concept/self-expression.
- (6) Social infrastructure (the relationship and interaction patterns that occur between peers and family).

- (7) Generation gap issues (the perceived notion that individuals over thirty are unable to comprehend the inner messages and appreciate the true beauty of rap music).

After review of the fourth group (twelfth graders), no new themes emerged and all subsequent data fit into one of the existing themes.

The study was successful in discovering topics for further research. Among the most important areas are questions relating to parental perspectives, criminal justice perspectives, educational perspectives and clergy perspectives. In addition to identifying topics for potential quantitative research, the findings of this study also reveal the need for additional qualitative and quantitative exploration of the seven thematic factors and the themes.

A clear explanation of students' personal perspectives on rap music and its influence on the lives of participants of this study was carefully examined. Students primarily liked rap music for its beat and rhythm. Rap music made students feel good. It essentially made students feel positive and provided hope that their quality of life would improve. Rap music also addressed social conditions. It addressed conditions of the Black community as well as perspectives on popular culture. These qualities about rap music were termed as very important and significant attributes of the hip-hop culture.

The information on rap music and its association with criminal activity was not so clear. It appeared that students expressed a "mixed-bag dialogue" on rap music and its potential to encourage



adolescents to engage in criminal activity. According to several students, rap music does not encourage adolescents to engage in criminal activity. Students contended that students actually engage in criminal activity out of personal choice. Rap music; gangsta rap included, does not encourage or lead students in the path of criminal activity. However, one student made a rather important observation. The student indicated that rap music does not have the power or influence to encourage students to engage in criminal activity; however, popular rap artists do have influence on students and their behavior. In essence, some rap artists have loyal followers who actually emulate artists in dress, speech, and value. Rap's potential power to influence young people rests on the artist(s) and the loyalty of his/her followers. A second notion on rap and its association with criminality centers on the belief that some young people are not bright enough (intellectually) to distinguish studio violence from real-life experiences. It is further believed that there are young people who watch studio violence (as seen in videos) and cannot separate that which is seen on television from reality. Students expressed the belief that the real problem is not with rap music but with the intellectual functioning of some students.

Students talked at length about rap music and how it is perceived by older adults (individuals over thirty). It was a consensus among the groups that older adults unfairly blamed rap music for the numerous ills of society. Students concluded that rap music is a mere scapegoat for older people to justify the problems of society. Students also noted

that rap music doesn't have any greater influence on people's action than that of hard rock, jazz, R&B or country music.

Based on these findings, several implications were derived. The implications are as indicated:

- . Rap music does not encourage adolescents to engage in acts of criminality.
- . Depending upon the artist(s), rappers can influence the action of young people.
- . The intellectual functioning of adolescents has a greater affect on adolescents than rap music.
- . Rap music doesn't affect the lives of adolescents anymore than hard rock, jazz, R&B or country music affect others.
- . Rap music is being used as a scapegoat.
- . Older adults (individuals over thirty) don't understand rap, therefore, they denounce it.
- . Rap music addresses societal conditions in a harsh and unapologetic manner. That is why it is being heavily targeted by popular culture.

### Observations, Commonalities and Differences Among Focus Groups Grades 6, 8, 10, and 12

The differences among the focus groups were minor. As anticipated by the investigator, sixth grade students were the least articulate and twelfth graders were the most articulate. The first sixth grade focus group appeared extremely passive and non-verbal initially. After about twenty-five minutes, students appeared more comfortable and anxious to share their views on rap music. However, several students remained inhibited and reluctant to voice their personal opinions on rap. Several sixth graders engaged in side conversations in regard to Question #2 - What are your thoughts on rap music and its association with violence? It appeared that several students became very defensive and concluded that the investigator was anti-rap. Due to this misunderstanding, the investigator elected to briefly terminate discussion to explain his neutral position on the art form. Students listened quietly, but the seed of negativism had been planted and for the remainder of the session, the students addressed questions defensively.

The second group of sixth graders were more dialogic than Group #1. After a brief introduction, students anxiously dialogued with the investigator. As with Group #1, the second group of students engaged in side conversations in response to Question #2 - What are your thoughts on rap music and its association with violence? Several students expressed the belief that the notion that rap music

causes young people to engage in acts of violence as "wack." One student actually responded to the notion with "Bull Shit, that's f--king crazy."

Upon meeting the third group of sixth graders, the investigator concluded that earlier focus groups (Groups #1 and #2) had spoken with members of Group #3. Group #3 entered the classroom noisily and anxious to dialogue. After about five minutes, the investigator concluded that Group #3 had met informally to identify a spokesperson. The investigator briefly terminated discussion to request total group participation. Male students tended to monopolize initial discussion. Group #3 responded to Question #2 - What are your thoughts on rap music and its association with violence? - similarly to Groups #1 and #2. The investigator concluded that Question #2 placed the investigator in an adversarial role. The students concluded that the investigator was not pro-rap, therefore, respondents addressed Question #2 in a defensive manner.

The eighth grade students selected for this investigation were extremely more dialogic than the sixth graders. It appeared that students were anxious to share their views. They were very cooperative and orderly. As with grade six, the eighth graders addressed Question #2 - What are your thoughts on rap music and its association with violence? - rather defensively. Question #2 received significant dialogue. Students appeared ready to defend their position that rap music does not encourage adolescents to engage in criminal activity. The investigator concluded that the respondents took the question

personally and because of its personal appeal, students endeavored to denounce the popular perception of rap and its association with violence.

Tenth grade students selected for this investigation were very articulate and dialogic. The students appeared calm, yet ready to share their position on rap. However, the tenth grade students did not respond as defensively to Question #2 as students in grades six and eight. Tenth grade students responded more to Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? It appeared to be group consensus that Blacks and women are depicted very negatively in rap videos. Black females of each group expressed serious displeasure with the manner in which females are depicted in rap videos. It appeared that they (Black females) took the negative stereotype personally and were offended by roles women portray in videos. The negative depiction of females as ho's, bitches, skeezers, and prostitutes offended females of each focus group. Side conversations among each group expressed the belief that Blacks are depicted very negatively in rap videos. However, several young males espoused the belief "there's nothing wrong with seeing a little skin." One female respondent adamantly responded by saying, "You guys are all alike. You wouldn't want to see your sister doing some of those things, would you?"

The twelfth grade students were the most articulate and the most assertive. They were extremely "matter-of-factly" in their responses. In essence, respondents appeared to really think deeply before

addressing questions. Body language/facial expression depicted students as serious about responses to each question. Effort was made to succinctly explain personal positions and media representations. However, the twelfth graders shared similar positions with tenth graders on Question #3 - How are Blacks and women depicted in rap videos? Group consensus revealed that Blacks are depicted very negatively in rap videos and women are seriously demeaned. As with the tenth graders, Black female students were extremely verbal about their disapproval of the manner in which women are depicted in rap videos. Black males supported the females' position and agreed that women are negatively stereotyped. The males of this group addressed Question #4 - What is your position on rappers being called role models? - very seriously. Group consensus revealed that the students do not view rappers as role models. This notion was premised on the belief that role models should be someone known personally by the selectee. It was not uncommon for respondents to identify relatives or older friends as ideal role models. However, rappers were deemed studio-role models. They were not held in high regard as potential role models.

Each focus group rendered similar responses. The differences were most apparent in verbal skills and self-discipline. The sixth grade students were extremely non-verbal and from the onset of each focus group. However, the last twenty minutes of each session proved to be the most rewarding. It appeared that the students' comfort level tended to escalate toward the end of each session.

Eighth grade students tended to be very similar to sixth grade students in regard to verbal skills and discipline. However, the eighth grade students appeared more assertive and more mature.

The differences between tenth grade students and twelfth grade students were minor. However, the twelfth grade students were more articulate and more thorough with their responses to questions. Tenth graders appeared anxious to respond to questions; however, their responses lacked the depth of the twelfth graders.

## Conclusion

The affect that rap music has on the lives of adolescents is at best inconclusive. However, participants of this investigation readily espouse the belief that rap music has no negative affect on their lives. Students who participated in this investigation readily purport the notion that rap music is liked primarily for its beat and rhythm. Secondly, rap music is liked because of the manner in which it made participants of this study feel. Students of this study liked rap for varied reasons. Regardless of the reason, none of the participants indicated that they liked rap music because it gave them the incentive to engage in acts of violence. Students who participated in this investigation adamantly noted that rap music is not a motivating factor when young people elect to engage in criminal activity. Each focus group vehemently noted that young people who engage in criminal activity do so out of personal choice and that rap music is not the motivating factor.

The students of this study expressed consensus in regard to their position on rappers being termed role models. It appeared to be consensus among each focus group that rappers are not role models, they're entertainers. Each focus group concluded that role models should be someone well-known by the individual. Rappers would not typically meet this criteria because they are basically seen on television or in music magazines. They are not readily available to interact with youth to offer mentorship or establish personal relationships.



Each focus group also concluded that Blacks and women are depicted very negatively in rap videos. The negative images of Blacks and women as depicted in rap videos affected the participants of this study by inducing anger. Students indicated that they get angry in regard to the manner in which Blacks and women are depicted in rap videos. Several students expressed the belief that they fear that there are people who watch the videos and believe that the images are a realistic representation of Black people and women (especially Black women). Students believed the images as depicted in rap videos feed to the negative stereotypes associated with Black people and women.

In conclusion, the affect that rap music has on the lives of adolescents needs further study. The students who participated in this study purport the belief that rap music does not affect their lives in a negative manner. However, the researcher's findings suggest a need for additional study and research. This notion is premised on the belief that adolescent perspectives on rap is only one dimension of the massive discourse on rap music and its affect on the lives of adolescents.

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**APPENDIX**



511 Hunt Club Road Northwest  
Apartment 29-D  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060

April 16, 1997

Mr. Jeff Parris, Principal  
Jackson Middle School  
2200 Ontario Street  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27403

Dear Mr. Parris:

I am a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am beginning to conduct research for my dissertation entitled "Popular Perceptions of the Effects of Rap Music on American Adolescents." The methodological component of my research will entail conducting focus group interviews with approximately forty-two middle school students in grades six and eight. I have written to your superintendent and have received his permission to contact you.

The focus group interviews will not exceed fifty minutes per group. I will need three groups of sixth-graders, each group consisting of at least seven students. I will also need three groups of eighth-graders, each group consisting of at least seven students as well. I would greatly appreciate your assistance with the student selection process.

It should be further noted that the students' responses will be coded so that their anonymity is protected. I also seek permission to videotape each focus group interview. In lieu of my request to videotape each focus group, please be assured that only the students' first names will be used in the videotaping.

I would like to begin conducting my research at your school on April 23, 1997. Mrs. Sandra Lee, Director of One Step Further, has agreed to assist in facilitating this investigation.

If additional information is necessary, I may be reached at (540) 552-8925. Dr. Richard T. Graham, my committee chair, may be reached at (540) 231-4999.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Professionally,

Henry V. Johnson, Jr.  
Doctoral Student

511 Hunt Club Road Northwest  
Apartment 29-D  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060

April 16, 1997

Mrs. Jane Teague, Principal  
Grimsley High School  
801 Westover Terrace  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27408

Dear Mrs. Teague:

I am a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am beginning to conduct research for my dissertation entitled "Popular Perceptions of the Effects of Rap Music on American Adolescents." The methodological component of my research will entail conducting focus group interviews with approximately forty-two high school students in grades ten (10) and twelve (12). I have written to your superintendent and have received his permission to contact you.

The focus group interviews will not exceed fifty minutes per group. I will need three groups of sophomores, each group consisting of at least seven students. I will also need three groups of seniors, each group consisting of at least seven students as well. I would greatly appreciate your assistance with the student selection process.

It should be further noted that the students' responses will be coded so that their anonymity is protected. I also seek permission to videotape each focus group interview. In lieu of my request to videotape each focus group, please be assured that only the students' first names will be used in the videotaping.

I would like to begin conducting my research at your school on April 24, 1997. Mrs. Sandra Lee, Director of One Step Further, has agreed to assist in facilitating this investigation.

If additional information is necessary, I may be reached at (540) 552-8925. Dr. Richard T. Graham, my committee chair, may be reached at (540) 231-4999.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Professionally,

Henry V. Johnson, Jr.  
Doctoral Student

511 Hunt Club Road Northwest  
Apartment 29-D  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060

April 16, 1997

Dr. Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent  
Guilford County Schools  
1820 Carmel Road  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27406

Dear Dr. Weast:

I am a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am also beginning to conduct research for my dissertation entitled "Popular Perceptions of the Effects of Rap Music on American Adolescents." The methodological component of my research will entail conducting focus group interviews with approximately forty-two middle school students in grades six and eight. I am requesting your permission to allow me to conduct this investigation at Jackson Middle School.

I am also requesting permission to further my investigation at Grimsley High School. At Grimsley High School, I request permission to conduct focus group interviews with approximately forty-two high school students. My targeted groups are grades ten and twelve. I will need three groups of sophomores, each group consisting of at least seven students. I will also need three groups of seniors, each group consisting of at least seven students. I would greatly appreciate your support in this endeavor.

It should also be noted that the students' responses will be coded so that their anonymity is protected. I also seek permission to videotape each focus group interview. In lieu of my request to videotape each focus group, please be assured that only students' first names will be used in the videotaping.

I would like to begin conducting my research in your school district on April 23, 1997. Mrs. Sandra Lee, Director of One Step Further, has agreed to assist in facilitating this investigation.

If additional information is necessary, I may be reached at (540) 552-8925. Dr. Richard T. Graham, my committee chair, may be reached at (540) 231-4999.

Dr. Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent  
Guilford County Schools  
April 16, 1997  
Page Two

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Professionally,

Henry V. Johnson, Jr.  
Doctoral Student

cc: Dr. Melvin C. Swann, Jr.,  
Deputy Superintendent

Dr. Michael T. Renn,  
Executive Director of  
Secondary Education

Dr. Lillie M. Jones,  
Associate Superintendent  
Educational Program Services

## Standard Ethics Protocol

My name is Henry V. Johnson, Jr. I am the principal investigator for this research: "Rap Music: Popular Perceptions and Its Affect on the Lives of Adolescents Attending Jackson Middle and Grimsley High Schools of Guilford County, North Carolina."

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is highly appreciated. Please note the following as participants of this project:

- (1) Your participation in this group discussion is entirely voluntary.
- (2) You are free to withdraw from this discussion at any time.
- (3) Your names will be coded in such a manner that your anonymity is protected.

The resulting conversations from the group discussions/interviews will be deemed confidential information and will be available only to the researchers of this project. In recognition that videotaping is the principal means of capturing observations in this type of group discussion, I am requesting your permission to tape each session.

Excerpts of group discussions/interviews will be made a significant part of the final research report. Again, thank you for your willingness to participate.

Please sign this form as evidence that you are informed of the above stated agreement and your willingness to participate in this investigation.

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Guardian Signature  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Student Signature  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Date

## PERSONAL PROFILE DATA SHEET

DIRECTIONS: Please check or fill in the appropriate information for each question. Information gained will be treated as confidential.

1. You are?
  - a.  Female
  - b.  Male
2. Your age group?
  - a.  6-10
  - b.  11-15
  - c.  16-20
  - d.  21-25
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
  - a. White/Caucasian, Non-Hispanic
  - b. Black/African-American, Non-Hispanic
  - c. Hispanic/Latino
  - d. American Indian/Native American
  - e. Asian or Pacific Islander
  - f. Alaskan Native
  - g. Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you attend church or Sunday School regularly?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
5. Did/do you live in a single-parent household?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
6. Do you have a loving and supportive relationship with your parent(s)?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
  - c.  We seldom spend time together
7. Are your parents high school graduates?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
  - c.  I don't know
8. Do you plan to attend a two or four-year college?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
  - c.  Undecided

RAP MUSIC INQUIRY: Please check or fill in the appropriate information for each question. Answers will be treated as confidential.

9. Do you listen to rap music?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
10. Do you generally like rap music?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No
11. Do you hear rap in your school?
  - a.  Yes
  - b.  No

12. To what extent are you concerned about the cursing, sex, and violence depicted in rap?
  - a. \_\_\_ Extremely concerned
  - b. \_\_\_ Moderately concerned
  - c. \_\_\_ Unconcerned
13. Rap lyrics that depict women as whores and bitches should be banned.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
14. Rap lyrics that depict law enforcement officers as pigs and the enemy should be banned.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
15. Sexually explicit rap lyrics tend to demean women and other minorities.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
16. Rap music poisons the minds of young people.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
17. Rap is essentially the voice of inner-city youth responding to an unjust society.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
18. Rap music encourages young people to commit crimes.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
19. Rap is a poetic and creative form of expression.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
20. Rap turns innocent kids into gangsters.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
21. Rap could enhance classroom instruction.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
22. Rap artists are poor role models for inner-city youth.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
23. Public schools should encourage self-expression and creativity; rap music epitomizes this belief.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
24. People commit crimes, not rap music.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree
25. Rap music encourages young people to engage in unsafe sex.
  - a. \_\_\_ Agree
  - b. \_\_\_ Disagree

26. Rap provides inner-city youth with hope for a brighter future.  
a. \_\_\_Agree    b. \_\_\_Disagree
27. Rap music encourages young people to experiment with drugs.  
a. \_\_\_Agree    b. \_\_\_Disagree
28. Explicit sex and violence is representative of our culture. Rap  
doesn't promote violent or negative sexual behavior.  
a. \_\_\_Agree    b. \_\_\_Disagree
29. Additional Comments:



**VITAE**

Henry Vanderbilt Johnson, Jr.

**HENRY VANDERBILT JOHNSON, JR.**

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 Blacksburg, Virginia 24060  
 (540) 552-8925

**EDUCATION**

- Pursuant:** Doctor of Education (Curriculum and Instruction)  
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
 Blacksburg, Virginia, 1993-Present
- D.A.G.S.:** Emphasis: Educational Administration and Supervision  
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
 Blacksburg, Virginia, 1988-1989
- Ed.S.:** Emphasis: Educational Administration and Supervision  
 East Carolina University  
 Greenville, North Carolina, 1987
- I.A.Ed.:** Emphasis: Educational Administration and Supervision  
 North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University  
 Greensboro, North Carolina, 1979-1982
- I.S.Ed.:** Emphasis: Intermediate Education/Reading  
 North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University  
 Greensboro, North Carolina, 1982-1983
- .S.:** Emphasis: Intermediate Education/Math/English  
 Elizabeth City State University  
 Elizabeth City, North Carolina, 1972-1975

**EXPERIENCE**

- ADMINISTRATIVE:** Graduate Assistant  
 Supervisor of Student Teachers
- Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
 Blacksburg, Virginia
- Duties included developing a working and supportive relationship between student teachers and cooperating teachers. Mentoring student teachers and serving as a liaison between Virginia Polytechnic Institute - College of Education - and Roanoke City Schools, Roanoke, Virginia, 1993-1994.

HENRY VANDERBILT JOHNSON, JR.  
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### **Adjunct Professor**

Elizabeth City State University  
Elizabeth City, North Carolina

Taught elementary reading methods course to undergraduate students. Worked with junior and senior education majors for NTE preparation, Summer 1994.

### **Assistant Superintendent Curriculum and Instructional Personnel**

Tarboro City Schools  
Tarboro, North Carolina

Responsible for the administration, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum and instructional programs. Other duties include the interpretation of the curriculum and its philosophy to the Board, the administration, the staff, and the general public. Collaborating with the K-12 Directors of Instruction and with building principals to improve individual staff competencies. Support the superintendent in his overall administrative efforts, interpret his ideas and decisions to staff and public; inform superintendent of pertinent division developments and events. Represent superintendent in superintendent's absence, 1990-1993.

### **Instructional Supervisor**

Hyde County Schools  
Swan Quarter, North Carolina

Responsible for administering the educational program at the elementary and secondary level in accordance with Board policies and administrative rules and regulations as directed by the superintendent and to provide leadership in the development and improvement of education. Supervised and coordinated county-wide testing. Assisted the superintendent in the coordination of county-wide policies and their implementation. Provided assistance in identifying staff development needs of teachers and principals. Served as contact person for various divisions of the State Department of Public Instruction such as Division of Accreditation/Planning, Division of Cultural Arts, etc., 1982-1990.

HENRY VANDERBILT JOHNSON, JR.  
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**Graduate Assistant**

College of Education Postgraduate Studies  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Blacksburg, Virginia

Duties included evaluation of transcripts, certification analysis/advisement, preparing and maintaining data gathering efforts, reviewing and revising advisors' manuals, reviewing and revising supervisors' handbooks, and developing professional packets for new postgraduate students, 1988-1989.

**Minority Affairs**

Division of Curriculum and Instruction  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Blacksburg, Virginia

Duties included providing leadership, guidance, instruction, and mentorship for minority undergraduate students who plan to enter graduate school in the University of Virginia system, Summer Program, 1988.

**TEACHING:**

**Teacher**

Mattamuskeet School  
Swan Quarter, North Carolina

Taught language arts, math, and science in grades seven and eight, 1975-1982.

**Graduate Assistant/Lecturer**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Blacksburg, Virginia

Taught undergraduate minority students about the need to network and project a positive self-image. Lectures were centered on building self-esteem and how to cope as a minority at major universities.

**AWARDS AND HONORS**

195 Certificate of Appreciation - Governor George Allan, State of Virginia

HENRY VANDERBILT JOHNSON, JR.  
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- 1990 O.A. Peay - Hyde County Black Achievement Award
- 1990 North Carolina Rural Leaders Program Award
- 1989 Ambassador of Goodwill Award - Black Graduate Students Association  
(Virginia Tech)
- 1986 Alumni Service Award - O.A. Peay Hyde County Alumni Association
- 1985 The Order of the Long Leaf Pine - Former Governor James B.  
Hunt, Jr.
- 984 Certificate of Appreciation - Governor James Martin
- 983 Outstanding Young Educational Administrator Award - Hyde County  
NAACP Chapter
- 977 Outstanding Young Educator of the Year Award - Hyde County Alumni  
Association

#### MEMBERSHIPS

NC-ASCD (North Carolina Association of Supervision and Curriculum  
Development)  
NCAE (North Carolina Association of Educators)  
Phi Delta Kappa Fraternity, Inc., East Carolina University  
AASA (American Association School Administrators)  
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Elizabeth City State University  
Masonic Lodge, Gratitude Lodge #137, Engelhard, North Carolina  
Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Engelhard, North Carolina  
The Order of the Long Leaf Pine  
Tarboro City Schools Middle Schools Task Force  
Eastern Star Baptist Church - Education Committee Member  
Healthy Mothers and Children Council - Education Committee Member

#### OFFICES HELD

Finance Manager, Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, 1982  
President, Local NCAE Chapter, 1980-1982  
Chairperson, Personnel Recruitment, Hyde Rural Health, 1979-1981  
Board of Directors, Mattamuskeet Medical Center, Inc., 1983-1984  
Board of Directors, WHYC Radio Station, 1983-1986  
Secretary East Carolina University Minority Recruitment Program,  
1983-1986