THE EFFECT OF UNDERGROUND RAP ON RAPPERS INDENTITIES

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Department of Sociology
Abstract

of

THE EFFECT OF UNDERGROUND RAP ON RAPPERS IDENTITIES

by

Zaki Syed

Rap and hip-hop provide a forum for marginalized populations to express and create their own unique identity. To further understand rap and the concept of identity, two local hip-hop groups were examined and observed for a period of three months. One of two hip-hop groups represented consisted of members that resided in the inner city and were practicing Muslims. While, the other group consisted of Caucasian middle class youth. Though they differed drastically, both groups to a certain extent were marginalized from their surrounding communities. To help guide the research sociological theories from two prominent sociologists, Randall Collins and W.E. B. Dubois, were employed. Randall Collin’s theory of Interactional Ritual Chains helped to define how the rappers developed group identity and solidarity through group rituals. This solidified group identity caused conflict with the norms and values of the rappers immediate surroundings.

The response to marginalization that occurred after the group identity of the rappers was solidified was explained through W.E.B. Dubois theory of Double Consciousness, which details the burden of balancing and having multiple/dual identities. Rap became an outlet for members of both hip-hop groups to celebrate and exemplify
their identity in a positive way. While, also serving as a coping mechanism in response to the development of a Double Consciousness.

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Cid Martinez, PhD.

_____________________
Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past forty years, rap and hip-hop has gone from its humble and relatively unknown beginnings in South Bronx, New York to infiltrating numerous youth subcultures on an international and national level. Hip-Hop and Music researcher Levine (2008) states that hip-hop and rap have emerged as the world’s favorite youth subculture. Rap, the act of chanting or rhyming rhythmic patterns over a beat, is now being witnessed not only in various communities and locales in the U.S., but in other countries as well (Atkins 2006). Rappers are increasingly being “discovered” and rap music is becoming more prevalent in countries such as Japan, Morocco, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Egypt (Levine 2008). Rap has been found in unexpected places, from favelas of Sao Paulo all the way to high rises in Tokyo (Levine 2008).

Some of these countries, communities, and locations are so demographically, socioeconomically, and racially different than the South Bronx, where rap and hip-hop originated (Harkness 2012). This stark disparity has made many sociologists, scholars, and thinkers question what elements of rap have enabled it to be so popular amongst youth of such diverse backgrounds (Chang 2005). Chang has suggested that the fact that rap is easily “formulated” from a beat and simple rhymes has allowed it to spread so rapidly (Chang 2005). Rap has typically (not always) consisted of a telling a message/narrative about one’s life, social surroundings, and day-to-day experiences (Chang 2005). Many of the original founders of rap, along with the majority of rappers today, focus upon the “realness” and authenticity of their personal experiences in their
lyrics (Ogbar 2007). As a result, commercial and mainstream rap (rap accessible to huge numbers of the general public) has been dominated by themes, such as violence, misogyny, homophobia, and promiscuity (Ogbar 2007).

Politicians, media, and scholars have taken these disturbing themes seriously as a reflection of the lives of rappers (Ogbar 2007). As such, researchers and sociologists have conducted scholarly work on the effect of hip-hop on dominant cultural values and the construction of one’s identity, focusing on aspects of rap such as realism, its worldwide popularity, and the negative anti-social values present in commercial hip-hop (Ogbar 2007). For example, renowned sociologists Bell Hooks (1994) and Angela Davis (1992) have had conversations with commercial rapper Ice Cube’s view on politics and feminism.

However, some underground rappers (rappers that are not displayed on radios or prominent music channels, or owned by record companies) and sociologists have contended that commercial rappers (those who are displayed in radio stations, the popular market, and employed by internationally well known corporations such as Sony and Warner Bros) have exploited rap’s “claim of realness.” These underground rappers allege that commercial rappers pretend to have a certain image in order to boost record sales (Morgan 2009). Despite this, other sociologists claim that gangsta and commercial rappers are simply relaying themes that have been a part of their experiences and lives, especially those that are from the inner city (Morgan 2009).

Since, rapping is an art form in which rappers are expected to be truthful in their lyrics when discussing issues in regards to their community, values, and personal lives;
sociologists have begun to study rap as a means of understanding rappers' identities within their respective communities. Using rap as a means to study identity, has led to various sociological viewpoints in literature on the best way to analyze rap lyrics and the lifestyle of rappers in order to explain the shaping of identity in relation to cultural norms and values. Some sociologists have examined mainstream/commercial rap lyrics and rappers, especially those that fall under the subgenre of “gangsta rap,” as a means of exploring and explaining formation of identity amongst a street subculture in inner city African-American males (Kubrin 2005). Other sociologists believe that a more effective way of explaining identity formation/maintenance and cultural norms/values of inner city youth and youth of various other backgrounds is through the examination of non-commercialized underground hip-hop (Harkness 2012).

My initial tendency is to agree with the sociologists who state that underground hip-hop is a better representation of the experiences of rappers as a whole, as it has not been commercialized to fit a certain role. Moreover, as mentioned above, the fact that there are numerous rappers in multiples regions means that their realities and experiences cannot be generalized or placed into one group. Therefore, I believe that conducting research on underground rappers from different regions and backgrounds, and specifically attributing this to the shaping of underground rappers’ identities in relation to cultural norms and values to that specific region, is a more effective way to conduct research. In the literature review, I will go into greater detail as to why researching underground hip-hop and rap is a more effective means of conducting research.
In order to contribute to the viewpoint that underground rap is a more authentic means of conducting research, I will be conducting research on two underground rap groups in Northern California. One underground rap group consists primarily of inner city Muslims, while the other rap group consists primarily of white, suburban, middle class Christian’s. By comparing these virtually two different groups, I hope to show how underground rap is oftentimes a more realistic representation of rappers’ backgrounds.

My research question is: How are underground rappers’ identities defined and embodied in response to the mainstream rap/hip-hop community?

To guide my research I will be using two theories the Interactional Ritual Chain Theory and the theory of Double Consciousness. The Interactional Ritual Chain Theory is a theory developed by Randall Collins that synthesizes the theories developed by prominent sociologists Durkheim and Goffman (Collins 2004). Collin’s argues that acts such as sex, smoking, the arranging of social status, and every aspect of our social lives are governed by Interaction Rituals (Collins 2004). These Interaction Rituals create symbols of group membership, produce or deplete emotional energy from individuals, and create feelings of group solidarity. It is through the performance of interaction rituals that individuals and identity of the group is enacted (Collins 2004). This theory will be applied to underground rappers to see how the ritual of rap is performed and how group solidarity and identity is performed/attained.

The second theory I will be using to guide my research will the theory of Double Consciousness. Double Consciousness is a theory developed by W.E.B. Dubois that was used to describe the experience of those that are marginalized by mainstream hegemonic
society (Dubois 1903). In response to being shut out of mainstream society, the marginalized develop a psychological self-defense mechanism in which they develop a “twoness” or dual identities in which they identity their personal self (Dubois 1903). One self represented the identity that consisted of preconceived stereotypes/beliefs that have been assigned to the marginalized through society (Dubois 1903). The other self consists of ones internal personal or group collective identity that is closer to one’s actual reality (Dubois 1903). Those that are dealing with Double Consciousness are under a permanent veil or “looking glass” in which their personal identities are shaped by how the larger societies view them (Dubois 1903). While, primarily designed to talk about the marginalization of African Americans in American society, Double Consciousness is now used to apply to any group of people that has been marginalized from a larger group (Levine 2006). I will be applying the theory of Double Consciousness to underground rappers who claim to have been marginalized by the greater hip-hop/rap community. I will be using the theory of Double Consciousness to study the two groups of underground rappers as I seek to understand their identity relations in relation to mainstream hip-hop.

My belief is that after interviewing both separate hip-hop groups that act/performance of rap will be regarded as an ritual, and out of that ritual emotional energy(negative or positive) will emerge resulting in an set of symbols and an group identity for participants involved. The group identity that comes as a result of the ritual of rap will then create dual identities that will be a result of a direct clash with mainstream hegemonic hip-hop rap in terms of values, issue discussed, and style of music. I also believe that both groups will reveal distinct/different identities based on
their differences in social class/demographics, thereby adding to the theory that underground rap is more effective means of studying hip-hop as underground rap is based around the community; whereas mainstream hip-hop is designed to market to large spectrum of the American public.

This study is not meant to explain identity-relations to music and community of all underground rappers; rather, it is meant as a way to add to the existing research on underground hip-hop, by analyzing a segment of the underground rap population in Northern California. Also, since this study is only conducted in Northern California, it cannot accurately represent the motivations, incentive, and lifestyles of numerous other underground rappers whose motivations, incentives, and lifestyle choices may vary according to demographics, popularity of rap in the area, and ethnic or racial backgrounds.

Roots/Origin of Hip-Hop:

In order to understand the impact of the research that I am planning on conducting, it is important to reader have some understanding of hip-hop, rap and its history. This is a brief history; while it might not encompass all of the elements, artists, and historical moments of rap, it is a sufficient guide to gain a basic understanding of rap and hip-hop.

The roots of hip-hop can be traced to inner city Puerto Rican and African-American youth in 1970’s South Bronx, New York (Chang 2005). Historians have described South Bronx in this time period as a crime ridden and poverty-stricken place. Some hip-hop scholars suggest that the poverty of the Bronx directly contributed to the
creation of the four elements of hip-hop – beat boxing, rapping or MCing, break dancing, and graffiti (Keyes 2002). Chang (2005) claims that hip-hop developed as a way for disenfranchised youth to have fun and create music in a relatively cheap and inexpensive way. Since access to instruments like guitars and pianos was limited for inner city youths, these children had to learn to improvise and create their own music (Ogbar 2007). This creativity led to a wide array of art forms. Beat boxing, making musical sounds with one's mouth, Chanting poems over a beat evolved into what is now known as rapping or MC’ing (Ogbar 2007). Mixing old records on a turntable become known as DJing. Break dancing emerged as a form of moving one’s body, dancing, and twisting in a open place, requiring no equipment (Keyes 2002).

All of these skills would then be showcased at house parties, initially held in abandoned buildings of the Bronx (Ogbar 2007). Another art form that became extremely famous during this time was graffiti writing. Youths would use spray paint cans to write their names and draw pictures, cartoons and other creative art on subways, walls, and buildings (Ogbar 2007). Though illegal, it was extremely cheap and often used as a way of advertising and gaining respect in a society where many of the youth felt marginalized (Keyes 2002). As a couple of anonymous graffiti artists mentioned, their socioeconomic status ensured that they might not ever have had the ability to buy advertisements that displayed their struggles, adversity, and frustration from being marginalized from hegemonic America (Chang 2005). Graffiti was a method through which they could ensure that their names, beliefs, and values were well known throughout the city (Keyes 2002). In an interview with Chang(2005) Hip-hop pioneer Krs-One mentioned that in
order to be well respected in community during the early days of hip-hop one had to be proficient in all four elements of hip-hop. This soon changed, however, as practitioners of hip-hop became more specialized in their specific areas (Keyes 2002).

During the late seventies and early eighties, the elements of hip-hop soon became symbolically separated from each other in the eyes of the public (Krims 2000). Rap soon became commercialized, while graffiti, on the opposite end of the spectrum, was criminalized (Krims 2000). In the 1980’s, Mayor Koch led a campaign to rid New York City of graffiti, increasing harsh penalties for graffiti writers and installing razor wire fences near subway stops so that graffiti artists would not be able graffiti the subway (Gladwell 2000). Koch’s stance against graffiti was profiled in the movie Style Wars, in which the governor speaks out on his stance against graffiti (Chang 2005) Graffiti artists were often depicted by law enforcement as in the same category as violent criminals (Chang 2005). Graffiti artists were seen as nuisance, while business executives and CEO saw rap as something that could return a profit if marketed to the general public (Morgan 2009).

The first commercial rap song was called Sugar Hills Rapper Delight (1979). While not considered extremely degrading to the art form, it was a watered down version of original rap (Bowser 2012). In those days, rap songs were designed for parties and long events and songs could range anywhere from 15-30 minutes time frames (Bowser 2012). Rapper’s Delight was cut down into four minutes to match the commercial recording time frame (Bowser 2012). Also, the song Rapper Delight took out the role of the DJ/Beat Boxer, who would typically make beats and mix-up tempos according to the
rapper pace, as the DJ supplemented the rapper using industry pre-recorded beats (Bowser 2012).

_Rap_

As the different elements of hip-hop started to gradually drift away from each other, rap started gain popularity in more commercial avenues (Quinn 2005). The mid to late eighties were characterized by socially conscious rap that encouraged positive values of disadvantaged people by rappers, such as Africa Bambata and Chuck D (Quinn 2005). However, the socially conscious era of rap was short lived. The nineties saw an emergence of a form of a more aggressive and masculine driven form of rap, known as gangsta rap (Watkins 2004). This dominated mainstream and commercial rap market for nearly a decade (Quinn 2005). The emergence of Gangsta Rap was greatly marked by a rap group known as N.W.A., with singles such as “Straight out of Compton” or “F*** the Police” (Quinn 2005). This new style of rap started a great deal of controversy amongst hegemonic Americans, as it glorified gangster lifestyle and various other elements of a criminal subculture, such as the refusal to snitch (cooperate with authorities) (Krims 2000).

From the early 2000s until recently, the commercial rap market started to incorporate other styles and forms of rap music as well (Chang 2005). This was characterized by the popularity and acceptance of white rapper Eminem into mainstream rap circles (Bowser 2012). A few years earlier, Eminem would not have been accepted or even allowed into mainstream rap from insiders, due strictly to the restriction that gangsta rap was supposed to represent the experiences of inner city African-American youth.
While Eminem might have had legitimate experiences worthy of rap, a white rapper would not have been considered authentic or black enough to listeners to create an effective commercial market (Bowser 2012).

Eminem’s acceptance into the mainstream rap industry led to the rappers of different ethnicities and non-traditional background breaking into the rap industry. For example, Kayne West, who often portrayed the image of college school prep, became more popular in the late 2000s (Bowser 2012; Dyson 2007). Yet, despite the fact that commercial rap has incorporated various identities and different lifestyles as compared to the 90s, the majority of commercial rap music is still dominated by what some would consider violent or over sexualized themes (Quinn 2005).

**Definition of Underground Rap**

As my research will focus on underground rap, it is also important to have an understanding of the definition of underground rap.

Underground rap is defined as any and all rap that falls outside of the commercialized mainstream venues (1998). It consists of rap that is typically not played on prominent radio stations or music television channels such as MTV or BET, and that is not under contract to corporate funded record labels (Morgan 2009). Most underground rappers are usually not well known on a global or national level in same way that many mainstream rappers are (Morgan 2009). Underground rap has usually been characterized by socially and politically conscious themes. This can be partially attributed to the fact that major record companies rarely sign acts that are socially conscious, as socially conscious raps are not thought to be big money makers (Morgan 2009).
That does not mean that there are underground rappers that don’t make profanity filled and morally ambiguous songs or that no commercial rappers are socially conscious (Ogbar 2007). Rather, this is a simple observation of the trends (Ogbar 2007). It should be noted that there are also numerous underground rappers who don’t embody socially conscious themes, and actually rap about the same subject matter as commercial rappers. The only reason these rappers remain underground is because they have not been lucky enough to get signed by a major record label (Morgan 2009). After all, some of the mainstream and commercial rapper were initially underground rappers (Morgan 2009). Likewise, many former commercial rappers have gravitated towards underground rap as their relevance in the commercialized market diminishes (Morgan 2009).

The majority of rap pioneers were initially underground rappers. This is because in the late seventies and early eighties, with the exception of the Sugar Hill gang, very few rappers had gained national prominences. At this point in time, hip-hop was still a relatively new movement (Chang 2005). Therefore, underground rappers have always existed and will continue, as there are always people who have been rejected or cannot enter the mainstream (Chang 2005). Ironically, in recent years the huge commercialization and exposure of rap has led to more underground rappers who might be inspired by and enjoy the art forms of mainstream rap (Atkins 2008). However, as they learn more about rap, they may not approve of message or want to rap about the themes present in commercial hip-hop (Levine 2008).
Chapter 2

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

In the literature review, I will attempt to demonstrate why researching underground rap is a more legitimate means of analyzing rapper’s identity in relation to the environment. By doing this, I will lend credibility to my research’s focus on two groups of underground rappers in Northern California from different socio-economical and racial backgrounds in an attempt to explain identity formation in relation to one’s environment. Since the Interaction Ritual Chains Theory and Double Consciousness theory will be used to guide my research on interpreting the development of underground rappers identity I will also be explaining both theories in the literature review in detail.

Gangsta and Commercial Rap

Amongst the numerous sociologist’s that have conducted studies on commercialized rap and its relation to identity formation of inner city African-American males, Charis Kubrin is the most well known. Kubrin (2005) conducted a study in which she examined, coded, and analyzed the lyrics of 403 rap songs. Kubrin (2005) only looked at songs from albums that had gone platinum and sold over 1,000,000 million copies, using the justification that this volume of copies sold would indicate that the albums had reached a huge segment of the population. Kubrin chose to look at rap songs from time period of 1992 to 2000, during time period in which gangsta rap themes dominated the majority of rap sales (2005).

However, Kubrin did not solely focus at gangsta rap albums, claiming that “gangsta rappers” might mix genres and therefore studied all rap music from that time
period (2005). Kubrin wanted to closely examine gangsta rap because she felt it embodied themes of violence, resistant to victimization, refusal to cooperate with authorities, developing a reputation of violence, and numerous other norms that have been believed to make up the struggles of inner city youth (2005). Gangsta rap is considered to be a by product of gang wars of South Central and is defined as rap music that glorifies blacks as criminals, prostitutes, pimps, and gangsters (Perkins 1996). Kubrin and some other scholars have stated (incorrectly) that the majority of pioneers of gangsta rap were gang members themselves, and that gangsta rap therefore reflects gang life from a criminal’s perspective and can be used effectively to analyze street code and subculture (2005; Krims 2000). Upon conducting her study, Kubrin found themes in the lyrics of establishing a social violent identity, portraying violence as social control, retaliation, resistance to victimization, responding to challenges and a refusal to cooperate with authorities (2005). Kubrin then attributed these themes to the experiences of inner city African-American males, implying that rappers identities were shaped by their experiences, and those identities were then displayed in their songs and lyrics.

To a certain extent, Kubrin and other scholars who have researched rap music are accurate in the assertion that mainstream rap lyrics and commercial rap artists embody the identity they project of a street culture. Numerous sociological literature and ethnographies of the street code have uncovered values and lifestyle very similar to the ones projected in gangsta rap (Krivo and Peterson 1996). For example, the majority of the themes of street culture that Kubrin (2005) finds through the analysis of rap lyrics such as responding to challenges, payback, and retaliation are very similar to the themes
discovered in Elijah Anderson’s ethnography on the street code (1999). In Anderson’s (1999) ethnography, he explains how the marginalization of African-American males and inner city youth from mainstream society leads to an oppositional culture whose values greatly conflict with that of mainstream. In this culture, survival and means of gaining status are all intricately tied to the creation of a violent identity. It is readily apparent that the similarities in themes discovered in the research point to the relevance of gangsta rap and the code of the streets. Still, it is important to note that despite the similarities, simply using the themes found in gangsta and commercial rap as a way of explaining the experiences of inner city youth and the construction of a rapper’s identity in relation to those experiences can potentially lead to research that is misleading (Dyson 2007).

One reason that using gangsta and commercial rap to explain the experience of inner city youth and construction of identity is misleading is that the majority of rappers are not who they claim to be (Dyson 2007). A few of the pioneers, such as Ice T and Snoop Dogg, have had affiliations with street gangs through neighborhood and familial connections (Chang 2005). Still, contrary to popular belief, the bulk of pioneers and even the current practitioners of gangsta rap music were not and are not actual gang member (Chang 2005). In fact, other than a few minor indiscretions with the law, the bulk of commercial rappers have not had any serious felony offenses or contact with law enforcement, courts, or the legal system prior to becoming famous (Quinn 2005).

Hip-hop mogul and gangsta rap pioneer Dr. Dre of the infamous group N.W.A was so distant from the gangsta and party lifestyle that he had no criminal record (not even a misdemeanor), used to dance in disco’s adorned in tight fitting clothes and
lipstick, and had not even smoked marijuana (what is considered by many to low-level and relatively harmless drug) prior to becoming a successful rapper (Chang 2005). This viewpoint is expressed in Dr. Dre’s earlier rap song with N.W.A’s “Express Yourself,” in which he states “I don’t smoke cess [slang for marijuana] cause it’s known to cause a brother brain damage, and brain damage on the mic don’t manage” (Quinn 2005: 105). The fact that Dr. Dre, one of the leading pioneers of gangsta rap, had not even tried marijuana during a time period in which gangsta rappers were supposedly bragging about substance abuse (not just marijuana) and violent behavior demonstrates a huge disconnect between what rappers claim in their songs and their actual behavior.

Ironically, Dr. Dre in his later years would not only indulge in marijuana, but also create an entire album dedicated to it labeled the “Chronic” (slang for weed) (Chang 2005). More recently, in the last couple of years gangsta rapper Rick Ross (who named himself after major LA drug distributor Freeway Ricky Ross) was discovered to be a former correctional officer when pictures of Ross in a Correctional Officer uniform circulated the Internet (Morgan 2009). Ross, who rapped about selling drugs, shootouts, and living a criminal lifestyle, eventually admitted to being a law enforcement officer (Morgan 2009). Given the stringent background checks in law enforcement, it is very unlikely that if Ross lived a so-called gangster lifestyle since his early teens, as he alleges to have done so in his songs. After all, that type of lifestyle would have made it difficult to be given security clearance to work in a prison. Dr. Dre and Ross are two of the numerous examples of gangster rappers who don’t live up to the lifestyles they claim in their songs.
When Quinn (2005) was conducting research and reviewing literature on gangsta rap, she discovered that due to the high volume of mainstream rappers pretending or claiming to be gangsters, commercial rappers have actually started to be viewed with disdain amongst some actual criminals elements in the inner city. Mainstream rappers were commonly referred to in street subculture as studio gangstas, meaning that the only time they would commit crimes or engage in criminal like behavior is when they were in studio lying about it (Quinn 2005). The term studio gangsta, was popularized in rapper Eazy E’s music video “Real Mutha**** G’s,” in which he called mainstream rapper’s studio gangstas and fakes for trying to portray an image they did not live up to (Quinn 2005). Eazy E was one of the few gangster rappers that might have actually lived up to the stereotypical lifestyle he portrayed; even his rise to stardom occurred due to the record label he acquired through funds gathered through his drug dealing lifestyle (Quinn 2005). Ironically, Eazy E was more gangster than rapper, and it has been documented that Eazy E did not know how to rap or even write lyrics in general. Rather, he relied heavily on other so called “studio gangstas” to write lyrics for him(Quinn 2005). The paradox of the situation presented itself in such a way that rappers were pretending to be gangsters, and gangsters were pretending to be rappers.

Some gangsta and commercial rappers have even gone on air in interviews to state that they are merely playing a role in their songs, similar to how an actor plays a role in a movie (Quinn 2005). Some of these gangster and commercial rappers have also complained that their lyrics and antics, which are created for an entertainment effect, are often taken too literally and as reality of the rapper’s own experience (Dyson 2007).
These rappers protest that other comedians, actors, entertainers, and musicians of other genres are often not held to the same standards (Dyson 2007).

The initial emphasis and propaganda by initial pioneers of hip-hop centered around the themes of “authenticity and realness” has left many mainstream rap listeners and the media unable to distinguish between the difference between reality and fiction (Dyson 2007). Dyson (2007) states that pop musicians and artists from other genres (that are not hip hop related) are not expected by listeners to lead a lifestyle or embody ideals that center around the topics/themes they sing about. Dyson (2007) uses the example of the pop star Madonna, who has portrayed numerous phases and different themes throughout her lifestyle and in her songs such as the experience of being a virgin, a material girl in the pursuit of wealth, a post-religious vagabond, without facing any consequences of being expected to reenact those themes in real life. No one expects Madonna to be a virgin, simply because she sings about it in a song, or be an extremely selfish, money-grubbing women despite the fact that she is portrayed as such in her material girl song (Dyson 2007). Another example that Dyson (2007) uses to illustrate his point is that of Frank Sinatra, who had alleged affiliations and connections to mob, yet was not expected to be singing about what a crazy mafioso he was.

One possible explanation as to why gangster rappers and commercial rappers lyrics are taken so seriously and viewed as authentic representations of the rapper’s lifestyle is the racial and socioeconomic status of their audience (Bowser 2012). Researchers have claimed that, regardless of the type of rap music, over 50 percent of the market consists of white men and women between the ages of 18 to 29 (Rose, 1994;
Watkins 2005). One source points out that the likelihood of being a rap listener is greater if one is white and in the suburbs (Werner 1998).

In order to understand and uncover what the demographics of mainstream rap listeners were, Bowser (2012) analyzed data questions from the GSS and CPS (Current Population Survey). When analyzing the GSS, Bowser (2012) looked at a 1993 survey, which asked respondent questions on their musical preferences. Eight percent of whites claimed to “like rap very much,” while only 2.3 percent of white respondents claimed to “like rap very much.” Bowser (2012) claimed that these percentages do not mean that more blacks than whites numerically listen to rap music; rather, the study actually proves the opposite. Bowser (2012) state that since Caucasians outnumber African-Americans nationally on a scale of 10-1, that the white 2.3 percent represents more people in the general population than the black 8.2 percent. Bowser (2012) claimed that the CPS on public arts participation showed that even though there were smaller proportions of white listeners as compared to black listeners of rap music, blacks listeners were still numerically outnumbered compared to white listeners. This suggests that the majority of listeners of mainstream rap music are not black. Therefore, it would be logical to assume that majority of rap music purchasers are not black either.

Bowser (2012) also asserted that research and similar tests in the GSS have showed that whites have more annual household income. Therefore, they probably have considerably more money to spend on entertainment and are more likely to spend it on the purchasing of rap albums. Bowser’s (2012) research show that Kubrin’s (2005) research of albums that went platinum (that sold 1,000,000 million copies) and other
research on mainstream rap as a way of explaining the values of inner city black youth is misleading. The majority of customers who buy the album are more likely to be white, with disposable income to spend on entertainment (Bowser 2012). The majority of commercial rappers is aware of this phenomenon, and has crafted their identities in such a way to please white, middle class audiences (Ogbar 2007). However, due to the probability that whites are more likely to buy commercial rap albums, the analysis of gangsta and commercial rap cannot be used effectively to explain the trend of consumerism and values of white America.

Bowser (2012) claims that since mainstream rap is highly competitive, gangsta rappers in have tried to convince white audiences of the authenticity of their experience to sell more records. Since the majority of white youth have virtually no experience with inner city youth or the subculture, they have no real means of distinguishing the authenticity of the message or one claim over another (Bowser 2012). Werner (1998) also stated that white listeners who have had very little contact with African-Americans have very little reason to question the over the top assertions of rappers, even when the lyrics and representation of authenticity is bordering on the line of extreme absurdity and ridiculousness.

However, when it comes to white rappers, white audiences are more likely to question the authenticity of the rappers claims. For example, when white middle class rapper Vanilla Ice claimed to be from the hood and living in a gang-infested neighborhood, his authenticity was immediately questions and he was exposed to the public as a fraud, losing considerable sales (Bowser 2012). However, when Rick Ross
was discovered to be a correctional officer, he still managed to continue to sell records (Morgan 2009). This suggests that since white people have actual interactions with other white people, they are more likely to questions claims of authenticity of street culture for other whites. With something they are less familiar with, they are less likely to call into question the veracity of the statement.

It is not that the representations of street code and aggressiveness in gangsta rap examined by Kubrin (2005) in the inner city don’t exist. Rather, the portrayal of these representations that make the essence of gangsta rap unrealistic. The majority of gangsta rap songs paint the ghetto as a romanticized place, filled with pretty women, fancy cars, clothes, jewelry, and nonstop parties, in which rappers can prove their manhood against condescending rivals (Chang 2005). This tendency can be witnessed through multiple gangsta music videos, such as Snoop Dogg’s “Juice and Jin,” Dre Dre’s “Dre Day,” Rick Ross’s “Pushing it to the Limit,” and many more (Quinn 2005). Bowser (2012) argues that if commercial rap music were being marketed to mostly African-American inner city youth, then there would be less emphasis on romanticizing the ghetto. People who are actually from the ghetto would know the harsh realities of inner city life, and would not fall prey to these romanticized portrayals.

Dyson (2012) agrees with Bowser, stating that:

“The hip hop notion that if you ain’t poor and black you ain’t authentic may have been generated by folk outside of the ghetto. A lot of people in the ghetto are trying to get the hell up out of there. They don’t want to romanticize it” (2012:11).
Gangsta or commercial rap cannot be adequately used to describe the identity of rappers or even their relation to the community. The research has shown that gangsta and commercial rap is a highly lucrative business based partially on the truth. Rappers that are not gangsters themselves claim to be in an effort to target white audiences that are not educated about the ways of the inner city in an effort to sell records (Quinn 2005). As mentioned before, the elements of the street code portrayed in gangsta music do exist, but not in such an overly romantic manner. It is their inaccurate portrayal that makes the accuracy of most rappers questionable.

*The representation of Underground Rap in Regards to rapper’s Identity*

By definition an Underground rapper’s music is not owned or funded by any corporate or commercial entities (Morgan 2009). This fact alone is crucial in the argument as to why Underground rappers are more authentic representations and reflections of ones identity (Charnas 2010). Without any corporate backing, the underground rappers are in a sense free to rap about themes and subject matters of their choosing (Charnas 2010). However, if the underground rap artist want to make any substantial money, they will most likely have to receive sponsorship from an corporate sponsored record label; which will in turn essentially force the rapper to center their raps around commercially successful, but negative themes like crime, gangs, womanizing violence etc…(Charnas 2010). The chances of an underground rapper becoming financially successful on their own are very slim.

In Charnas (2010) research on the process and business of hip-hop music he discovered that only most of the top media corporations were adequately equipped to
promote rap albums on a national, international, or even statewide level. Charnas (2010) discovered that almost every successful album had sponsorship by a corporation. That is because corporations are the only financial entities that can obtain millions of dollars in bank loans to promote talent, advertise, burn copies of CD and distribute them in stores and online (Charnas 2010). Also, corporations usually come with entire teams of graphic designers, accountants, lawyers, market executives that are all working together to promote a rappers album (Charnas 2010). Given the huge financial disadvantages and lack of personnel, it would be highly unlikely that one underground rapper or even a group of Underground rappers would be able to sell CD’s in the same amount as corporate sponsored rappers.

That is not to say that there aren’t underground rappers who haven’t managed to become successful enough to make a modest living comparable to a school teacher, independently without the help of major record labels (Morgan 2009). However, the majority of underground rappers don’t generate enough income from their songs to even lead the lifestyle of someone from a lower middle class income bracket (Morgan 2009). In some case underground rappers actually lose money because of all the costs that go into production, without any revenue coming back to the artist (Harkness 2012). Given the evidence presented, it would be logical to assume that most Underground rappers do not pursue music for it’s financial incentives (Harkness 2012). Bowser (2012) states that because the majority of underground rappers cannot expect to benefit from financial incentives, their main reasons for pursuing the music are for reasons of artistic expression of oneself and creativity. There are numerous instances of underground artists that have
started to rise in prominence only to turn offers from corporate-sponsored record label (Bowser 2012). For many underground artists signing with a corporate-sponsored record label would force one to compromise their identity and values. Bowser (2012), interviewed countless local Bay Area underground artists that were given or offered contracts with corporate-sponsored record labels. Bowser (2012) reported that almost all of the underground rappers that were offered record contracts were told to make their lyrics more aggressive and violent. What surprised Bowser (2012) is that almost all of the underground rappers that were offered these record deals turned them down claiming that accepting the offer would compromise their ethics. Bowser (2012) admiration of Bay Area underground rappers (esp. those that were unemployed or poverty stricken) was transparent:

“ What amazes me is that many artist who are offered this opportunity choose to reject it. For them, agreeing to this condition would violate their art, their principles, and the communities they reflect and represent. They refuse to sell out in the age of money is everything…..turning down the possibility of making big money in order to stay true to the art and themselves, and this is the most unappreciated and least recognized issue in Hip Hop today ” (Bowser 2012:79).

Numerous ethnographies and research have also pointed to this trend amongst underground rappers to reject corporate sponsorship in the name of preserving authentic hip-hop identity (Morgan 2009; Harness2012; Watkins 2004).

As one can see that many underground rappers refuse to sign a record deal with a corporate sponsor so that they don’t have to fit into a commercialized format and face restrictions or possible censorship. Without corporate restrictions the underground rapper has the ability to freely express themselves and embody their authentic identity through
their lyrics. Since commercial rappers are beholden to corporations, they were never able to get the same amount of expression of freedom as underground rappers. Therefore, commercial rappers are the least likely to be authentic.

Even though, underground rappers are not beholden to corporations, they are in many ways shaped by the community in which they reside and perform in (Bowser 2012). Since, underground rappers usually consist of local MC’s who are not gaining widespread national fame or receiving financial incentives, they must rely on local audiences for support and to increase audience size (Bowser 2012). Many times local audience’s will consist of friend, relatives, and schoolmates (Bowser 2012). In order to ensure success amongst local audiences underground rappers need to be sure to match the socioeconomical, demographic, religious views of their audience not just through lyrics, but through their appearance as well (Bowser 2012).

For example, in Harkness (2012) ethnographic and observational study of the Chicago underground he discovered that underground rap scene in the area was dominated by African Americans and Latinos males of a low socioeconomic status in the inner city. Harkness(2012) research uncovered that rappers that did not fit the dominant category in Chicago underground hip hop scene such as females, whites, suburbanites, homosexuals etc… were shown little to no acceptance, respect or a following amongst the underground crowd. However, when Bennet(1999) conducted a study on white underground rappers in Northeast England, he discovered that being white or suburban had relatively little to no negative impact on likability factor amongst local audiences. Bennet (1999) attributed to the fact that majority of the audience themselves were white
and suburbanites. Looking at the comparison between both studies one can see that even though hip-hop had its roots in Latino and African American inner-city culture, underground hip hop has expanded in such a way that there may or may not be influence of Latino or African-American inner-city cultural depending on the demographics and racial make up in the audience. The identity of the underground rapper is tied greatly to audience for which they perform.

The idea of identity being tied to the audience, is greatly exemplified in Atkins (2008) ethnographic research on underground rappers in Japan. Atkins(2008) mentions how his research tackled pre-conceived myths that outsiders had about Japanese rappers such as that they would be emulating African American inner-city subculture in attitude and topics/themes in terms of rap. Atkins(2008), research actually found the quite opposite and discovered that Japanese rappers themes were centered around family, political stances, custom of blind obedience to authority, and empty affluence. When Levine (2008), when to Morocco he also discovered that Muslim rappers were completely different that any group of rappers he had encountered:

“ The fact that Morocco is a Muslim country has meant that rappers will generally avoid cursing or describing girls with negative words, nor will they talk about cars or bling, bling …because that stuff doesn’t reflect Morocco’s reality”(2008:44).

This themes and values of hip-hop changing from region to another demonstrate that underground hip-hop can be used to study identity in relation to community values, since the community shapes the rappers identity in different ways depending on the demographic. Due to the varied nature of values and subject matter that change amongst
underground rappers from one demographic to another, it would be ineffective to have
generalizable studies about relationship between values and identities of underground
rappers. However, since underground rappers not only rely on local audiences, but have
their musical identities shaped by them; underground rap can be used to study the
relationship between values, identity, and community for the specific region and
demographic in which the rapper resides and performs in.

*Double Consciousness*

Forty years after the Civil War, W.E.B. DuBois, wrote a book entitled the "Souls of Black
Folks," which would forever make him popular not only in the world of sociology, but in an era
of civil rights as well. Perhaps the biggest reason behind his success was his use and
development of a theory known as "double consciousness." Double consciousness is the theory
that an African-American in the United States simultaneously views oneself in two differing
ways, due to negative portrayals perpetuated by hegemonic White America (DuBois 1903). Both
of these dual consciousness have been developed and must exist at the same time, so that the
African American maintains his or her psychological and physical well-being (DuBois 1903).

One of these consciousness's forces African-Americans to view themselves in a truly
negative light, as they feel as if they are a strain to society, a problem, and inferior in regards to
hegemonic America. According to DuBois, this view has been developed as a means of
psychological survival (1903). By dealing with the reality of their social status, the African-
American mentally prepares him or herself to being put down and looked down upon by society.
This mental preparation prevents the African-American from harping on the injustices of
discrimination and wallowing too long in feelings of frustration or hopelessness (Dubois 1903). This, in turn, enables African-Americans to survive psychologically.

Although not directly mentioned by W.E.B. Dubois in his book "Souls for Black Folks," it is necessary for the physical survival of African-Americans to understand the reality in the America that they reside in. Dubois might have ignored this aspect of double consciousness, as Dubois grew up in the North. The North was alleged to be "liberal and open minded" during Dubois's time in regards to race issues, so the majority of the discrimination that Dubois faced probably occurred at a psychological and institutional level (Dubois 1903). However, by exploring the Dubois's theory, one can see the physical aspect of it as well. For example, in 1955, Emmitt Till (an African-American male) was tortured and killed for simply whistling at a white woman in Mississippi (Apel 2004). Similarly, a more recent exploration reveals Trayvon Martin, an African-American male, who was shot to death by a neighborhood watch captain for being "suspicious," as he was walking through a predominantly White neighborhood (Trotta 2012).

Many believe that Martin's death could be directly attributed to the fact that he was African-American.

It is important to note that both Till and Martin were both out of their element, visiting places where they might not have encountered such overt racism before. Till was from Chicago, Illinois and visiting Mississippi the deep south during a time period in which the southern public enacted numerous forms of discrimination towards blacks both institution on individual violent level as well (Apel 2004). While, Martin was visiting his dad in the suburbs and might not have been aware of "white flight" and the tendency of those in the suburbs to view any person of color as a threat. Recent and past events such as Martin and Till forcefully serve to remind African
Americans that they must be aware of negative feelings of hegemonic America at all times in order to survive physically and psychologically as well. One should also note, that Till and Martin's murder were not the only case of racially motivated murders. That being said, it is still important to remember that discrimination/negative views of African Americans exists even in places that are supposed to be "open minded" and the discrimination that occurs will happen on a more institutional, discreet, and psychological level. In "Philadelphia Negro" Dubois mentions how even though Northern whites tend to look at blacks sympathetically, they continue to discriminate (whether unintentionally or not) considering blacks and their customs to be uncivilized and savage like; while consistently looking upon blacks to be mentally inferior (1899). This mentality of looking down upon African Americans has been rooted in hegemonic America’s time since the very beginning in which African Americans were brought to the United States as slaves and forced to abandon their original religions, languages, and names (Dubois 1899). To sum it all up the African American as Dubois put was looked upon with “Contempt and Pity”(1899). Dubois's theory points out that no matter where the African American goes he/she in terms of hegemonic America they will still be subject to a negative view; and face a constant threat of physical or psychological harm.

This constant reminder and feeling of threat of physical/ psychological or institutional harm results in a forced consciousness of being aware of how one is negatively viewed by society as mentioned above. Perhaps, the biggest consequences of this forced "consciousness" is that African Americans start to behave in ways so as to not offend or incite their White counterparts into inflicting physical or psychological harm (Dubois 1903). African Descent or African American culture and try to appear to be as little threatening as possible. It is true that
not all African Americans will act in a way as to appease "White America", however Dubois theory implies that if they don't use their consciousness to change the way they act they will suffer the consequences (1903). This change of behavior usually results when African Americans encounter other White Americans or when they are under or in institutions or spheres controlled by "White America" (Dubois 1903). The African American will try to draw as little attention to the fact they are of African Descent or African American culture and try to appear to be as little threatening as possible. The African American tries to draw as little attention to his "African Roots" and personal identity as possible not because of the fact that "African Descent" is actually dangerous to White America; Rather they do it because simply being of "African Descent" is perceived to be dangerous to White America (Dubois 1903). By acting in such a manner, the African American is acting out a false identity pretending to be something they are not, so they are not subjected to further harm. Acting out in this manner contrasts with the African American's actual identity of who he or she really is (Dubois 1903). This clash of identity with a negative self-view consciousness leads the African American to develop another consciousness for the sake of psychological well-being.

The second part of the consciousness that shapes the African American dual consciousness is being aware of one's African descent and even being aware of one’s identity, having a desire to maintain one’s culture, and even being proud of one’s African American identity (Dubois 1965). It is important to remember that while an African American might have to develop a consciousness and learn how to act around white hegemonic America in order to survive, it doesn’t mean that African Americans has forgotten his culture or roots or that the African American strives to assimilate into hegemonic society (Dubois 1965). Rather, this
second part of the consciousness is where the African American retains his identity and gets to truly express his/herself and enact one’s traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices. This consciousness of being African is constantly in the back of the African American’s mind, however it does not shape or guide one’s actions when around “hegemonic” white American, but it does guide and shape the African American’s when amongst other African Americans or in areas/avenues that are predominantly African American (Dubois 1903). This consciousness also serves as a form of psychological self-defense used to maintain ones sanity. Since, the African American is not given the choice to assimilate into hegemonic America or treated fairly as other Americans, they struggle to define themselves identity wise and need to find an avenue in which they belong (Dubois 1903). Even if the African American manages to somewhat assimilate it will be at the expense of sacrificing their cultural identity. So the African identity part of the consciousness provides African Americans society an escape from hegemonic white America where they are treated with pity and contempt, and allows them to enter into a mental state in which they can truly free themselves from the repression of hegemony (Dubois 1903). This consciousness also enables the African American to come up words, practices, and customs that are only known amongst African American circles; but still discreet enough so as to not be noticed by hegemonic white Americans when around them (Kelly 2008). This phenomenon could even be witnessed during the old days of slavery in which African Americans would start singing songs/hymns with hidden coded meanings/messages (Kelly 2008). However, since the messages had hidden meanings the slave masters thought the slaves were simply happy to be working. One hymn such as “follow the drinking gourd” was even intended to help the slaves carry themselves to freedom. It also gave the slaves a feeling of belonging and being part of the
world in which the slave masters could not interfere (Kelly 2008). This demonstrates that the identity part of the double consciousness for the African American provides a psychological benefit in providing the African American a feeling of belonging and uniqueness.

Both the African Identity consciousness and negative self-view consciousness exist within an African American’s consciousness at all times leading to a dual consciousness. Unfortunately, the African American needs both dual consciousness within their mental framework to both mentally and physically survive in America (Dubois 1903). Simply relying on the African identity would be disastrous for African American (Dubois 1903). This is due to the fact that Africans were brought to the United States by force made slaves, were forcefully stripped of their African culture, and through years of institutional abuse made economically dependent on “Hegemonic America” (Kelly 2008). Dubois summed up the issue of dual consciousness best in the quote from his book “Souls of black Folks” saying that African Americans wish simply to, “Make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face”(Dubois 1903). This, shows that African American simply want to be able to assimilate into American culture, while retaining their African Identity.

Double Consciousness amongst Underground Rappers

While, Dubois wrote his theory of Double Consciousness to address identity and behavior amongst African Americans, his theory of Double Consciousness can be applied to other religious, ethnic, or any groups in general that have trouble fitting and assimilating into American hegemonic society. That is because the idea of Double Consciousness is centered around members of a certain group developing dual consciousness as a response to being
marginalized from mainstream hegemonic society; in which in order for member in their culture/group to survive on a psychological and physical level they develop two dual consciousness (Dubois 1903). Since the actual idea of double consciousness is centered around marginalization and fight for one’s identity it only makes logical sense that any other culture/group that would be marginalized from mainstream society would also develop Double Consciousness. Therefore, even though main purpose of Double Consciousness was to explain the identity problems of African Americans, the idea behind Double Consciousness is not specific to African Americans.

One of the groups that this theory of Double Consciousness can be applied to is underground rappers. As mentioned in previous sections of the literature review, underground rappers are any rappers whose music is not on nationally syndicated or corporate owned airwaves (Morgan 2009). Ever since the formation of hip-hop there have always been followers of the movement that have resisted commercialization (Chang 2005). As certain elements of hip-hop were separated from one another such as graffiti becoming increasingly more and more criminalized, break dancing and Djing becoming its own art certain hip-hop loyalists started to become agitated with the state of hip-hop (Chang 2005). Soon corporations starting dictating what rappers could and couldn’t rap about even creating and set market for the general public(Chang 2005). Many underground rappers tried to resist this change by speaking about the topics they believed and they were either been dropped from their corporate record label, or told to adjust their lyrics to fit a more profitable and mainstream audience (Ogbar 2007). Other underground rappers who are marginalized could simply be those who are not fortunate or talented enough to be recruited in the corporate structure of record labels or media; also leading
to their marginalization from the mainstream hip-hop (Levine 2008). By banishing underground rappers from participating in mainstream rap if they didn’t adhere to corporate desire, the industry of commercial hip-hop music is in a sense marginalizing the underground rapper. Other underground rappers who are marginalized could simply be those who are not fortunate or talented enough to be recruited in the corporate structure of record labels or media; also leading to their marginalization from the mainstream hip-hop (Levine 2008).

Both types of marginalization (whether voluntary or involuntary) limit the underground rappers exposure to mainstream public, and makes him feel that his actions are either wrong, and not within confines of hegemonic American society. By being alienated from mainstream America society and music, underground rappers were starting to form the first part of their dual consciousness similar to that of African Americans; which is the consciousness in which persons of groups start to realize or see themselves through a negative worldview or lens through the eyes of the hegemonic dominant culture. It is part of the consciousness, in which the person starts to realize that if they aren’t aware of their status as a marginalized group and behave in a certain manner, then they could face dire consequences or at the very least be banished (indirectly) from mainstream society.

*Double Consciousness Supplemented with Interactional Ritual Chain Theory:*

Dubois’ theory of Double Consciousness explains the twoness of one’s soul when attempting to balance conflicting ideologies and the painful development of identity as an outsider in contrast to a hostile society. However, Dubois’ theory fails to fully explain how individual identity is defined/developed within one’s own group through the use of rituals and interaction within the group. Therefore, in order to truly understand how
identity is developed amongst underground rappers, this paper will utilize a combination of the Interaction Ritual Chain Theory and the Double Consciousness theory in order to understand the development of identity amongst underground rappers.

Interaction Ritual Chain Theory is a theory developed by sociologist Randall Collins. Collin’s dispels the myth that individuals create situations and develop their own personal identity. Rather, he theorizes that it is situations/rituals of the group that create and shape the identity of the individual (Collins 2004). Collin’s argues that acts such as sex, praying, smoking, gatherings and numerous other aspects of our social lives are all social interactions that are shaped through interaction rituals (Collins 2004). It is through the process of performance and interaction of these rituals that one’s identity starts to develop. In order to explain the effect of interaction rituals on shaping ones identity, Collins synthesized the theories of two prominent sociologists, Goffman and Durkheim.

Goffman's contribution to Interactional Ritual Chain Theory:

Goffman defined rituals with the belief that individuals were actors and that all social gatherings and setting were a symbolic stage in which these aforementioned actors would perform and manage their image in front of a greater social audience (Goffman 1967). He elaborated that individuals will perform their roles as actors through interactional rituals, and these rituals help develop the individual identity (Goffman 1967). Goffman believed four elements were required in order for a ritual/setting to occur: (1) the act (performance) of the ritual, (2) an actor to carry out the ritual, (3) an audience to observe the ritual, and (4) the creation of symbols that glorify/illuminate the ritual (Goffman 1967).
Symbols were especially important to Goffman. He hypothesized that the absence of symbols would cause the importance of the rituals to fade and become mere memories (Goffman 1967). In fact, Goffman alleged that the symbol was so vital that the ritual centered on the symbol, defining the ritual “as the way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him” (Goffman 1967). This quote demonstrates Goffman’s staunch belief that rituals were specifically carried out when in the presence of symbols. Goffman also believed that the majority of rituals could be found in everyday life through salutations, compliments, and verbal interchange (Goffman 1967). Through the use of his theories, we can interpret rituals to understand where we stand with people, and help us understand what kind of relationship that we have with them.

Durkheims contribution to Interactional Ritual Chain Theory:

Prominent sociologist Durkheim was similarly held a great deal of stock in rituals, surmising that rituals shaped group membership and formed solidarity within a society (Durkheim 1965). Durkheim hypothesized that rituals would be shaped around sacred objects or symbols, and it would be through those rituals that a collective conscience would emerge (Durkheim 1965). It is through this collective conscience that individuals would develop meaning and then creation of an individual identity that would then be shaped by the identity and values of the group (Durkheim 1965). Durkheim also thought that moral beliefs and practices were also reinforced through the use of rituals. According to Durkheim, every society has a system of beliefs and sacred objects, which is reinforced
through a moral community such as a clan, sect, tribe, etc. (Durkheim 1965). Though this theory on rituals provides valuable insight on the emphasis of rituals and how they strengthen bonds and reinforce social solidarity, it has been criticized as static, lacking an explanation for the dissolution or evolution of social groups. However, despite the slight differences between Durkheim and Goffman’s theories, both sociologists believed that in order for a ritual to exist, there had to be both respect for a sacred object and that the sacred objects had to be carried out regularly; otherwise, both sociologists agreed that the sacredness of the objects will fade away.

**Synthesizing of Durkheim and Goffman’s Theory:**

As mentioned in the literature review earlier, Randall Collins synthesized the theories of Durkheim and Goffman in order to create the Interactional Ritual Chain Theory. Collins took Durkheim’s concept of moral integration and emotional energy through ritual and then combined it with Goffman’s theory of performance of rituals through group situations (Collins 2004). The Interactional Ritual Chain Theory states that in order for a ritual to occur there need to be situational copresence, also known as group assembly) It is in this situational copresence that people will start to interact with one another. It is through this interaction that one’s identity is enacted and performed. The interaction also brings about feelings that create the emergence of an emotional energy, which in turn leads to a creation of symbols (Collins 2004).

The first part of the Interactional Ritual chain theory states that in order for a ritual to occur, a situational coprescence must be present (a group assembly or presence
of two people) (Collins 2004). The situational copresence is necessary, as humans are influenced by behavior of another and are constantly monitoring and adjusting their behavior in response to others. Humans have been observed to shift/change their behavior while under the gaze of others (Collins 2004). While humans are in copresence, humans begin to interact with one another. However, these interactions are governed by rules. For example, when individuals are engaged in a conversation with others, there is an immense pressure to agree (Collins 2004). These interactions create rituals that create solidarity and conformity, showing that one is a member of the group and barriers are developed to keep outsiders away from the group (Collins 2004). It is through these interactions that members of the group honor through their rituals what their group deems to be socially valued, which are known as sacred objects (Collins 2004). Once established, if rituals are broken, then those present will feel an uneasiness or disgust. Some will try to downplay or alleviate the situation of breaking of rituals through humor. However, if those who violate the ritual apologize (a form of deferring to the rituals), then order is once again restored.

Interactional ritual theory also states that rituals lead to a heightened sense of shared emotions (Collins 2004). When people are together they experience a shared action and awareness, that results from the intensification of a shared experiences. These emotions are the result from engaging in the same routine and focused attention that leads to a collective feeling and thinking. These feelings of group solidarity lead to symbols/emblems that become markers for the group’s identity (Collins 2004). Not only does this emotional energy create symbols, it also gives people the courage to engage in
tasks and do what they believed to be valued (Collins 2004). Through the identity of the group, the individual starts to feel a sense of morality. This contributes to the outrage if a ritual is broken. It should be noted that not all rituals are effective, rituals can fail, decay over time, fail to produce any group solidarity or membership or any substantial symbols (Collins 2004). When rituals are effective they create an emotional energy, an identity for the individual within the group identity, and a feeling of being moral. When rituals are ineffective, they deplete the emotional energy of the group and create a feeling of demoralization (Collins 2004).

*Interactional Ritual Chain Theory and Underground Rappers:*

Since both groups of underground rappers are already gathering in places where there is situational coprescence, such as concerts, cyphers (a circle group in which member gather around to recite either freestyle lyrics), and Mosques, the Interactional Chain Theory will be used to study how the ritual of rap defines the practices for the underground rappers, what symbols are developed, how the underground rappers gain an emotional energy, what barriers are developed to keep outsiders out. Their rituals will be examined to see if they produce or deplete emotional energy, and if they are ineffective or effective in creating a group identity. The effect the ritual of rap has on the underground rappers identity as an individual within the group will then be compared with their Double Consciousness that develops as a result of being an underground rapper.
Chapter 3

DATA AND METHODS

In order to truly understand how underground rappers' lyrics, lifestyles, and performances are shaped by their identity in regards to their cultural and community values, I have chosen to use a qualitative ethnographic approach. The justification for not using a quantitative approach is demonstrated by the origins and definitions of rap and hip-hop described above. The demographics and themes and lyrics of underground rappers are easily changed from location to location, and the fragmented nature of underground rap creates a situation in which there is not a large enough sample size to create a generalizable study. By using an ethnographic approach, I will be able to dig deeper into the lives of my participants and frame an analysis that is very specific to lives of the subjects I am studying.

The theory I will be using to guide my research, as mentioned in the introduction, will be Double Consciousness. In the process of actually collecting my data and research, I will use a methodical approach similar to one that sociologist Mitchell Duneier (1999) used for his book *Sidewalk*. In *Sidewalk*, Duneier (1999) takes a journalistic approach in which he observes, tapes and records conversations, and participates in the lives of African-American men who sell scavenged books, magazines, and panhandle in the streets of New York’s Greenwich Village (Duneier 1999). Duneier’s (1999) ethnographic approach takes the readers and opens them up to the world of outcasts, who have been living on the edge of society struggling to survive. By actually participating in the activities of the panhandlers themselves, Duneier makes use of the sociological method...
known as participation observation. Like Dunier(1999), I too will be using the method of participant observation.

By using participant observation method with underground rappers, I hope to gain close and intimate familiarity with underground rappers and truly understand their motivations and group practices that define who they are in relation to their art of rap. In participant observation, my level of involvement will fluctuate from moderate participant (when I am taking field notes and conducting interviews) to active participation when I actually participate in the rap concerts through performances, and the rap cyphers (when a group of rappers do impromptu freestyle raps on the spot).

My method of capturing the data will be through taking field notes, observing participants in the studies, and one-on-one interviews. Unlike Dunnier, I will not be tape recording or video recording my participants myself. I will constantly carry a notebook with me and take field notes/observations and write down answers in response to interviews. Contrary to what many might think, carrying around a notebook will have the positive effect of allowing me to blend in with the environment. Many rappers are continuously carrying around notebooks to instantly write down any thoughts/rhymes that might come into their head, so that they do not forget these thoughts later.

My experience in journalism has given me the skill set and ability to write down interviewee’s response verbatim in a quick and efficient manner. The decision to refrain from tape recording and video recording is due of the costs and time constraints associated with transcribing interviews. However, more importantly, constantly tape and video recording participants can open an array of ethical issues and might cause
participants to lose trust in the researcher, causing participants to be more reticent in their dealings with the researcher.

My plan is to follow and observe two distinct groups of underground Northern California rappers for three months as they go about their rap careers at open mic nights, venues, shows, ciphers, and other performances. It should be noted that I have changed the names of all rappers and the names of their respective groups, in order to protect the privacy of my interviewees and to comply with the confidentiality guidelines of Sacramento State University when conducting research. Any reference to any actual rapper name or actual group is merely by coincidence. I will interview rappers of two different rap groups/bands that make up the memberships of two different demographics within Northern California.

The first rap group/band consist of underground rappers that are of Caucasian descent and come from middle class Christian families that reside in the suburb. For the purpose of this research, this group will by the pseudonym of the Suburban Rap Caucus and will be abbreviated under the initials of SRC. Members of this group will at times be known as the suburban rappers. It should be noted that when using the term Suburban rapper it will apply only to the suburban rappers within the context of my research, and not be able to generalized/applied to numerous Suburban rappers that are currently present in the United States. The other rap group/band consists of rappers that reside in and participate in activities of a Northern California inner city Mosque, and are of the Muslim faith. Since the primary gathering place of the Muslims rapper is the Masjid (religious place of worship), they will be primarily referred to as the Masjid rappers. The
usage of the term Muslim or Masjid rappers will only apply to groups within my research and cannot be used to generalize the numerous Muslim/Islamic rappers outside of Northern California. By comparing the two different sets of rappers from different backgrounds, we can gain a clearer understanding of what motivates rappers to perform and to what extent socioeconomic status, racial, and demographics play a role in shaping ones musical identity as an Underground rapper.

My current position as an underground rapper in the Northern California hip hop scene will enable me to enter more intimate environments and ask more deeper personal questions in the interviews that might be closed off to outsiders. Establishing trust and respect amongst the interviewees will be primarily a non-issue, since my rap rhymes and skill subset has already established respect amongst potential interviewees who have constantly invited me to come to their venues and participate in concerts or ciphers. As per request of interviewees, in exchange for interviews and constant observation and following of interviewees, I will also participate in some of the activities of the underground hip-hop scene, such as the ciphers (a skill practicing event in which rappers freestyle/impromptu rap) which can be scheduled or spontaneous. Similarly, I might be asked to share some of my pre-written raps at certain venues or open mics.

There are some limitations to my research, as my casual involvement as participant may make me susceptible to researcher bias, to the point where being embedded as underground rapper might make me less objective or willing to report some of the negative aspects that are apparent in underground hip hop. In order to counter this bias, I will tend to lean more towards the side of a moderate participator where I maintain
a balance between the role of an “insider” and “outsider.” This, in turn, will allow me to keep a sense of involvement to know what is going on, but enough detachment to remain objective.

**Goals/Strengths of Study**

In conclusion, the goal of this study as mentioned earlier in the introduction is to answer two research questions: How are underground rappers’ identities defined and embodied in response to the mainstream rap/hip-hop community? The theories I will use to guide my research in order to understand identity will be Double Consciousness and the Interactional Ritual Chain theory.

After interviewing both separate hip-hop groups I hope to provide to the existing research of the rituals and symbols that define underground hip hop groups and build group identity/solidarity. I also hope to understand how group identity (that is obtained through rituals) clashing with the identities ascribed to underground rappers by society and their immediate surroundings in terms of values, issue discussed, and style of music. My belief is that both groups will reveal distinct/different identities based on their differences in social class/demographics, thereby adding to the theory that underground rap is more effective means of studying hip-hop as underground rap is based around the community; whereas mainstream hip-hop is designed to market to large spectrum of the American public.

A strength of this study is that it conducts in-depth research on underground rappers through actual observation and participation with subjects. Additionally, the
researcher himself is embedded into the hip-hop culture and rap, which leads to a lesser occurrence of inaccuracies when reporting, and enables the researcher to get more into touch with the subjects. This will give me access to more information that might not have been present to other researchers.

Ironically, the strength of this research is also one of its biggest weaknesses, as being embedded into the culture of hip-hop might prevent the researcher from seeing negatives aspects of rap. Another limitation is the small sample size is extremely small, which only represents the aspirations and motivations of a few underground rappers in the Northern California area. Since the study is only conducted in the greater Northern California area, it cannot accurately represent the motivations, incentives, and lifestyles of numerous other underground rappers whose motivations may vary according to demographics, popularity of rap in the area, and ethnic or racial background.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Brief Overview of Results

The ritual of rap governs the interactions of both groups as underground rappers experience feelings of solidarity, a creation of symbols, positive and sometimes negative emotional energy and emergence of a group identity. This group identity starkly contrasts with the identity ascribed to them by society, creating a clash resulting in Dual and multiple identities that develop into a multilateral double consciousness. This Double Consciousness is in response to rappers’ conflict between the identity ascribed to them by society and one’s own personal group identity.

Observations at the Masjid

Researchers Role and Setting of Research

The particular Masjid that I chose to research was located in inner city neighborhood in Northern California. The majority of the people who live in the neighborhood are from a low-income social economic class. Individuals who reside outside of this neighborhood in nearby counties, derogatorily refer to the area as the “ghetto,” while those who are from the area refer to the neighborhood as the hood. Before entering this neighborhood to conduct research as a researcher, I was warned by many to
be extremely careful when conducting my research. I was even told that due to class differences between the participants I would face difficulty in overcoming barriers and building the necessary relationships in order to conduct research. Ironically, despite the fact that I resided in middle class neighborhood, I was able to build a strong connection with the participants, fully immersed within the group.

I was able to build this connection due to two characteristics. The first characteristic was my ability to rap and also freestyle (improvised impromptu rap) rap. This skill enabled me to participate in their activities/ritual of rapping either when they were at a concert or an informal cypher (when a group of underground rappers spontaneously start rapping). However, more importantly, I was of the same religious affiliation as my participants. This shared characteristic of practicing Islam connected me to the underground rappers at Masjid through religious rituals. For example, the underground rappers and I participated in the five daily prayers (required of Muslims) and weekly Friday prayers (Jummah) together. Being Muslim also helped in deciphering Islamic slangs and words that would be difficult for non-Muslims to understand. My ability to participate in these group rituals, such as rapping and prayer, I was able to connect to both groups and gain a level of solidarity and understanding with both groups.

*Situational Coprescence and Performance of Rituals*

The primary location where underground rappers from Masjid gathered to perform the rituals of rapping and praying was the Masjid itself (also known as a Mosque). The Masjid was located in the middle of a residential neighborhood surrounded
by apartments and houses. The Masjid itself had originally been a house. The interior walls had been knocked down and all the floors were carpeted so that worshippers could gather and pray. Both the front yard and backyards had been cemented with black concrete and served as a parking lot. Since the Masjid was originally a house, it served as a symbol to represent a familial and collective environment. Many of the patrons and rappers who attended the Masjid would commonly refer to it as the “House of Allah (Arabic for God).”

It is at the Masjid the situational copresence and the performance of rituals takes place. The religious identity of being a Muslim is forged and reproduced through the performance of the five daily prayers (Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib, and Isha). The five daily prayers take place at various intervals throughout the day, Fajr is performed at Sunrise, Zuhr is performed in the early afternoon, Asr takes place during the late afternoon, Maghrib occurs during the sunset, and Isha is performed at nightfall. While, the five daily prayers are required to be performed by all practicing Muslims in various intervals throughout the day, Muslims are not required to perform all daily prayers within the Mosque, but are required to perform the Friday prayer together. Additionally, there is a general consensus amongst Muslims that performing prayers with a sizable congregation will lead to collection of good deeds that can be used to elevate ones status in the afterlife. It for this reason, the Masjid is open throughout the day at the designated prayer times. Usually due to work related issues, the majority of the Muslims that attend this Mosque can usually be found there for the morning prayer (Fajr) before going to work,
or the evening (Maghrib) and night (Isha) prayers that usually occur after work.

Therefore, the attendance for the afternoon prayers Zuhr and Asr is typically very small.

Before starting each prayer, Muslims would go through the ritual of ablution known as wudu. During wudu, the Muslim will rinse his/her mouth, wash their face, hands, and their feet. The bathrooms at Masjid were accommodated with “wudu stations” that consisted of solid tile stools, and low rise sinks in order to complete this ritual. Technically, one would be allowed to complete wudu once throughout the day and that would be considered valid. However, wudu can be invalidated through numerous actions such as defecation, urination, passing gas, bleeding, vomiting, or sleeping, emission of semen, or sexual contact. Due to the physical difficulty of naturally maintaining wudu throughout the day, it is more common for the Muslims to perform wudu numerous times throughout the day.

The Muslims at the Masjid were called to each prayer in attendance through the Adhaan, which is an Arabic recitation of the Shahada (statement of faith). Once, the worshippers have gathered they stand shoulder-to-shoulder, foot-to-foot, while they kneel down and prostrate southeast towards the Qiblah. The Qiblah leads to the traditional Muslim holy site of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Each prayer was made up of completing a cycle of a Rakat. The number of Rakats vary based on time interval for prayer. The requirement for the Fajr is two Rakats, 4 Rakats for Zuhr, 4 Rakats for Asr, 3 Rakats for Maghrib, and 4 Rakats for Isha. A Rakat consists of standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting while reciting praises of Allah (Arabic word for God) and reciting verses from the Quran (Muslim holy book).
During the break in between prayers, Muslims can be found sitting inside the mosque reading the Quran, or even outside discussing Islamic or even non-Islamic matters. The true situational co presences of the prayer, is truly felt on Jummah (Arabic for Friday). As mentioned above, Muslims are not required to attend the Masjid to conduct five daily prayers, with the exception of Jummah, which takes place during the Zuhr prayer (early afternoon). All able bodied Muslims males are required to attend Jummah Friday prayer (many Muslims will take off of work to come to the Jummah prayer). During the Jummah prayer, the congregation will be packed, often containing 150-200 Muslims who all take time off from their respective workplaces or classrooms to participate in the prayer. The Jummah prayer also serves as a social gathering, as after the prayer many people meet to congregate with their fellow Muslims and friends.

Through the Friday prayers and the rituals of the five daily prayers taking place, one can see the Interactional Ritual Chain Theory at work. The mosque serves as a ritual gathering for situational co presences to take place. Through this co presence, the ritual of praying takes place. While praying, the Muslims begin interacting with one another, the feeling of group solidarity start to take place, and a positive emotional energy is created. Through this group solidarity for all those participating in a ritual of prayer a group identity of being Muslim is being forged. Still, this identity is dynamic and constantly subject to change, as praying more than just the required Jummah prayer at the congregation will cement one’s identity within as an Muslim. Praying less will make one feel more distant from the identity of being a Muslim.
Just as described in the International Ritual Chain Theory, the rituals barriers also
serve to keep outsiders out and solidify group identity. For example, outsiders such as
non-Muslims would have difficulty in performing rituals with the group due to a lack of
understanding. Not only that, those Muslims who refuse to participate in the ritual of
prayer (breaking of the rules of the ritual according to the Interactional Ritual Chain
Theory) will be extremely ostracized and segregated from the group almost to the point
of banishment. Bigg Jinn (a rapper and patron of the mosque) described the ritual of
Prayer as extremely sacred.

“Salat (prayers) are a place for us to get together as an Ummah (Muslim
Congregation) and share our devotion towards Allah (God). Yeah, you gotta
pray when you come to the Masjid, otherwise what are you doing here. If you
are not trying to participate in our activities then you should leave.” [sic] - Bigg
Jinn

The concept of Jummah and daily prayer is a subject that is not unique simply to
this inner city Northern California Masjid. I have visited numerous mosques throughout
my life and have witnessed the same fervor and dedication towards Jummah and daily
prayer. However, this mosque is unique in comparison to others due to its presence of
inner-city rappers. After almost after each prayer and especially Jummah, one can see
groups of young men gathering in circles and “spitting” (reciting) rap lyrics, while one
person b-boxes (make music with their mouth) and they take turns in demonstrating their
lyrical ability to each other in rap circles this often known as a cypher. The themes they
all rapped about were strikingly similar and geared towards change and Islam. This may
be attributed to the rappers respect to the mosque. Some of the rappers at the mosque
would even go to a nearby car start playing instrumentals (music that is simply beats
without lyrics) and start playing music while trying to rap to it and stay according to the
beat and tempo.

During these rap cyphers, there are many bystanders that do not participate at all
and simply enjoy the raps. However, unlike praying, if bystanders do not participate in
the cyphers or rap, they are not banished or seen with contempt. In fact, many of the
bystanders are good friends and still close knit with many of their rappers friends.
However, if they want to gain status and identity within the group, then it is essential that
they participate in the group cypher. In addition, if they want to gain higher status, then it
is essential that a higher mastery of rap is achieved through mastery of lyrics and the
ability to freestyle (rap about random topics spontaneously). A rapper named 786 Soldier
explained the phenomenon of rap.

“Now if you don’t want to rap during the cypher its cool, cause you still pray
you’re an Akey (Muslim Brother). But if you want to achieve greatness be an
Muslim Emcee (rapper) than you gotta participate in the cypher. It doesn’t matter
if you good or not, cause you will get better. When you get better, that’s when
you don’t just do the cypher, you get in the studio and record music. While, you
record music then you direct it towards Islam. You take both action and blend into
one.” [sic]-786 Soldier

Observing these rap interactions, one can also see the theory of the Interactional
Chain Theory at work. The ritual of rap takes place at a situational co presence, where
the participants are already bonded together by a common faith, and the act of rapping
forces them to interact with one another. The higher status gained by participating
solidifies ones identity as a Muslim and as a rapper within the group. This creates a
positive emotional energy and group solidarity. Similar, to the singular identity of being
an Muslim, the identity of being a Muslim rapper is very dynamic and constantly subject
to change. If spends less time at the cyhper, than they are less likely to be known as a rapper. However, if one tries to achieve mastery and goes into a recording studio and makes music as a Muslim rapper then her identity as Muslim rapper is even more solidified. Even in the ritual of rap there are barriers to outsiders, even though they are not as sharply defined as the rituals of prayer. For example, those who can’t rap aren’t considered outsiders to larger group as Muslims, but as rappers they are excluded.

*Inner City Male Rapper Identity vs. Muslim Identity*

The interactional ritual of the Muslim rappers engaging in both the rituals of being Muslims and rappers, contributes to the emergence of their identities being partially explained by the theory of Double Consciousness. The reason Double Consciousness cannot be fully explained through the emergence/blending of the Muslim rappers and their inner city identities is because when Dubois described Double Consciousness, it would come of as a result of force. True Double Consciousness means identities that were inflicted upon the participant without choice and that identity results comes as the result larger part of dominant group subjecting an weaker group to the identity it has prescribed to them, resulting in two identities.

In the case of the inner-city/ rapper identity versus the Muslim identity, the identities are not directly harmonious but they are also not directly competitive. Since the majority of the rappers at the Masjid are converts to Islam, they aren’t forced into religion. Also, many of the patrons at the Masjid claim that inner city America and even many mainstream rappers have been known to be friendly to Islam in comparison to the rest of hegemonic America. Many famous rappers are Muslims themselves, such as
Snoop Dogg and Ice Cube. Some Muslim rappers at Masjid even boasted that Muslims were actually safer in their neighborhoods, in comparison to well to do conservative neighborhoods that were Islamaphobic. As 786 Soldier put it, “The hood has respect for Islam.”

However, despite this, coming from the inner city and being Muslim, while simultaneously participating in the rituals of rapping and praying contributes to a blending of identities, forcing one to have dual identities. This act of simultaneously having to balance Dual Identities makes up a major portion of Dubois’ theory of Double Consciousness. Therefore, while these are not two identities directly in conflict, they are two identities who often experience friction, which is similar to Dubois’ theory of Double Consciousness.

As mentioned before, dual identity of the underground Muslim rapper at this Masjid comes mainly from performing the ritual of two different acts, and the desire of the Muslim rapper a to blend both identities together, from which they attain a positive emotional energy. While rap has spread worldwide and into majority of the culture, the majority of rap symbols and actions have their roots in the inner city and the majority of rappers from this particular Masjid are young males from the inner city. Through observation of the informal set of rules, slangs, and customs that these rappers engage in, it is apparent that these rappers continue to retain certain aspects of street culture. As a result, some aspects of street culture have become interconnected with rap and hip-hop culture. As mentioned in the previous chapters, a vital element in hip-hop is the ability to be authentic. In this culture, rappers refer to this quality as “keeping it real.”
The desire to maintain an authentic appearance poses a challenge for the rappers at the Masjid. In order to “keep it real,” they must simultaneously embrace two very contradictory identities: maintaining their identities as inner city males who embrace the hip-hop culture along with their identities as ultra conservative Muslims. Rapper Dinboy 400 from Masjid referred to this inner struggle, explaining:

“Man, it’s like this: you know you got Islam, it tells you to pray, not be chasing after them females, live like this life. That’s very righteous and its like, you wanna do all that right, but at the same time you don’t wanna forget where you came from. Cause I still come from the streets, I was in streets even befo I was Muslim you know. Still, you know Islam has guided me the right path Alhamudillah [thank God] man. So, but like I said I’m still a street dude. I’m a street dude so if somebody gets in my face [verbally challenge or invade personal space] Ima handle my business [resolve the situation, usually through assault], even though Islam says to forgive disrespect that ain’t directed at the Din [religion of Islam]. But even though I’m a street dude, I’m not gonna be out there in streets selling drugs, or getting with females, or gangbanging. I used to do that, but I’m Muslim now, and since hip-hop is all about being real, I try to put in that Muslim feel [perspective] along with that street stuff while being true to who I am when I am doing my music.” [sic] – Dinboy 400

Dinboy’s colorful explanation clearly demonstrates the conflict between these two separate identities. While trying to maintain the lifestyle choices and aspects of both the street identity and Muslim Identity, Dinboy’s actions interestingly juxtapose with his beliefs. He refrains from blatant violations of Islam, such as fornicating, drinking, and drugs, and won’t glorify it in his music. Despite this, he will still respond to elements of the street culture such as assaulting or attacking someone if they challenge him verbally. This delicate balance of pushing two identities is present in many young rappers of this demographic, and is exemplified through their “slang” (informal words used during rap), “music videos,” and even everyday speech.
_*Dinboy 400_ and other rappers at the Masjid made it quite clear to me that their religious identity superseded their identity as rappers. Any traditions or rituals that would form an inner-city/rapper identity were quickly discarded in an effort to make harmony with their religious identity. However, if certain rituals of the inner-city/rapper identity did not directly conflict with their religious identity, then they were simply blended in to create a dual identity that would work in harmony. The constant process of finding and managing an appropriate identity relates to the theory of Double Consciousness. However, the attempt to create harmony and fact that this identity is created by choice, takes away from the theory of Double Consciousness. Even though the identity is created by choice and is relative harmony, there is certain amount of conflict, as the identities are separate and the blending and managing of those two identities is bound to create conflict.

*Symbols (Nicknames)*

In the Interactional Ritual Chain theory, Collins talked about through the rituals the group would develop symbols so that memories would fade, and the ritual would remain fresh in the minds of the group (Collins 2004). It is interesting to see how the Muslim rappers would use these symbols to create a combination of both rituals in order to balance the dual identities.

A prime example of Muslim rappers successfully merging their identity with that of rappers is through the use of nicknames. There is a unique custom amongst rappers and in the street culture to choose or have peers choose colorful moniker to represent
their personality or lifestyle. This custom has resulted in a lot of colorful and interesting list of well-known names such as 50 Cent, Smiley, Biggie Smalls, and Eminem. While the Prophet Muhammad (a prominent religious figure in Islam) and his companions had a few nicknames, the majority of the Muslims have a given name, usually in Arabic symbolizing religious significance. Similarly, the rappers at this Masjid have traditional Muslim names. However, in addition, every single one of them had a rap moniker, by which they called in certain circles.

Similar to other rappers, these names were fused in with physical or qualities one deemed to fit their personality. However, unlike other non-Islamic rappers, each moniker was also religiously symbolic. *Sabr Styles, Bigg Jin, 786 Soldier* are three nicknames that epitomize a combination of religious symbolism and unique personality traits. For example, *Sabr Styles* includes the word *sabr*, an Arabic word to describe patience and endurance especially when striving towards Islam. It combines this symbolically rooted word with “styles,” a shortening of the rap slang “freestyles,” which means having the ability to complete or deliver impromptu poetry/rap on the spot.

Another name to look at that exemplifies this merged identity is the name Big Jinn. This nickname emulates numerous mainstream and underground rappers who have utilized the term Big or Lil in front of the names such a Lil Wayne, Lil Flip, Big Sean. The word *Jinn*, on the other hand, is used in Islam to describe spiritual creatures made of fire. This amalgamate name permits the artist to remain true to the customs of rap/hip-hop with the use of the word Big, while clinging to his Muslim identity through the word *Jinn*. Big Jinn explains the development of his nickname:
“When I walk into a spot, people be like ‘Yo, this brother hella huge, like a straight up monster, I don’t really want a to mess with him.’ I’m not cocky about it neither, but it is what is. So, I wanted a nickname that reflected my size, but at the same time I also wanted to keep it Islamic, you feel me? So I added Jinn right after Big cause Jinn’s are supposed to be these like mysterious creatures in Islam, some are good, some are bad, but mysterious. I’m like mysterious you know so my name represents everything that I’m doing, who I be.” [sic]- Bigg Jinn

Bigg Jinn’s feelings regarding his name illustrate the struggle that rappers at Masjid undergo in order to maintain the identity and mannerisms of rappers without completely sacrificing their religious identity. As demonstrated, many rappers have overcome this hindrance through a mechanism of combining the two disparate cultures into one name. Still, despite this incorporation of religious symbolism into their rap nicknames, many rappers are reluctant to only use their rap monikers throughout their daily activities.

Bigg Jinn clarifies, stating that even though he has a stage name as a rapper, he still uses what he terms is his “proper” Islamic name of Muhammad when he introduces himself to people. While Bigg Jinn states he doesn’t mind being called by his rapper moniker if somebody recognizes him from a rap concert or even says his name at the mosque, he is also open to the use of his Islamic name in everyday contexts. The usage of rapper names interchangeably with one’s proper name is not unique to Bigg Jinn. In fact, all of the rappers interviewed stated that they used their “real” Islamic names, and restricted their rap names for when they were on stage or marketing to sell albums (compilation of their songs).

Sometimes, fans (especially children from the mosque) might refer to the rappers at this Masjid by their rap name. However, the majority of participants surveyed
indicated that typically, on a day-day basis, most rappers utilize their proper Islamic name. Therefore, the combination of the two identities isn’t as seamless as the rap nicknames would suggest. Simultaneously using two names with different meanings symbolizes having dual identities. Masjid rapper 786 Soldier described this experience:

“At times, I’m two different people, I be on stage freestyling spitting off the top of dome [rapping without any preparation] got the crowd hyped at. That’s just the moments though, most of the time I’m just this guy trying to get to Akhira [heaven]. That’s beauty of having two like names cause when I’m rapping I’m 786 my name [rap moniker] is like my alter ego, otherwise I’m just me you know Omar.” [sic] – 786 Soldier

786 Soldier statement illustrates the significance of living two different lifestyles at the same time, which is personified through the use of nicknames and titles. While the majority of rappers at the Mosque attempt to blend in elements of their religious identity with rapper identity through rap monikers, their religious identity more often than not takes precedence over their rap/inner city identity.

Symbols/Ritual (Utilization of Islamic Terms in Everyday Vernacular)

Another symbol that has developed that reflects the Muslim rappers group identity and also reflects their partial double consciousness is their utilization of Islamic Terms in the everyday vernacular. Their usage of everyday Islamic speech is not only; it is also a ritual in itself. In this ritual, the usage of the Islamic terms in the everyday vernacular, they gain group solidarity and recreate their dual identity of both rapper and Muslim. Observations of the Muslim rappers in their natural habitat revealed that rapper nicknames/monikers that symbolized or identified their emergence yet separatism of inner-city identities and Muslim identities was not an isolated incident. They had also
included identifiable Islamic terms in their everyday speech, which carried over into their rap lyrics. Technically, Muslims are not required to constantly speak or use Islamic terms when talking to others in their everyday speech. However, there are certain greetings, sayings, and words that most Muslims understand and occasionally use, such as *Kafir* (non believer), *Miswak* (cleaning utensil used by Prophet Muhammad), *Salam* (greeting of peace/hello), *salat* (prayer), *Akey* (brother), *Inshallah* (God willing), *Mashallah* (Arabic appreciation for phrase).

Generally, Muslims utter these phrases solely within the confines of the community. Being a Muslim myself, I have frequented numerous Mosques and observed that Muslims would typically use these figure of speeches amongst themselves. However, the rappers at the Masjid extended the usage of the phrases, employing Islamic terms to the point where they would be using these expressions every couple of sentences. This usage continued even in instances when the conversation did not refer to religion, even when describing basic everyday activities. This reliance on these terms ensured that only other Muslims would be able to completely understand what the rappers were discussing or talking about.

Upon entering the Masjid for the first time, other rappers greeted me with “*Salaam Akey*” (greetings brother). Likewise, in any dialogue where the term brother, “*homie*” (street slang), or friend would normally have been, Muslim rappers tended to substitute the term *akey*. When it came to conducting oneself according to morals and values, the term *Halal* was used. When discussing religion, they would use the word *Din* (religion) and when expounding upon helping others and giving charity, they referred to
Zakat. This over insertion of religious terms into their vocabulary even shone through their rap lyrics. The excerpt below is taken directly from one of the freestyle impromptu rap sessions that 786 Soldier performed while on stage at a concert:

“Maghrib to Isha [mid evening prayers till night time prayers], I be with my akeys [brothers], trying to give Zakat [give to charity] and do my salat [prayers]. Will I ever make it to the Akhirah [heaven] I don’t know, but in this dunya [life], I gotta leave the dough if jannat [heaven] where I wanna go.” [sic] – 786 Soldier

Without the translations that were added into the quote above, many non-Muslims would have difficulty deciphering what the rapper 786 soldier was talking about. 786 Soldier and other rappers claim that their habits of basing the majority of their everyday language on Islamic terms can be directly attributed inner city and gang culture, which stresses the use of slang terms to reaffirm ones identity and commitment to an group/lifestyle while simultaneously keeping out outsiders to the group.

Transcript of Dialogue Regarding Utilization of Islamic Terms in Everyday Language
The following is a transcript of dialogue that I conducted with 786 Soldier on this issue:

Me: I have made an observation that when talking or even rapping, you and the majority of the members of your group are constantly interjecting Islamic terms into your conversations. What would you say is the reason for this?

786 Soldier: Its slang, it’s like an Islamic slang. But its still everyday speech cause slang reflects how you live. You know got gangbanger that got certain slang or whatever, but it reflects how they live. So these words just come out in my everyday speech, cause that’s how I live, so I can I say I’m about the Din [religion] cause I feel that way, that’s how
I live my life. So when it’s my life it becomes my speech and then it becomes easier for it come out in my rap cause that’s everyday life.

Me: It has been reported that one’s life can be reflected in their everyday speech and, as is evident in your case, even into your song lyrics. However, being a Muslim myself, I have noticed that not all Muslims, not even all Imams [Islamic preachers] are inclined to use so many Islamic terms in their everyday speech. While they might say mashallah [praise God] when something good happens, or inshallah [God willing] when wondering about the future, there is not a common interjection of these terms when speaking with those who do not practice the religion. Despite this, you and every other rapper here at the Masjid seem to use these specific terms when describing just about anything. Why do you think that is?

786 Soldier: It’s not like you plan to say it like that, you know but when I think about it I guess you could say that we mix in some elements of street and put an Islamic flavor on it. The reason I think it happens like that though is because old habits die hard and like I told you before I’m always gonna be from the streets. Where I came from [inner city] you want your words to reflect your lifestyle, and a lot of us come from the environment.

When I was gangbanging I was with the Bloods [American street gang] we would always be like “hey blood” or “blood this or that” and we call or enemies crabs, and we had names for the cops like the “five-0”. You know, gangbanging was a lifestyle and we were committed and that became our world so we let our words reflect that. I feel society don’t know this, but people from the hood are really committed to whatever lifestyle they are in. So when we take shahada [convert to Islam], we want be all about Din and this life.
Were not like some other Muslims who only pray like once a week, I mean this is our lifestyle and we want our words to reflect what were living.

Me: Would you prefer or like to see other Muslims, even the ones that aren’t rappers or from the “streets,” as you describe it, to start using more Islamic terms in their everyday speech?

786 Soldier: Our style is purely Islamic its not like not were doing anything unislamic by using these slangs. I mean, it’s all cultural just cause they’re not doing or were doing it doesn’t make it Haram [prohibited] for either one of us. That being said though, I would like to see it because you need to speak to people in a language they understand that’s what the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him always said. You know street culture has a lot to do with hip-hop culture, and hip-hop is a language everybody speaks I mean you go to China and they be listening to Jay Z. Plus, Islam has always been spread amongst the poor and downtrodden first and I think that is where the streets is at. So if we mix in the streets language with Islamic language we can bring people closer to Islam and do real Dawah.

As is clearly evident from the transcript above, 786 Soldier and other rappers feel that one of the inner-city ideals of being true to oneself and being committed to their lifestyle should be reflected in their everyday speech. Moreover, it is easier to solidify group commitment through the usage of everyday language that makes it easier to identify members within the group and discover who are the outsiders, an clear demonstration of Collins Interactional Ritual Theory. Ironically, while 786 and the others feel they need to show commitment through their everyday lives to Islam, they do not to
use such language consciously. Rather, it as a side effect, resultant from their lives on the “streets” when they would fully immerse themselves in the culture of lifestyle and ensure their language reflected that respective lifestyle. Their love for Islam propels them to use and incorporate Islamic language to reflect everyday speech, and simultaneously leaves them perplexed at why others Muslims don’t do the same thing if they love Islam. Testimony from participants shows they feel using these Islamic word with a hip style can increase and spread the message of Islam. This is not necessarily how the majority of Muslims in general feel. Through, their everyday vernacular we not only see symbols that arise through the words, yet we also see the rappers participating in a ritual, trying to blend two dual intenties into one demonstrating the Dual Identity concept of Double Consciousness. While, also simultaneously demonstrating the concept of Interactional Ritual Chain Theory and the performance of their rituals.

_Dress: Indicator of One’s Identity_

The Interactional Chain Theory states that symbols are used an emblems to the keep the memories of the ritual and group identity fresh in the minds of the participant. Perhaps there is no better symbol other than what one wears when it comes to keeping the memories fresh, since they are literally wearing the symbols. This can serve as a daily reminder of the ritual and group identity. Dress also relates to Double Consciousness as well, as it clearly signifies as an marker of ones identity. Also, while lyrics, nicknames, and word usage might all demonstrate the probability of a push-pull relationship between the inner-city hip-hop persona versus the Muslim identity, one can see a stronger
correlation when examining this relationship through the appearance of these Muslim rappers. Islam encourages Muslims and males to dress in a certain manner. It is recommended that males trim the upper lip of the mustache and allow their beards to grow out. Additionally, the teachings of Islam suggest that males wear a *Kufi* [head covering or hat] and roll their pants above their ankles. Given the religious dedication of this group of Muslim rappers, it is not surprising that all but one member of this rap group observes the Islamic recommendations for appearance mentioned earlier.

Interestingly enough, these Islamic recommendations are observed and supplemented with the inner-city/hip-hop clothing style. The typical inner city outfit for rappers consists of a plain white or black baggy t-shirt usually coming down past waist and stopping short of the knees, known as a “Tall T.” This ensemble is completed with baggy blue or black jeans. When the weather is more frigid, this outfit also includes a baggy sweatshirt with a hood worn over the shirt. Muslim rappers greatly admire and respect the outfit as a symbol for their way of life. *Ansar the Helper*, a rapper from Masjid, describes this as “only for real hardcore person that about that life.”

According to *Ansar*, this inner-city subculture outfit, while no longer popular amongst mainstream America youth, still comprises what the majority of youth from the inner city and those that are involved in a culture of gangs wear. However, *Ansar* says this outfit does vary from the typical inner city outfit, due to what he dubs “Islamic modifications.” In addition to the standard outfit, Muslim rappers also include a *kufi*, beard, and the baggy pants rolled up above the ankle. They take the outfit one step further
by wearing prayer beads over their neck. *Ansar* when explaining the various aspects of the outfits, discussed the addition of the Islamic aspects to this ensemble:

“You know over the tall tee you got the Islamic prayer beads and that’s in like of place of jewelry or a chain that I or some of the others might have had in my previous life when I wasn’t as religious, and then instead of a dorag [covering worn on head], I got on a *Kufi*. Then we got this beard, *Alhamudillah*, but you know we still like line ups [when beard is designed and styled by the barber] so we got and maintain this Islamic beard you know mustached trimmed everything, but have them line up or style sides of the beard while it letting grow, without violating *Sunnah* [ways of the Prophet SAW].” [sic] – Ansar the Helper

It is evident that rappers retain value from both their clothing from their inner city and hip-hop culture and required forms of appearance for their faith. As a result, they are often practicing dual identity. Unlike the nicknames (which are also blended element of hip-hop culture with Islamic culture), they dress this way on a daily basis, retaining it as a part of their permanent identity. By using dress to create a permanent Identity the rappers keep the concept of their ritual alive, through the symbol of dress, and also signify their Dual Identity. Therefore, effectively creating a Dual Consciousness while following the ritualistic patterns of the Interactional Ritual Chain theory.

*Themes in the Rap Music*

When conducting a performance of a ritual it is important to understand how the ritual is being performed and with what amount of intensity and fervor. While, looking at the ritual of rap, looking at the themes the rappers could helps us understand the identity issues and primary reasons that rappers have for rapping. Unsurprisingly, almost all the themes of the raps for the rappers at Masjid centered around their religion. Through
looking at the themes in the music, one would discover that even though the Muslim rappers have dual identities their religious takes precedence over their identity as rappers. In fact religion, overshadowed even their discussion of subjects involving the hip-hop culture as a whole, or even the problems of the inner-city. This is because as Dinboy 400 put it:

“That all of the problem of the inner-city could be solved through the spread of Islam.” –[sic]- Dinboy 400

In fact, the biggest motivation for the majority of these Islamic rappers is to spread Dawah [preaching Islam] and to bring non-believers and others closer to Islam. They also aim to present a positive image of Islam. Many of these rappers have a strong belief in life after death, believing that they will be resurrected and called before a higher power to face the consequences of their actions. Some, like Dinboy 400, feel that if they are not constantly acting in ways throughout the day in which to make Allah [Islamic term for God] happy, then they might adversely impact their chances of going to paradise. Other rappers, such as Ansar the Helper, are under the impression that they have a lot to atone for in regards to the sins they have committed in life, most of them exacerbated through Western culture and influence. Ansar discussed his fear of the resurrection and his quest to obtain forgiveness from God:

“I was wild as a youngster, drinking, clubbing, chasing females. I was caught up in the Dunya [this life], Allah [Islamic term for God] is the most merciful, yet I got a lotta sins, done a lotta haram [non permissible], so now I gotta try to do as many goods deed as possible until die, and I never know when I’m going to die, so I gotta do as many good deeds as possible so that I go to the right place.” [sic] – Ansar the Helper
The feelings that Ansar the Helper and other rappers are expressing are not unique for a deeply religious person. Throughout my research, I observed many religious Muslims who fear a hereafter and have a desire to atone for their sins. However, the Muslim rappers’ methods to atone for their sins are extraordinary. Every participant interviewed declared their primary motivation for rapping was to bring people towards Islam. These participants expanded on this thought, stating they were not rapping for money or fame, but simply to seek the rewards of the hereafter. While some admitted that their past motivations might have included money or fame, they asserted that their reentry into religion directly coincided with changing motivations. Bigg Jinn expressed his motivations clearly:

“Akey [brother] you wanna know why I rap, its for Allah [God], I don’t care about fame none of that. I just think that if I keeping on rapping, keep on spitting lyrics I’m getting good deeds, I’m taking myself closer to Jannat [heaven]. I told you that I needed forgiveness so rapping is my way of attaining it. The more people I reach, the more they listen and that’s dawah. Look I got this talent of rap, I got to use it for the Din not for myself” [sic] – Bigg Jinn

This quote demonstrates that while rappers might have a partial Double Consciousness and Dual Identities due to their rituals of being Muslim and being a rapper, they insist that one of their identities (that of being a rapper) only exists to exemplify their primary important identity of being a Muslim. The themes in the song greatly exemplify Collins theory on Interactional Ritual Theory. Not only do the Muslim rappers use the ritual of prayers to solidify their group commitment and identity, they also look to outside rituals (on top of the rituals they are already conducting) to further strengthen their initial identities.
Contradiction and Collision of Interactional Chain Rituals

It is possible that the only true form of Double Consciousness that occurs for the Muslim rappers is when their world their Interactional Chain Rituals collide with another. The ritual of rap can collide with the ritual of praying and being observant Muslim, if the use of music is involved. The method of “rapping with music” to attain goods deeds and spread Islam is interpreted by some to contradict Islam. According to certain Islamic scholars, it is forbidden to participate in making music, with the exception of the daff (drum). These scholars claim that both the Quran (Islamic book of Muslims) and Hadith (sayings of Muslim Prophet Muhammad SAW) forbid the practice of music. This is a controversial subject, as other scholars argue that music is permissible, citing examples in which the Prophet encouraged music.

As a result, many members of the rap group at this Northern California Masjid have felt repercussions for rapping, as members of the religion community have scorned them for the very thing Muslim rappers feel bring them closer to religion. Righteous Din describes the condescension that conservative Muslims have heaped upon him, stating that it had an adverse effect on him and his identity and image of himself. Righteous Din described these emotions to me one night after completing our nightly prayers.

“People come up to you and be like ‘yo your lyrics are dope, but rapping about Islam, astaghfirullah’ [Arabic way of voicing displeasure]. We got fans, and then we got people all over the nation coming up to us whenever we perform saying that’s wrong hopefully Allah shows you the right path. The feedback kinda changes you, I mean here you are supposed to be this super righteous Muslim and then you might me doing something unislamic. It shakes me up, cause you know I’m doing this for Allah, and
if I can’t do this (rap) I don’t really know any other way to help the *Ummah* (Muslim Community).” [sic] – *Righteous Din*

*Righteous Din* is clearly shaken up by the backlash in the greater Muslim community and bemused by the negative reactions to his rapping. Due to his reliance on his talent of rap for expressing his emotions, including promoting his religion, he is unsure if he can promote his religion without the use the music. Yet when using rap to do what he thinks is right, he encounters criticism from certain Islamic scholars. The uncertainty surrounding the permitted use of music in Islam threatens Min’s dual identity.

For this entire group of Muslim rappers, their rapping revolves around expressing their Islamic identity. The censure they face by some members of the religions Islamic community forces the identity of their rapper self to be viewed through the lens of greater Muslim community and religious mandates. This can cause pain and forces rappers such as Min to question their religious identity versus their rapper identity. At the end, they feel ambiguous towards an important part of themselves, uncertain whether their religious identities can sufficiently supplement their rapper identities.

While *Righteous Din* was shaken up by the idea that music might be prohibited in Islam, other rappers from the group easily dismissed critics and others as being ignorant about certain aspects of Islam. They refer to examples of other scholars who permit the use of music. On the other hand, another portion of rappers from the group believe that even though rapping might be forbidden in Islam, it is still needed in order to combat the ills of society that is becoming increasingly immoral. In their opinion, the only way to combat that is to replace negative rap with mainstream positive rap.
When 786 Soldier, a member who voiced the opinion that negative rap could only be combatted by another rap form, was asked if he would ever consider using daff/drum (one of the only instruments allowed by the religious authorities who declare music to be inconsistent with Islamic teachings), he abruptly declined, reasoning:

“No Akey, I can’t just use a drum. I don’t even use beats from the 90s, I use mainstream beats. Because then you got people bobbing their heads and listening. They have a saying in rap that if the beats really good, then people will just listen to their lyrics and not really care what you saying. There is a flipside to that when it sounds good non-muslims will want listen to it, and then they’ll wanna know what it says and then come to the Din and that’s some good deeds right there. Yeah music might be unislamic, it might not, but the end’s justify the means. I mean the same people that tell you rap is un-islamic go listen to Jay Z or some other womanizing, drug glorifying filth. Its very hypocritical” [sic] – 786 Soldier

This reasoning by 786 Soldier demonstrates that while he is self-aware of his reception in the greater Muslim community and is aware that he is not keeping with the community status quo, he views himself as a rogue hero someone who will break a couple rules in order to help out his community.

Despite the bleak outlook painted by this section, in which the Interactional Rituals of the two different representative groups collide with one another, the collision of the rituals still does not signify a true full on representation of Double Consciousness. That is because a sizable group of Muslim scholars still believe that music is permissible in Islam as long no profanity is performed. In accordance with these Muslim Scholars, the rappers at the Masjid are not doing anything contrary to the primary tenets of Islam; rather, they are actually attaining good deeds through the spread of Islam. Also, the sin of
using music is relatively minor in Islam, when being compared to others sins such as drinking or adultery or even missing a prayer.

Themes: Masjid Rappers’ Topics

Observation of the rappers at the Masjid revealed that these rappers were extremely devoted to their religion. As a result, it was clearly evident that they were trying to interject values from their inner city life and mix it in with their Islamic religious beliefs. After examining and analyzing the rituals of the Masjid rapper, it was uncovered that the Masjid rappers were attempting to blend both dual identities. After delving past the actual act of rapping and examining the ritual of rap and the themes rappers were discussing, one was able to see that identity was a central theme. Not surprisingly, the majority of the themes that Muslims rappers focused upon centered on religion. The three major themes that the rappers at the Masjid rapped about revolved around: (1) redemption, specifically changing from a life of a sin to more meaningful life, (2) instructions and (3) the glorification of the religious rituals of Islam, including the topic of an afterlife and their love for Allah (God).

Theme 1: Redemption

The theme of redemption was very interesting to observe. Moreover, it was extremely powerful at times. The rappers exhibited a great deal of emotion regarding their lives before they came back towards the path of Islam, discussing how they were lost in a self-destructive path of violence, sex and drugs. They rapped with great sadness about times wasted in the “streets,” prison, and within a gang subculture. By talking to many of the rappers from the Masjid and exploring the themes they talked about most
frequently, it was apparent that many felt that they were a product of their environment, stating that before Islam and seeing the “light,” they were caught up in a self-destructive cycle. In the minds of the rappers, Islam was this superior force coming to save the rappers from not only from their self-destructive lifestyle, but also their low socioeconomic class, and even a lifetime of unhappiness projected on them through harsh conditions and substandard living in poor neighborhoods. 786 Soldier described this phenomenon when talking to me.

“You wanna hear something funny, Akey. Before Islam, I was living in a bad neighborhood, drugs everywhere, gangbangers, violence, zina (Arabic for adultery), it was a real hell hole. Now after Islam, I still live in the same neighborhood I’m still around the same filth. But I’m safe from it. Islam gives me the inner peace and strength to not participate in the degradation and filth all around me. I don’t participate in that stuff no more. Before, I used to be frustrated by my conditions, and I’m still frustrated, but now cause of Islam I can endure. Islam teaches me patience, and teaches me that it is my Islamic duty to change the conditions, not become a part of the problem. So to help people, I give them Islam and that’s what I rap about. My entire raps and the rest of these Brothers are centered around Islam and how it changed me, because the entire problems of the ghetto (inner city) can be solved through Islam.” [sic] – 786 Soldier.

It is important to note that many of harsh conditions that these rappers were previously subjected to did not necessarily change after their acceptance to Islam. Rather, their coping abilities and ability to rise above being a “product of their environment” had undergone a drastic change. Every single one of the rappers interviewed said that they felt like the problems of the inner city could be fixed and resolved through Islamic solutions.

Further elaborating, the rappers at the Masjid would use their own examples of redemption while rapping to illustrate the power of Islam, discussing how they gave up
certain illicit activities in order to get closer to the truth. Generally, rappers at Masjid
downplayed certain aspects of the stereotypical inner city identity, such as drugs or
gangbanging. Their conscious effort to downplay these stereotypes and their focus on showed that they placed a high importance on their identity as a Muslim. In fact, by looking at the theme of redemption, one could see that rappers at Masjid looked upon their inner-city identity as an identity that was proscribed to them at birth due to demographics and location. On the other hand, Islam was seen an identity/lifestyle to be followed, and the inner city lifestyle values could only be followed if they didn’t conflict with Islam.

Following the theme of redemption, the Muslim rappers were constantly urging others to change through their rap, focusing on a chance of forgiveness from God and lifestyle of inner peace. Through this interactional ritual of rap, we examined the themes to see the development of the rappers identity in regards to Double Consciousness. However, a close look at the theme of redemption in rap reveals that the identity of Muslim rappers does not completely fall under Dubois’ Double Consciousness theory. This can be attributed to the fact that while they do acknowledge the inner-city identity as it was ascribed to them by birth, their Muslim Identity (through choice of their own) takes precedence. This differs from Dubois’ Double Consciousness theory, in which the identity is forced. The clear distinction is the concept of personal choice. However, Dubois’ theory of balancing or having Dual Identities still applies, as even through redemption and change, the Muslim rappers still acknowledge their inner city Identity.
Theme 2: Glorifying the Participation of Religious Rituals

Ironically, through the ritual of rap, the Muslim rappers at the Masjid glorified the rituals of Islam. The second most dominant theme, after redemption, in the Masjid rappers group rap lyrics was the description and glorification of the actual participation of religious rituals. The rappers at the Masjid would rap on the pleasure and emotional experience of participating in the five daily prayers required of Muslims. Some even went so far as to include detailed instructions in their raps on how to perform ablutions before the prayers and complete the five daily prayers. A prevalent topic, included in many of the rappers, was the weekly mandatory prayer of Jummah and its benefits.

*Righteous Din’s* impromptu freestyle lyrics include this discussion of religious rituals, rapping:

“Yo, I keep down for the *ummah* [Muslim group] during *Jummah*, all I gotta say, yo is don’t go astray, prostrate your head down and pray.”-[sic]- Righteous Din

In *Righteous Din’s* quote, we can see that he is discussing *Jummah*, a religious ritual, while simultaneously encouraging other Muslims to be steadfast in their ritual of prayer.

Rappers at this Masjid also often addressed the religious ritual of fasting during the month of Ramadan. One rapper at the Masjid had an entire song dedicated to the once in a lifetime mandated religious pilgrimage to Mecca. *Righteous Din* described the ritual of rap as a way to teach people about the rituals of Islam.

“See by rapping about prayer, fasting, and *Hajj* [Muslim Pilgrimage], I’m making Islam look exciting. I want people to feel it’s cool to pray, it’s cool to do *wudu*, *Jummah* is good. Also, at the same time I can’t be a good Muslim if I’m actually a part of these things in real life you know like
praying and fasting. So I gotta make it cool for other Muslims to do, cause if they are not doing those things they basically going away from Islam, so I’m trying to bring them closer to Islam. Plus I feel a deep connection with Islam and I feel like prayer brings me to closer to it, and I gotta think about doing these things even when I am not doing it, and that’s why I rap about the prayer.” [sic] – Righteous Din

This quote demonstrates that Righteous Din and the other rappers at the Masjid talk about prayer, fasting and other rituals because they feel the rituals define the religion and that without participating in the rituals, one will move further away from the religion. This ties directly into the Ritual Chain theory, which states that identity is intrinsically linked to one’s Interaction Rituals. Also, it helps to define their identity as Muslims.

The Interactional Ritual Chain theory states that Interactional Rituals are later developed into symbols, so that memories of the ritual stay fresh and alive in the minds of the participants (Collins 2004). Through discussing the Interactional Rituals of Islamic tradition through the ritual of rap, they use the rap as a symbol to keep the Islamic rituals fresh and alive in minds of other Muslims, while further cementing their own personal identity as Muslims.

Theme 3: Rapping about Afterlife and Love for Allah (God)

The third most dominant theme evident in Muslim rapper’s raps was the expression of love for Allah (God) and questions in regards to the Afterlife. Some of the rappers would devote entire songs centered to the forgiveness mercy and love of Allah. The most unique rap I heard was when some of the rappers would rap about the ninety-nine names of Allah (God).
Ansar, the Helper, was the rapper came up with these impromptu lyrics. “There are 99 names to Allah, cause he just so great. His mercy could elevate you a different space, His love is everywhere you want to be. Come to Allah because he loves both you and me.” [sic] – Ansar the Helper

It never ceased to amaze me how many times Ansar and other rappers would compliment Allah in different and unique ways. The rappers discussed the personal bond that they developed with Allah. Their focus on this theme is due to the fact that the love of Allah is central to one’s identity as a Muslim. As a Muslim myself, I have observed that Muslims take devotion and respect to Allah very seriously. A true Muslim is supposed to love Allah (God) more than his friends, parents, and even children. Even non-devout Muslims will be careful not to say anything disrespectful towards Allah, as doing so in many people’s eyes would brand one as not being a Muslim. When rapping and praising Allah, the rappers at this Masjid feel that they are going beyond simply identifying themselves as Muslim and moving closer to gaining reward in the Afterlife and entering Jannah (paradise).

Many of the rappers from this Masjid wrote and performed many elaborate rhyme schemes describing the afterlife or entering Jannah (paradise). There would be raps describing a feeling of ultimate tranquility and peace, coupled with descriptions of flowing rivers and plentiful food. Almost every single one of these descriptions would be followed by instructions on how to get paradise, such as being steadfast in one’s prayer, praying five times a day, and being good to those around them. These descriptions of the afterlife gave Muslim rappers incentive to ascribe to the Muslim Identity over their inner
city identity. 786 Soldier described his feelings regarding this connection with the Muslim Identity.

“Yeah, I was a thug, yeah I’m from the streets. But gangbanging not gonna take me to Jannah. Being a good Muslim is gonna take me to Jannah. Even if I don’t do it I can’t rap about that gangster lifestyle cause that might make me go towards hell fire. But I still hold on to that image (inner city Identity) when I rap but to an extent, and I only do that so I can help other people caught up in the hood, and bring them back toward Islam. A lotta of the other brothers here do that also to just ask around. But yeah I love rapping about Jannah (paradise) cause it makes me feel good inside and also cause it makes other wanna to good.” [sic] – 786 Soldier

It is apparent that 786 Soldier and many of the rappers believe in rapping about paradise, feeling that it is an incentive for other Muslims to follow Islam. While the rappers at Masjid represent their Muslim Identity, yet ironically, also held on to their inner city identity, as they felt it would help them help others living in the inner city. These rappers believed that helping others would help them enter paradise.

In Collin’s theory of the Interactional Ritual, he talked about groups gathering to participate in rituals, developing their own moral code and beliefs through this process. This was obvious through the themes practiced by the rappers at the Masjid, who, through their religion of Islam, are taught that those who participate and follow the guidelines of Islam will be rewarded through entering paradise. It also serves to alleviate the Double Consciousness that might have been present in the Masjid rappers in trying to balance inner-city identity versus their Islamic identity. It is clear that in the minds of these rappers, it is necessary for their Islamic Identity to take precedence over their inner-city identity in order to enter paradise. However, they still encompass Dubois’ theory of dual identities, as they utilize the dual identity of being Muslim and coming from the
inner city is necessary in order to bring others towards Islam. Their love for Allah (God) binds all the Muslims together through their rituals and activities as believers.

*Observations of Suburban Rap Caucus:*

*Researchers Role and Setting of the Research*

The Suburban Rap Caucus is located in a suburb on the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Northern California. Many residents in this neighborhood have described their suburb as a quiet, peaceful, and close knit community. The community has also been described as being conservative and very patriotic. The suburb is not overly populated, with a couple of corporate owned grocery stores, fast food restaurants, and apartment complexes. The majority of this suburb consists of houses and acres of open land. Vast majority of residents of this particular suburb are Caucasian and come from a middle class social economic status. Some of the striking differences between the suburban group and rappers from the Masjid came as a result of social class differences. Issues that the rappers in the inner city might face such as violent crime, gangs, poverty, police brutality and homicide were a rare occurrence in the suburbs. The striking difference between Suburbs and inner city was the prevalence of a hip-hop and rap subculture. At the inner city Masjid, there was definitely a huge presence of underground rappers within the Masjid and in the surrounding areas. However, in this particular suburb, other than members of the Suburban Rap caucus, it was extremely unlikely to run into some underground rappers. In fact, according to members of the group, it is rumored that the town in which they lived in was so conservative that it even had a city ordinance
banning rapping music. Whether or not that rumor is true is irrelevant, however it does demonstrate the psychological atmosphere and acceptance of suburban residents towards rap music.

Similar to the rappers at the Masjid, I shared many similarities with the Suburban Rap Caucus that enabled me to gain a certain level of acceptance, participate in the rituals, and develop a group identity within the group. The similarities between me and the Suburban Rap Caucus was that we both came from a similar social economic background. Therefore, we were able to bond over sharing the commonality of being from similar neighborhoods. However, we differed in terms of religion, race, and even familial culture. Fortunately for me, the most important factor in the ability to gain acceptance within the Suburban Rap Caucus was having to ability to perform and recite rap lyrics efficiently. Similar, to how the rappers at Masjid placed a huge emphasis on the identity of being a Muslim to gain acceptance within the group, the rappers at the Suburban Rap Caucus placed an huge emphasis on having the ability to rap. Through having the ability to freestyle (spit lyrics spontaneously) and participating in the rituals of the cypher I was able to gain acceptance into the group, gain a group identity as the rapper within the group. Some members of the hip-hop group even jokingly referred to me as an “honorary member.”
Situational Copresence and Performance of Rituals

Unlike the rappers at the Masjid, the Suburban Rap Caucus rappers did not have a singular gathering place in which they could gather to perform and engage in the rituals of rap. Rather, the location in which the Suburban Rap Caucus rappers would gather to perform would vary on a month-to-month or even biweekly basis. Through text messages, Internet forums and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter members of the group would inform other members of time, date, and places for group meeting. The group meeting would typically occur through the use of a rap ritual known as a cypher.

Cyphers might take place in a bar, library, hall, or even a parking lot. A scheduled cypher would consist of numerous members of the group agreeing to meet at a designated spot. Once at the designated spot, one member of the group would either start b-boxing (the creation of music through use of ones vocal cords) or bring a stereo system so that hip-hop musical beats could be played while rappers chanted rhymes in tune with the beat. The rappers would then gather around in a circle, while somebody would start of the cypher by rhyming and reciting rap lyrics. The rappers would then take turns reciting rap lyrics in the circle, trying to ensure that everyone in the circle was given an chance to rap. However, it should be noted that turns to perform were not based on order, time or even a clockwise progression. Rather, when one rapper stopped rapping the other would simply chime in. It was apparent that the cypher was governed by a set of informal rules. For example, rappers would ensure that other rappers were given a chance to rap by pausing to allow others to chime in. According to the rappers, for a rapper to completely
dominating the group members’ time in the cypher by not allowing others to chime in was seen as rude or disrespectful and was rarely done. Not engaging in the ritual of the cypher was also seen as disrespectful, unless the rapper mentioned having a cold or some specific ailment related to one’s vocal cords. All of the rappers who participated in the ritual of the cypher gained status in the group, yet those whose performances were spectacular gained an even higher standing within the group, especially those who can demonstrate the ability to improvise through freestyle raps.

The cypher also serves as a social gathering for rappers to discuss and share their music with other artists and pass out copies of Albums, along with the links to their music online. The majority of the rappers at the Suburban Rapper Caucus were local artists with limited funds and exposure, so their music was not spread through concerts, but rather through social networking via other rappers. In fact, most of the rappers did not participate in the concerts either due to lack of funds or proper connections, so the cypher served as their primary gathering place where a situational co-presence could develop. Many rappers have described the cypher as creating an extreme emotional energy that solidifies their identity as rappers. Aaron tha Rapper described the emotions that overtake him and other rappers while he is performing in the cypher.

“The energy you get from being in cypher its raw, its like being in a gang or the army. All these people who can spit (recite raps) like you straight up flowing, all of us together their isn’t anybody in the group that can leave cypher and say they are not a rapper. Even if they sucked, because at least they tried, right.” [sic] - Aaron tha Rapper

Through Aaron’s testimony and upon further examination of the cypher, one can see many aspects of the Interactional Ritual Chain Theory at work. The cypher is the
situational co presence in which the performance of the ritual takes place. Through this ritual one can see the rappers interacting with one another, gaining an emotional energy. The act of rapping together amongst the rappers creates that emotional energy, and a feeling of group solidarity. That feeling of group solidarity creates a group identity for the participants within the cypher as a “rapper”. The rappers who perform better than other rappers have greater feelings of solidarity and their status and their group identity as “rappers” becomes more solidified. The rappers also develop moral codes and barriers to keep outsiders out of the group, those who can’t rap or refuse to rap are branded as outsiders. Violations of group norms, such as not allowing others to perform in the cypher can result in banishment of the group. Collin’s mentions that in the Interactional Ritual Chain Theory that offenses to the group can be amended through apology (Collins 2004). The concept of the allowing members to amend offenses is also apparent in the Suburban Rap Caucus. This is demonstrated through apologies of rappers who refuse to participate in a ritual through the use of the physical ailment. The excuse of a physical ailment serves as an apology to the group for violating the norm of not participating in ritual. The cypher overall demonstrates how rappers gain group solidarity within the rituals through the group, and emerge from the cypher with the identity of being a rapper.
Struggle to Assimilate within local Hip-Hop community

As demonstrated through their rituals of rap in their cypher the rappers of the Suburban Rap Caucus demonstrate Collins Interactional Ritual Chain Theory. Through engaging in the ritual of rap the rappers develop group solidarity, and the identity of being a rapper. However, this new identity causes a Double Consciousness to develop. The “rapper identity” comes into direct conflict with identity proscribed to them by their immediate suburban surroundings, and even the surrounding larger underground hip-hop community.

The majority of the rappers felt that since they were white and originated from a conservative suburban middle-class town, outsiders would stereotype them as inconsistent with the real message of hip-hop that originated in the inner city and was founded by largely working class or lower class Puerto Rican and African American males.

Out of the four rappers interviewed, three said that they felt discriminated and marginalized. These three rappers expressed that they felt their group the Suburban Rap Caucus (SRC) was viewed as inauthentic and fake, often negatively dubbed as the “wannabe” hip-hop group. Aaron tha Rapper, for example, alleged that in order to get “mad props” (slang for respect) amongst the larger underground hip-hop community in Northern California, one would have to be extremely talented at rapping adhere strictly to the community norms.

“Every time SRC go to another place outside of the burbs(slang for suburbs), we get like hated on. Like everybody will be like ‘what are those white boys doing here’ or they’ll be like what are they going rap about some straight up pop music or how great their lives are…. But when I kill
the mic [perform well] through the my lyrics, then they’ll be okay ‘my bad, whitie is actually pretty good.”[sic] – Aaron tha Rapper

While the Aaron and other rappers cannot point to explicit discrimination, they claim there is still a prevalent belief that their rap does not fall into the category of “authentic” and that these rappers are simply attempting to emulate a lifestyle.

However, the revelation of discrimination towards SRC might come as a surprise to those more familiar with mainstream rap. As mentioned in the previous chapters rap and hip-hop, white rappers such as Eminem have invaded mainstream hip-hop rap and rap has expanded to different countries. As a result, it seems contradictory that rappers of different race/social class would be out of place in the rap environment.

Matthew Thompson, head director/rapper for SRC, addressed this paradox, stating that while integration might have reached the mainstream hip-hop community, it is still a conflicting issue within the direct underground hip-hop community within Northern California.

*Transcript Addressing Discrimination towards SRC with Matthew Thompson*

*Me:* Mr. Thompson, in your opinion as the director of Suburban Rap Caucus, what caused the perception that rappers from a Caucasian, middle-class demographic are not talented as rappers? Could you expand on this theory, taking into account the fact that many white rappers like Eminem, or upper middle class rappers like Kayne West, have been successful and able to break into the hip-hop market.

*Thompson:* I think that in the mainstream rap it is possible to break in and be respected regardless of who you are, because almost everybody in hip-hop knows that audience that
mainstream attracts is white and well to do. But in underground rap, the fans are like the community of people around you, they’re what I like to call hardcore rap junkie that like to listen to their local artists along with their mainstream artists. But you’re not gonna find that many hardcore rap junkies out here in burbs (slang for suburbs) cause even though might listen and enjoy a rap song on the radio, they’re not really trying to listen to their local rap artists cause raps not really part of their culture. However, the inner city is different everybody raps over there, they got kids rapping in park, in the club everywhere, at their local talent show you know. Rap started in the hood [inner city] and amongst minorities, so when we go in there to rap people now its not part of our culture our way of life so they think were unauthentic. However, were trying to make rap popular in the suburbs and make it a part of culture but until that happens were not part of that in group. Right now I feel in underground rap, it is you can’t be both white and middle class and expect to pass. You could be black and upper class and still get a pass, or could you be white guy from the inner city and still get a pass. Because in both cases people feel you understand the hip-hop culture.

Me: You bring up some valid points. However, underground rap music is described as music that is not in the mainstream on the radio or nationally corporate owned television stations. A lot of underground rappers that are white and upper middle class have become well known and prominent within underground and local rap circles. Examples of these rappers are Atmospheres, Random Abilities, and Brother Ali. Additionally, there are also people rapping in different circles, like Japan, Mexico and Morocco. What distinguishes
them from SRC? Are these other rappers actually able to gain acceptance or is that just a façade?

_Thompson:_ As far as other countries are concerned, hip-hop is still not a major staple of their societies its terms of music or culture, so they probably won’t have any so called hip-hop experts to tell you weather they are real or not. But back to America. All of the people you named are from Minneapolis or Minnesota, and I’ve been down there are too many too hoods or inner cities with that rap culture, most of Minnesota is just farms and suburbs. It’s like an extension of our town except for the fact that its like a state, so I feel like when they were rapping they didn’t have anybody to tell them that what they were saying or doing wasn’t real or unauthentic, they build up their fan base and changed the culture of Minnesota to start enjoying rap. But out here in California, you gotta a lot of cities and this is the birthplace of west coast “gangsta’ rap, and were a small suburb right next to a big city with a thriving underground scene. So when you go to perform in the nearby cities everybody already thinks were fake or that our problems aren’t real so we struggle just to make a name for ourselves.

This transcript demonstrates that Thompson believes that white, middle class rappers and others members of his rap group struggle with consistently trying to prove that they are authentic to people in the inner city underground hip hop world or at least it seems they are trying to fit in. According, to Thompson suggest that maybe situation might be unique to area given the fact there hip-hop group is next to big cities with a huge underground market that caters to the inner city and doesn’t accept groups or people that they view to be outsiders. He also believes that rappers in different countries or those
in areas/states where there is less of a hip-hop inner city influence are able to create their own identity as they don’t have to rely on meddling of the part of nearby underground hip-hop scenes on what is authentic or to gauge how much artists fit into the culture of hip hop.

Thompson’s observation that hip-hop is not a part of the culture for the people of suburbs, yet makes up huge part of the lifestyle for inner city people is observation I have made myself. When interviewing rappers at the Masjid and observing them in the neighborhoods in the inner city, I have noticed that hip-hop/rap is very huge aspect of the lifestyle of an inner-city habitant. People freestyle and rap at gas stations, 7-Elevens, and outside the mosque. The age range is not limited, as I personally observed four-year old children and old men in there seventies rap.

The suburbs are a completely different world from the inner city. During my time researching the Suburban Rap Caucus within their respective suburb, I never witnessed anyone outside the rap group rapping. Most of the people in the neighborhood did not even know that a rap group existed. When I showed one of the music videos to a couple residing within the suburb, they keeled over in laughter. They claimed that it looked like a group of white suburban kids trying to rap and emulate a gangster lifestyle. As a result, the couple originally presumed that it was a parody video.

The ironic part is that the rappers were not even talking about gangs or anything provocative. Rather, the simple idea of suburban white rappers have people questioning the whole song. These scenarios illustrate the difficulties that suburban rappers face when
trying to being taken seriously. It is not only the underground hip-hop community; it is their own community, as well.

As one can see similar to the rappers at the Masjid, the rappers from the Suburban group also struggled to overcome issues of identity. However, due to their demographic location, ethnicity, and social class, the identity issues they faced were vastly different from those of the Muslim American rappers from the Masjid. The major theme and struggles facing the Suburban Rap Caucus was their need to prove the authenticity of their music to the standard hip-hop users that currently pervade the industry.

The fact that the Suburban Rap Caucus rappers are not respected for their skills creates a multifaceted double conscious. The Suburban Rap Caucus rappers tend to look at themselves through the lens of the two disparate societies that reject them: the larger underground hip-hop community and their own community. In response to these views, they try to blend their identity of being underground rappers with their suburban identity, while somehow trying to prove to both groups their legitimacy as underground rappers.

*Double Consciousness exhibited through Interactional Ritual Symbols*

According to Collin’s Interactional Ritual Chain theory rituals must continue to hold meaning to participants in order for the participant to continue to derive the benefits of group solidarity, emotional energy, and group identity (Collins 2004). One of the ways in which rituals are kept alive in the minds of the participants is through the use of symbols (Collins 2004). The rappers at the Suburban Rap Caucus had numerous symbols that they would use to reaffirm their identity as rappers. The forming of their identity as rappers was exhibited symbolically through numerous ways: (1) through the use of their
rapper nicknames/moniker, (2) through their clothing style, and (3) through their use of songs in which rappers attempt to be authentic to their suburban roots. However, while all of these symbols demonstrate the rapper identity, it also demonstrates a Double Consciousness within the rappers. Who through the use of symbols make futile attempts to create a singular rapper identity, yet the preconceived notions of the surrounding community in regards to rap continues to force the rappers into having a Double Conscious identity.

**Nicknames/Moniker**

Through the usage of rap monikers, the members of the SRC subconsciously tried to prevent a Dual Identity or Double Consciousness and try to create a singular identity as a rapper. The members of SRC differed vastly from the rappers of Masjid with regards to the usage of rap nicknames. SRC members emulated more traditional rap names. Suburban rapper *Apple Cash* described the process of coming up with a nickname as something that was “entertaining and catching.” Unlike the rappers at Masjid, who tried to tie in their rap names or mix/blend them in with inner city roots and religious identity, the majority of the rappers at SRC would not attempt to use their rap names as a method to merge two identities. Rather, they chose rap names that only reflected their identity as underground rappers, while sometimes including references to their personal identity. X Jabs, a member of SRC, explained the decision to leave out references to the suburbs in their respective rap names:

“Bro, I wanted to choose something that would always let everyone know I am rapper you know, I don’t want my name to reflect who I am in the burbs [slang for suburbs], I want it to reflect who as I am a rapper. I also wanted a name that I wouldn’t mind being called by, because once you
became a rapper there is no going back to a regular name that’s your life and your identity” [sic] – X Jabs

As mentioned above, X Jabs preferred to be referred to by his rap name at all times. The other participants in this study from SRC echoed this sentiment. Most of the rappers interviewed qualified this statement by stating that they would permit their family and people at work to call them by real name. However, despite this allowance, they preferred to be called by their rapper name as much as possible so that people could understand and start to take them seriously as rappers.

This is a major distinction from rappers at Masjid, and can be attributed to the differing identity issues between members of the SRC and the Muslim Rappers. The rigidity to adherence to their rap moniker throughout all aspects of their lives was a response to the Double Consciousness the Suburban Rap Caucus rappers faced in regards to their identities as rappers. This was unlike the rappers at Masjid came from the inner city and never had authenticity as rappers questioned. As a result, they were more at liberty to use their real names in life and add in references to their religious identity. However, since the identity of the Suburban rappers was constantly being questioned they attempted to use the constant adherence to their nicknames as a way to create a singular identity as a rapper.

_Dress_

Through the use of nicknames members of the SRC attempted to create the singular identity of being a rapper. However, all of these attempts prove to be futile and the Suburban rappers were ultimately left with a clash of two separate identities. One of
the ways in which the suburban identity and the identity of rapper clashed, creating a Dual Identity, was through the rappers style of dress. The SRC members attempted to demonstrate their commitment to rap by wearing clothing designed for the typical inner-city hip-hop rapper. The members of SRC would get fitted in the typical dress of the inner-city rappers described in Chapter 4. Many of them wore “Tall T,” baggy jeans, fitted baseball bats, and whatever else they deemed to be popular amongst inner city hip-hop rappers. However, this style of clothing directly clashed with upbringing and environment immediately branding them as outsiders. That is because unlike the rappers at Masjid, this style of dress was not popular and highly unusual for the residents of their suburb to wear. In fact, it was rare for anyone in that suburb to dress up in the inner city hip-hop apparel other than rappers from the Suburban Rap Caucus. By not dressing up in the typical manner as the rest of the residents in their neighborhood, the rappers started to view themselves as unusual/outside the group for ascribing to the norms of hip-hop culture. Through looking at themselves through the lens of residents and then viewing themselves as unusual, the Suburban rappers were forming a Double Consciousness. This Double Consciousness occurs when a hegemonic dominant group through their ideals forces a preconceived identity on less dominant group. In this case the dominant group are the majority of residents of the suburbs (in which the rappers reside) who are not a part of the hip-hop culture pushing the preconceived identity on the minority group (the rappers).

It should be noted that while the majority of suburban rappers ascribed to this traditional style of the inner-city hip-hop dress, two members of the group refused to
dress in such a manner saying that it actually led to being taken less seriously as rappers.

_J-Hog_, a member of SRC, explained that this attempt would backfire and cause more ridicule of SRC’s attempt to establish themselves as serious rappers, stating:

“They’ll be all like we gotta dress like this, this is hip hop we gotta keep it real(be authentic), so that people were all about this culture. In my head, I’m thinking yeah hip hop is about keeping it real that’s why you can’t dress like that you gotta be true where you grow up. Just dress up like everyone else here, that’s being real. There is saying just be who you are, don’t pretend to be someone les and that includes how you dress.” [sic] - _J-Hog_

_J-Hog_ points out the fact that by trying to become taken seriously and prove to the hip-hop world that they were authentic, the rappers actually had less credibility. Ironically, it should be noted that these two rappers who had a greater and deeper understanding of the rituals of hip-hop in terms of being “authentic” and keeping it “real”. They understood that in order to stay in touch with the rituals of hip-hop in terms of being authentic they would have to embrace the dual identities of being rappers and suburbanites simultaneously.

_Themes: Suburban Rappers’ Topics_

_Overall_

When it came to subject matter in terms of lyrics, the majority of the Suburban Rap Caucus rappers had to come to terms with their dual identity and display their differences in regards to the rest of underground hip-hop and their respective communities. As the unspoken rituals of hip-hop maintain that rappers must be “authentic” and “truthful” in terms of the subject matter they rap about, these norms
result in the fact that suburban rappers would have to go against the very underground hip-hop identity they were trying to portray. Suburban Rap Caucus rapper J-Hog states that in the early stages of the group, there were some members who attempted to rap about stuff that they hadn’t experienced, such as gangbanging and drug dealing. However, other members of the underground hip-hop community aggressively reprimanded them to stay away from these subjects.

Despite the fact that SRC members have similar nicknames and dress to underground hip-hop and inner city, the values of underground hip-hop paradoxically dictated that they rap about issues that were not generally associated with underground rap. The rap lyrics for the Suburban rappers stuck to themes about suburbs, such as the meth addiction problems that were taking over their community and dealing with divorce. Their lyrics revolved around problems that they had all actually encountered. Despite the authenticity in their lyrics, SRC’s J-Hog states there are still critics:

“Now, when we rap about suburban stuff and what we actually go through instead of getting props, we actually have some people in the hip-hop community, I would say about 25 percent that say that the stuff they’re rapping is retarded, hip hop is about real struggle, street shit. I guess it is damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” [sic] - J-Hog

J-Hog’s quote illustrates the dilemma that members of SRC are facing in terms of authenticity. Despite their actions, their identity is always questioned. If they are allegedly true to themselves and their environment, they should not be rapping. When they try to emulate the environment and lifestyle of other rappers, they are criticized as inauthentic. This is a direct representation and example of double consciousness, in
which rappers are constantly examining their identity through the critical eyes of others in the community.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of double consciousness the battle rappers are facing, it is important to examine their ritual of rap on deeper level by examining the themes that the rappers at the SRC chose to rap about through their ritual of rap. The three most prevalent themes that were prevalent in the SRC were: (1) meth addiction, (2) the struggle of going to school and working at the same time, and (3) dealing with divorce. Numerous members of the Suburban Rap Caucus group stuck to these themes mainly because they felt they had to stay true to the problems facing their community, and keep to hip-hop’s traditions of “keeping it real.” However, as mentioned above, by examining the themes in greater detail below, it is apparent that the Suburban Rap Caucus are constantly seen as inauthentic by other underground rappers and shunned by the community they live in as well.

**Theme 1: Drug Use: Meth Addiction**

Numerous rappers form the Suburban Rap Caucus talked about the perils and pitfalls of meth addiction that was starting to slowly take over their community, many of the rappers from the SRC (Suburban Rap Caucus) had friends or some family member that had fallen into meth addiction. According to many of the rappers at the Suburban Rap Caucus, meth addiction was a problem that was seriously starting to take a toll on the community. In the hip-hop spirit of “keeping it real,” many of the rappers from the Suburban Rap Caucus decided to tackle the issue of the meth addiction. It should be
noted that not a single rapper from the Suburban Rap Caucus rapped in a manner that would glorify meth use. Rather, all of the stories and description of meth include a portrayal as a horrific drug that would lead to ones downfall if continued. The stories and some of the lyrics of the rappers of the Suburban Rap Caucus were extremely heartbreaking and described the real horrific aspects of meth addiction and its ability to tear families apart. *Ice N Juice* rapped:

“It’s sister, they really loved her she was blessed but now she’s gotta rest, ten feet under, all cause of some meth”- [sic]- Ice N Juice

*Ice N Juice* raps demonstrate the hardship and disaster he feels meth was taking on his community. It should be noted that even the rappers that didn’t have family/friends directly affected by the meth problem also rapped about the issue as they felt if was affecting their family. By rapping about the meth problem, some would say the Suburban rappers might have found some common theme with the inner-city rappers who were also rapping about drug use affecting their community. Others might even say that they were keeping it authentic and rapping about issues that were relevant to them and their community. However, many of the rappers at Suburban Rap Caucus claimed that even rapping about meth addiction would still lead to their isolation from the greater underground hip-hop community surrounding them creating and Double Consciousness once again in regards to their identity as rappers. Rapper *Ice N Juice* explained the dilemma of constantly living in a Double Consciousness.

“It’s crazy. You could rap about meth addiction cause its affecting people around you. You would think you would get props (respect) for being upfront about a problem that is affecting you and your community. But people, not the rappers in burbs, are like these are over privileged white
kids who are falling into drugs cause they got too much money. Like the rest of the underground rappers are from hood, they still see us as over privileged and look at us doing drugs for fun, while they’re doing to escape their problems.” [sic] – Ice N Juice

Through *Ice N Juice*’s quote, we can see that the rappers struggle to gain respect through the ritual of rap within the greater underground community. Collin’s theory of the interactional ritual states that certain rituals are governed by rules (Collins 2004). The ritual of rap is often governed by the unknown rule of being authentic to the issues and problems one is personally undergoing.

However, despite the fact that the rappers at Suburban Rap Caucus try to follow this rule and stay authentic to the ritual of rap, they are still seen as inauthentic by the rest of the underground rap community. Due to the fact that the majority of the underground rap community comes from an inner-city environment, they don’t see the problems of the Suburban rappers as sufficiently harsh. These members of the underground rap community view something as harsh as drug addiction as a problem of White Privilege.

It should be noted that this specific group of Suburban rappers are not rich, and are actually mostly from the middle class. However, with the overabundance of the rappers in the surrounding community coming from harsh neighborhoods, the problems of the Suburban rappers are quickly dismissed as unimportant. This leads the Suburban rappers to have a constant clash of identity, as the larger group of rappers never accepts their identity as rappers, regardless of their efforts, leading them to look at themselves through the negative and judgmental lens of the larger underground hip-hop community. This, in turn, leads to a Double Consciousness.
Theme 2: The Struggle of Juggling School and Work in Modern Times

The Suburban Rapper Caucus also consistently rapped about the struggle to juggle school and work at the same time. Since the majority of the rappers for the SRC were between the ages of 18-25, they were of college-age. However, since these students were from the middle class and not extremely wealthy, the majority who decided to attend school were forced to work as well in order to pay tuition. Some of the rappers simply dropped out of school due to the immense pressure and chose to focus entirely on work. Other rappers took the opposite route and decided to not work at all and be in huge amounts of student debt. However, whatever their situation was, the theme of trying to afford an decent college education without going in debt and trying to work while going to school dominated the discourse for the Suburban rappers lyrics.

*J-Hog* explained his dilemma through his impromptu lyrics, chanting at a cypher,

“If I work full time, go to school full time I’m f----d most of the time. If just work and don’t go to school I stay a fool, but only go to school I’m still a fool in the zones, cause all I got is loans” [sic].

*J-Hog* discusses the dilemma of trying to get a decent college education without being in loans for a middle class young adult. *J-Hog* and the other rappers rapping about issues pertinent to other middle class youth contributes to their solidifying identity as middle class. However, this middle-class identity once again directly clashes with their identity as a rapper. In fact, some of the SRC (Suburban Rap Caucus) rappers told me that they were closer to underground rappers when rapping about meth addiction rather
than when they were rapping about schoolwork and loans. According to J-Hog, meth addiction was seen as severe and somewhat relatable to inner-city rappers. On the other hand, options and choices for going to school in the inner-city were limited, resulting in the suburban rappers complaints on the difficulty of balancing school work and loans seem more like whining.

“I can even see where people from the hood are coming from. They don’t take us seriously. I can already tell you what they’re thinking [inner-city underground rappers], they’re thinking these guys [SRC] gotta struggle to go to school and work, well so do we and we gotta other serious problems on top of that. So yeah, I see where they’re coming from, but at the same time we gotta be true to ourselves and keep it real and talk about problems that are facing us.” [sic] – J-Hog

*J-Hog* Illustrates the dilemma that is facing many of the Suburban hip-hop rappers who, through rapping about school and even meth, struggle to find common solidarity with the other group of underground rappers who continue to see the struggles of middle class rappers as miniscule. The suburban rappers, simply by being true to themselves when rapping, isolate themselves from the rest of the underground rappers who can’t relate to their topics for rap. This leads to a continuous Double Consciousness, as the rappers struggled to gain acceptance into underground hip-hop community as rapper yet are never truly accepted.

**Theme 3: Divorce**

The Suburban rappers third most prevalent theme was divorce. The Suburban Rap Caucus rappers, including some who didn’t come from divorced families, would talk about the pain felt during divorce, expanding on the mental anguish that children go
through, the inability of couples to stay together in today day and age, and effects that
divorce would have on children and how it would continue to persist.

*Fiery Fresh* laid his feelings on the line, rapping:

“Mom say Dad and her not getting back together, its whatever, but the effects last forever, I’m under the weather, no Christmas is lonely and phoney, and feel alone it’s a broken home” [sic]-Fiery Fresh

However, even therapeutically rapping about a painful experience such as divorce
does not come without criticism. While the first two themes led to the Suburban rappers
being isolated from the greater underground hip-hop community close to suburbs in
which they reside, rapping about divorce actually led to the Suburban rappers being
isolated from their own community and branded as outcasts. According to the Suburban
Caucus rappers, some of the residents of the conservative town, felt as if the rappers were
airing out the “dirty laundry” of the town.

“I’ve actually had people come up to me saying why are you talking about
divorce this is community issue, we’ll handle it like a community. It’s
crazy, divorce is all around us, and these people are acting like it doesn’t
happen. It happens in all suburbs, I just think that this suburb is from an
extremely conservative town, and they just frown on divorce you know.
Sometimes, I even feel isolated cause my parents are divorced and I feel
like this neighborhood looks down on me for it”-[sic]- Soul Taste

*Soul Taste* is not the only one who feels that his community has extremely
negative views in regards to divorce. Many other rappers echoed the same sentiment.
According to some of the rappers, the society in the rapper’s neighborhood was still
largely conservative. Whether or not it was true, those that were products of divorced
parents felt that due to the conservative nature of suburbs in which they resided in, they were looked down upon or seen as inferior.

As long as this feeling of inferiority persisted in the rappers’ minds, they felt excluded, developing a feeling of Double Consciousness. This further isolated the rappers, making them feel as if they don’t belong. The fact the majority of the members of the conservative community feel they are airing the “dirty laundry” contributes to the Suburban rappers feeling as if they are outsiders, creating a greater dual identity.

However, despite all of the negativity, many of the rappers from Suburban Rap Caucus claimed that rapping about issues such as divorce helped them gain a greater feeling of solidarity with other rappers, as they felt they could understand each other’s hardship as they had shared experiences in which they could connect. Fresh agreed, stating:

“When somebody goes through what I am going through, I feel like we connect. So when somebody talks about parents being divorced. I feel like that’s happened to me too, so I can relate”. [sic]- Fiery Fresh

As one can see through Fresh’s quote, sharing feelings of pain through the ritual of rap help the rappers gain solidarity within their group, yet results in them being branded by the community as outsiders. When they rap about less painful topics such as school and work, they are not branded as outsiders from their own community, but are branded as outsiders from the underground hip-hop community. While the Suburban rappers continuously reconfirm their identity as rappers in their group, they are constantly outcast from another group, leading them to stay in a constant state of Double Consciousness.
The rappers try hard through symbols derived from the ritual of rap lifestyle choices to maintain the rapper identity. Still, they are constantly being confronted by the outside society as not being legitimate. This causes a conflict of identities, forcing the rappers to be more rigid in their symbols (in comparison to the rappers at the Masjid) in order to maintain their rapper identity. Their rigidity in their symbols demonstrates their desire to subconsciously escape the Double Consciousness or a dual identity. However, eventually they must deal with fact, as demonstrated through the themes, that they will never have a singular plural identity as a rapper. Rather, their race and social economic class will always clash with their identities as rappers (due to society) leading to a Double Consciousness and dual identity.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Interpretation/Discussion of Results:

After conducting this study and observing two distinct groups of rappers the interpretation of the results it was discovered that both groups participated in Interactional Rituals that were specific to their group. The rituals revolved either around rap or religion. For rappers at the Masjid the rituals revolved around both race and religion. It was through these specific group rituals that members would interact with one another, gain emotional energy, develop group solidarity, and develop a group identity. It should be noted that these rituals were dynamic, constantly changing, governed by informal rules, and those who mastered the participation of these rituals were elevated to a higher status. The group identity that was derived from this ritual would contribute to a Double Consciousness and Dual Identities for both groups. Symbols gained through these specific group rituals also served as an indicator to the certain aspects of Double Consciousness taking place within both groups of rappers lives. However, it should be noted that for the rappers of the Northern California Masjid their identity could only partially be defined by Dubois theory of Double Consciousness; while the Suburban groups clash of Identities could be fully defined through the use of Double Consciousness. The original assertion was that both groups of rappers would face conflicts of identity (Double Consciousness) that would be a result of direct clash within mainstream hegemonic hip-hop rap. However, upon analyzing the study it was revealed that while the underground rappers interviewed did experience a clash/conflict of
identities and the developments of a Double Consciousness it was not due to a conflict or marginalization from mainstream hip-hop commercial rap. Rather, the Double Consciousness of the rappers was developed either as an response to marginalization from larger groups within their own subculture, or as a result of trying to balance and maintain two conflicting identities. Therefore, my assertion was partially correct in assuming that the underground rappers would face a crisis in identity, yet incorrect in the assumption that the cause of identity conflict would be due to a struggle against mainstream hip-hop.

_Masjid_

Even though the rappers at this Northern California Masjid were underground rappers whose musical ideals went against the mainstream hegemonic hip-hop, their conflict of identity did not occur as a result or clash with mainstream hip-hop. Rather, it was the result of exemplifying multiple cultural and religious identities subconsciously at the same time. The rappers at Masjid did not fully encompass Dubois’s theory of Double Consciousness. Dubois theory of Double Consciousness mandates that the dominant group oppress a minority group through placing an prescribed Identity upon them leading to confusion as to what is ones real identity, and constantly being forced to have two dual identities in order to survive. This was not the case for the rappers at Masjid as they were all Muslim by choice, and the inner city/rapper identity wasn’t necessarily stifling or taking away from their identity or religious duties as Muslims. Nor were the rappers at Masjid confused as to what their identity was. Through the importance the rappers placed
on their Interactional Rituals, it was made the clear the primary identity of the rappers atMasjid was being Muslim; while the identity of rituals of being a rapper simply
supplemented their original identity as Muslims. However, the rappers struggle of trying
to balance two Dual identities and look at oneself through a looking glass could be
directly tied Dubois theory of Double Consciousness. How the African American views
himself/herself through the lens of a looking glass, and gains one perception of self
through examining mainstream hegemonic society perception of them can be applied to
the rappers at the Masjid as well (Dubois 1903). Rap monikers, usage of terms, and the
permissibility of music is Islam are all themes used to illustrate how the rappers at the
Masjid are constantly looking through the lens of a symbolic looking glass to gain their
perception of themselves. Their inner city identity is seen through examining mainstream
American hegemonic identity (not mainstream hip-hop) and their desire to use Islamic
terms and words that outsiders can’t understand. Yet, this inner city identity is also
constantly being examined against their identity as Muslims. From the Muslim
perspective they examine how mainstream cultural Islamist (composed of mostly
immigrants) view them and dictate what is proper and Islamic, versus what the religion of
Islam actually mandates.

On a subconscious level one can see the underground rappers attempt to merge
both identities, yet struggle with the idea that to a certain extent both identities cannot be
completely merged into one singular identity and that underground rapper’s will have to
maintain dual identities of both being a Muslim and a Inner City rapper.
Suburban Rap Caucus

While the interactional rituals of participating in rap through the use of cyphers produced emotional energy and gave the members of the group the identity of being “rappers”, it also contributed to a Double Consciousness. This Double Consciousness was reflected through the symbols of the group that were a byproduct of the rituals of rap.

Similar to the rappers at Masjid, the Suburban rappers marginalization and forming of a Double Consciousness also was not due to their conflict with mainstream hegemonic hip-hop. In fact some Suburban Rap Caucus hip-hop rappers even said that they would have had an easier time assimilating into mainstream hip-hop culture. The mainstream hip-hop culture is marketed towards those that are white and well to do. Therefore viewers of mainstream hip hop culture might be more tolerant of an white suburban male who is rapping because they come from the same demographic as well. However, since the Suburban Rap Caucus rappers (white middle class rappers) were trying to become well known to their specific nearby local underground hip-hop scene composed of minorities and inner-city youths; they were immediately identified as outsiders. They were also marginalized from their own conservative communities who could not understand why the youth in their community could participate in activities such as rap. This marginalization from both groups (especially underground hip-hop creates the Double Consciousness effect similar to African American who wants to fit into mainstream hegemonic American society, yet is repeatedly told indirectly or directly that they will never belong. In the same way the Suburban Rap Caucus rapper longs to fit into Underground hip-hop community, yet is told repeatedly that he doesn’t belong. The
rapper is then forced to utilized the Double Consciousness theory of looking glass self, and view one’s identity through views of the local underground hip-hop community.

*Marginalization of Both Groups and Use of Rap to cope with a Double Consciousness*

To a certain extent, both hip-hop groups were marginalized from their surrounding communities. Hip-Hop was used as a unique forum for the marginalized populations to express and create their own unique identity. Hip-Hop also served as a way for the rappers cope with the feelings of Double Consciousness. For the rappers at the Masjid, they were marginalized from the inner-city community through their refusal to partake and participate in activities that mandated the inner city subculture when they violated the tenets of Islam. Through, rap the Muslim rappers were able to exemplify and celebrate the precedence of their Muslim identity, while simultaneously retaining certain elements of inner-city culture that did not violate their faith. Rap helped the rappers take on dual identities through the mixture of religious and rap names, dress, and language to exemplify the combination of Muslim Identity mixed in with elements of an inner-city identity. The Suburban rappers were also marginalized from their immediate surroundings. Both the local underground hip-hop groups and their community in which they resided in viewed them as unauthentic and not deserving of the status of rappers. Through, the use of the subject matter they talked about in their raps and participation in the cyphers, the Suburban rappers exemplified the identity of suburban youth along with the feelings of being an outsiders. Rap helped overcome their feelings of marginalization, and even helped in coping with the pain of Double Consciousness.
Through rapping about their feelings of pain of meth addiction, divorce, and feeling of being marginalized from community rappers will able to release and share their sorrows in a very therapeutic manner. For Both the Muslim and Suburban rap groups, rap served as a way to exemplify and celebrate one’s identity; while simultaneously coping with effects of a Double Consciousness.

Benefits of Using Underground Hip-Hop to Study Identity Formation

The original purpose of this study was based upon the assertion that the results of the study would to add to the existing belief that study of underground hip-hop rap music is more productive in comparison to mainstream hip-hop music, when attempting to analyze rapper’s identities in regards to their community. This assertion was based on the assumption that underground hip-hop groups are defined by and located within the community, whereas mainstreams rap groups are more marketed towards the general public. In order to illustrate the superiority of underground hip-hop for researching rappers identity in relation to their community, the hypothesis stated that the two distinct groups of rapper values, identities, lyrical content would vary drastically based on the differences in their communities’ demographics, race, and social class, while at the same time be very specific/unique to their respective group. The hypothesis was proven correct when the two groups being studied faced completely different obstacles and identities all attributed to their communities demographic and ethnographic differences. The rappers at the Masjid faced a crisis of maintaining a religious identity and inner-city identity. Since, they were from the inner-city their authenticity and sincerity towards the hip-hop culture
was never questioned. However, since rappers from the Suburban Rap Caucus were not from inner city, their entire struggle/development of a Double Consciousness was the result of constantly being questioned as authentic hip-hop artists. The highlighting of differences between the two underground hip-hop groups, adds credibility to concept that studying underground rap is more specific and specialized means of studying identity in relation to ones community. The uniqueness of each situation based on the underground hip-hop community proves that no two communities or groups are alike; therefore studying mainstream rap (which is not community based) is too broad to truly understand identity formation with the confines of ones community.

Limitations/Future Implications for Research

This research is specific and limited to these two underground hip-hop groups and their geographic region, social class, and demographics within the greater Northern California Area. Also, within these geographic and social constructs there are various groups. Therefore, this research cannot be used to make a general statement about identity for Muslim/Inner-City male’s rappers and suburban white middle class rappers, as identity development might differ from one organization to the next even within a specific context of class/demographics. However, this research does contribute to studying the Interactional Ritual Chain Theory, identity development and Double Consciousness in individuals. It also, adds to existing research on underground hip-hop rappers and their relation to their respective communities.
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