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Hip-Hop as a Site of Public Pedagogy

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The cursory spectator might easily characterize hip-hop as a nonsensical form of entertainment that glorifies misogyny, Black-on-Black violence, consumerism, and hyper-masculinity. Although there are derivative forms of hip-hop that serve as cheap entertainment, hip-hop also has various aesthetic contributions which allow it to operate as a springboard for discourse surrounding youths’ attitudes and beliefs about issues such as identity, violence, marginalization, hegemony, resistance, and social justice (Cohen, 2007). Since its beginnings, hip-hop has branched out into many forms, including old school hip-hop, gangsta rap, dirty south rap, and raggaeton, and no single description fits all of them accurately. Nevertheless, the idea of “keepin’ it real” seems present across all forms of hip-hop (Rose, 1994), and is the element that differentiates it from other musical genres. However, while most rappers claim to represent “reality” in their music, they are actually attempting to depict the experiences of marginalized or hood life.

Hip-hop possesses many of the same aesthetics, i.e., improvisation/freestyle, as other Black music genres like Negro spirituals, gospel, blues, and jazz. The difference between hip-hop and these other genres is that hip-hop pioneers blended rappin’ (emceein’), disc-jockeying (DJin’), graffiti art, and break dancing, to express the culture of marginalized Black youth who resided in urban centers during the decline of the Black power and civil rights movements. At its beginning, hip-hop sampled older forms of Black music like R&B, disco, and jazz to create a new genre of music that reflected the social, political, cultural, and economic imperatives Black youth faced in urban America. However, like jazz and other American forms of popular music, hip-hop became co-opted by the capitalistic, market-driven forces in society.

As corporate record companies became more influential in the production of hip-hop, the fundamentals of hip-hop—its call for social change, the pursuit of knowledge of self, and being true to one’s roots—began to weaken. The corporatization of hip-hop that began in the late 1970s all but destroyed hip-hop’s counterhegemonic voice by the late 1980s. Today, as a public pedagogy, hip-hop is often dominated by commercialized, hegemonic popular culture (Giroux, 2004). Nevertheless, even after the corporatization of hip-hop, there are remnants of counterhegemony found in some commercial rap music including Common, Lupe Fiasco, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, among others. And these counterhegemonic voices are heard more strongly in underground hip-hop scenes.
I use narrative analysis and Swindler’s (1986) “cultural tool kit” paradigm, combined with Boykin and Toms’ (1985) “triple quandary” framework, to analyze the objective and subjective complexities of hip-hop’s voice in the public sphere. These frameworks help me clarify and explore hip-hop narratives—which are stories told by rappers in their songs. This theoretical discussion is intended to extend the knowledge base on the role that hip-hop plays as public pedagogy. According to Garro and Mattingly (2000), narrative seems “to offer some fundamental way to make sense of experience” (p. 10). Storytelling permits narrators to communicate what is important in their lives and how things matter to them. Narratives offer a persuasive way to explain conduct because they have something to say about what gives life meaning, what is inspiring in our lives, and what is dangerous and worth taking risks for. In the context of hip-hop as a site of public pedagogy, narratives help build cultural understanding of the experiences of youth. These hip-hop narratives, shaped by rappers’ and their listeners’ cultural orientations, bring meaning to the cultural understanding of hip-hop as a site of public pedagogy.

Hip-hop narrative analysis functions as a powerful tool for the study of the role hip-hop plays in public pedagogy. Through the analysis of stories told by rappers in their songs, we are able to understand the experiences they actually had, or wished to have. Essentially, rappers in hip-hop tell stories about what is important to them. Through hip-hop narrative analysis, we are able to develop a clarified perspective of how cultural knowledge serves as a resource in hip-hop’s public pedagogy.

The autobiographical memory—memory of an event from a person’s own history—found in hip-hop facilitates rappers’ recall of discrete events in their past that relate to what is done in the present and the future (Burt, 2008). Understanding the past helps rappers give meaning to their lives and the world. Moreover, hearing the remembered accounts of others augments the listener’s “fund of cultural knowledge,” which helps the listener to meet future expectations (Price, 1987, p. 315).

Culturally available knowledge about what rappers and their listeners experience can also be seen as a resource that may guide the interpretation and reconstruction of past experience. By listening to hip-hop, culturally available knowledge becomes situated knowledge, connected to a particular person, context, and experiential history (Price, 1987). Thus, listening to hip-hop narratives provides a window of the process involved in relating individual experience to pre-existing explanatory frameworks available within a cultural setting. Rapping relates cognitive perspectives on memory to how cultural knowledge serves as a resource in guiding remembering about the past and how this cultural knowledge becomes a part of public pedagogy.

However, it must be kept in mind that most hip-hop narratives are filtered through corporate media conglomerates that frequently alter or shape the narratives to make them more marketable (Myer & Kleck, 2007). Thus, hip-hop narratives are not always necessarily the perspectives of the artists themselves, but, rather, they constitute dominant discourses about various perspectives of youth that circulate in popular culture. Unfortunately, too many record company executives seek to depict the “hood” as the place where the “bad life” is lived (Carruthers, 1972). Rap music record company executives and rappers collaborate to make money off of feeding American society’s voyeuristic appetite for marginalized Black life in the “hood” (Wimsatt, 2001). Unquestionably, the form of hip-hop most prevalent in public discourse depicts the “hood” as the forbidden zone of Black gangsters, drug dealers, and hypersexualized males and females. However, there are also some forms of hip-hop that express social justice and counterhegemony, and my analysis, below, explores both highly commercialized and alternative or underground hip-hop narratives, in order to understand what they have to say about prevailing youth cultural orientations.
Cultural Tool Kits

Culture is not a static, one-dimensional system that guides action in a linear direction; rather, “it is more like a ‘tool kit’ or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action” (Swindler, 1986, p. 277). For instance, there are a multitude of tools—the spirit of competition, possessive individualism (self-centeredness), growth, progress, rationalism (science), time as linear, professionalism (status), individual wealth, private virtue, and superiority of Western civilization, among others—that, when embraced, determine an actor’s degree of cultural competence, and contribute to his/her degree of success in mainstream American society. Those who use alternative tools not commonly found in mainstream American society’s tool kit—such as the spirit of cooperation, altruism, or Black pride—tend to be considered less culturally competent, and therefore, their degree of success in society is minimized. While alternative tools may be quite operational in other sectors of society, in the dominant culture, the use of alternative tools can result in the user being marginalized.

Swindler’s (1986) paradigm of culture as a tool kit serves as the foundation for discussing hip-hop narratives as public pedagogy. The stories, rituals, and worldviews expressed by rappers offer images of culture as a tool kit, symbols that rappers and their listeners use, in varying configurations, as public pedagogy. Studying hip-hop narratives offers a unique opportunity to examine two alternative tool kits that are distinct from the mainstream American society tool kit, letting us examine how each of these tool kits independently and collectively shape youths’ voices and perspectives in public discourse.

Although Swindler’s tool kit paradigm provides a solid foundation for discussing culture in general, it must be expanded to capture the unique and diverse cultural orientations present among African Americans, particularly African American youth who live in marginalized urban communities. To address the cultural specificity found in hip-hop, I built on Swindler’s “tool kit” paradigm by adding Boykin and Toms’ (1985) “triple quandary” framework, which posits, “African Americans simultaneously negotiate through three distinctive realms of cultural experience” (Jagers & Mock, 1993, p. 392). These cultural orientations include (a) the Anglocultural orientation, also referred to as a Eurocentric perspective, or mainstream American orientation; (b) the marginal, or minority orientation; and (c) the Afrocultural, or African-centered orientation. Most African Americans tend to be primarily rooted in one of the three particular orientations (Bowman, 1989); however, it is common for African Americans to simultaneously use tools from each of these orientations as an adaptive response to given social situations. When Swindler’s tool kit paradigm is combined with the three realms of African American cultural experiences set forth by Boykin and Toms, three distinct cultural tool kits become available for use in discussing the deeper meaning of hip-hop’s narratives and their voice in public discourse: (a) the Anglocultural tool kit, which contains cultural tools needed to be successful in the mainstream American society; (b) the marginal tool kit, which includes cultural tools that are mal-adaptive responses to structural barriers; and (c) the Afrocultural tool kit, consisting of old cultural patterns from prior generations that have been transferred into new adaptive resources to meet pressing current social imperatives (see Table 25.1).

Anglocultural Orientation

The first tool kit, the Anglocultural tool kit, consists of middle-class Anglo-American (Eurocentric) cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors that represent the appropriate cultural tool kit for success in mainstream America. Many hip-hop narratives demonstrate the use of tools from the Anglocultural tool kit, such as possessive individualism, the spirit of competition, conformity,
and effort optimism. Although many rappers live in and rap about marginalized communities, they tend to be in pursuit of the mainstream middle-class value system. It is not uncommon for rappers to rap about escaping the hood for a better life somewhere else. No better example captures the Anglocultural narrative in hip-hop than the lyrics in Kurtis Blow’s song “If I Ruled The World,” on the album appropriately titled *America* (1985). In this song, Blow raps:

> You see first it was a dream, I was livin’ in Rome/And then I moved to London, bought a brand new home/And everywhere I went, I drew lots of attention/Like a stretch limousine, one of those new inventions/It took a few years ’fore the day had come/But I was ruler of the world ranked number one. (Blow, 1985)

Blow’s narrative can be categorized as an Anglocultural expression because he fantasizes about living in Rome and London. As a person of African descent, he might be expected to dream about living in an ancient African nation or modern African city. Furthermore, his reference to a stretch limousine demonstrates the use of person/object relations (materialism), an Anglocultural tool. He concludes the verse with a statement that says as the ruler of the world he would be ranked number one. That statement implies his affinity to the Anglocultural tool of the competitive spirit.

Egalitarian-based conformity is a prominent tool in the Anglocultural tool kit. Although many rappers present narratives that can be classified in the Anglocultural category, they do not generally promote in their narratives egalitarian-based conformity tools like personal responsibility that keep youth out of such troubles as gang activity, pregnancy, school-related problems, or drug involvement. This is ironic given that while many of the rappers themselves once lived in risky environments, most of them were not personally involved with the risky behaviors that they rap about. Furthermore, they had the ability to personally mobilize the Anglocultural tool of egalitarian-based conformity that allowed them to become successful rappers. Thus you can say that they lived *in* the hood but were not *of* it.
Although there are benefits to youth who are able to use tools from the Anglocultural tool kit, there are also some adverse responses. For instance, possessive individualism, the spirit of competition, Machiavellianism, and materialism are principal tools found in the Anglocultural tool kit. All of these tools have the potential to desensitize youth to forms of collectivism, cooperation, and spiritualism. Collectivism, cooperation, and spiritualism have the potential to enhance empathy and reduce forms of violence-related behaviors.

Moreover, the existing perspectives of rappers whose narratives are rooted in an Anglocultural orientation oftentimes promote a pathological perspective of the hood. Many Anglocultural hip-hop narratives promote a mainstream and pathological perspective of the rapper and his or her community. These mainstream and pathological narratives tend to promote the need for the marginalized to escape their communities. A good example of this can be found in the hip-hop narrative told in the 1990 theme song of The Fresh Prince of Bel Air. In the song, rapper/actor Will Smith raps about his mother sending him to live with his aunt and uncle because she was afraid that he would fall victim to the tough West Philadelphia neighborhood he resided in. He was sent to the prominent and wealthy community of Bel Air, Los Angeles. The song opens with the lyrics:

Now this is the story all about how/My life got flipped, turned upside down/And I'd like to take a minute just sit right there/I'll tell you how I became the prince of a town called Bel-Air. (Smith, 2002)

Although it is understandable that a mother who fears for the life of her child would use her resources to get her son out of a risky environment, the act certainly does not promote the empowerment to address problems within one's community. Many rappers' narratives present pathological perspectives of their own communities, themselves, and the people in their communities and that is why they promote the use of Anglocultural tools to escape their communities, never to return to them.

Marginal Orientation

Although many rappers' narratives can be categorized as Anglocultural, a much larger group of hip-hop narratives can be categorized as marginal, or minority oriented. The marginal orientation reflects those experiences that are fostered by maladaptive coping to the historical legacy of racial and economic oppression (Bowman, 1989; Jagers, 1993; Jagers & Mock, 1993; Warfield-Coppock, 1990, 1992). As hip-hop became more commercialized and controlled by corporate entities, many of the voices and images of this genre of music became altered from their original forms. A 2008 study linked the glamorization of drugs in hip-hop music to a greater risk of alcohol and drug use among adolescents. The study examined the lyrics of the 341 most popular rap songs from 1979 to 1997, paying close attention to the earliest and latest years. Of the top 125 rap songs between 1994 and 1997, 69% contained drug references compared to only 11% of the top songs between 1979 and 1984 (Herd, 2008). This glamorization can be found in the song “Push It,” by rapper Rick Ross, whose birth name is William Roberts. However, he selected the name Rick Ross to associate himself with Ricky Ross, the first man recognized for the widespread distribution of crack cocaine in America. In the song, Rick Ross raps:

Fresh in my white tee/Mac eleven swear to god/I bought my first block/Broke it down and tore the block apart /
Background Lyrics: (push it to the limit)
Chorus
I push and I push
Background Lyrics: (push)
I ride and I ride
Background Lyrics: (ride)
Tryna survive on 95
Background Lyrics: (push it to the limit). (Bellotte, Moroder, Rotem, & Roberts, 2006)

In this song, Rick Ross uses multiple tools from the marginal tool kit in his hip-hop narrative. He uses the marginal tools of Machiavellianism and predatory individualism to narrate his use of a Mac-11 assault rifle and a kilo of cocaine to establish himself as the drug kingpin of his neighborhood. The complete narrative of this song is about his persona as a “big time” drug dealer involved in using the marginal tool of involvement in the illicit drug economy. The chorus, again, narrates his involvement in the illicit drug economy by narrating his attempt to survive the distribution of large quantities of cocaine up and down Interstate 95. Ross’s work also illustrates how cultural orientations are not mutually exclusive. For example, Ross uses Machiavellianism and predatory individualism from the marginal tool kit, and also Anglocultural tools like possessive individualism, the competitive spirit, and person/object relations (materialism). However, while some hip-hop narratives feature more than one orientation, they tend to focus on one orientation while paying little or no attention to the other two.

It is believed that the predominant expressions found in the marginal tool kit are a variety of self-deprecating antisocial expressions, such as “predatory individualism” and gang-related activities as well as aberrant achievement and survival strategies, for example, rejection of formal schooling and consequent participation in street economy (Bowman, 1989; Jagers, 1993; Jagers & Mock, 1993; Warfield-Coppock, 1990, 1992). The marginal tool kit is best reflected in “gangsta rap” music, a form of rap music that exhibits the most severe forms of social and economic marginalization that exist within poor inner-city communities. A classic gangsta rap song, “Straight Outta Compton,” by NWA (Niggaz With Attitudes), from a classic gangsta rap album with the same title (1988) opens up with the following statement: YOU ARE ABOUT TO WITNESS THE STRENGTH OF STREET KNOWLEDGE (Wright, Jackson, Patterson, & Curry, 1988). This opening narrative demonstrates directly hip-hop as public pedagogy. In the opening verse of the song NWA member Ice Cube raps:

Comin’ Straight outta Compton/crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube/From the gang called Niggaz With Attitudes/When I’m called off, I got a sawed off/Squeeze the trigger, and bodies are hauled off/You too, boy, if ya fuck with me/The police are gonna hafta come and get me/Off yo ass, that’s how I’m goin out/For the punk motherfuckers that’s showin out/Niggaz start to mumble, they wanna rumble/Mix em and cook em in a pot like gumbo/Goin’ off on a motherfucker like that/with a gat that’s pointed at yo ass/So give it up smooth/Ain’t no tellin’ when I’m down for a jack move/Here’s a murder rap to keep you dancing/with a crime record like Charles Manson/AK-47 is the tool/Don’t make me act the motherfuckin’ fool/Me you can go toe to toe, no make/I’m knockin’ niggaz out the box, daily/You weekly, monthly and yearly/until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly/that I’m down with the capital C-P-T/Boy you can’t fuck with me/So when I’m in your/neighborhood, you better duck/Cuz Ice Cube is crazy as fuck/As I leave, believe I’m stompin’/but when I come back, boy, I’m comin’ straight outta Compton. (Wright, Jackson, Patterson, & Curry, 1988)
In this verse, Ice Cube narrates the use of multiple tools in the marginal tool kit. He demonstrates the marginal tool Machiavellianism by referring to himself as a “crazy motherfucker” who uses a sawed-off shotgun to kill people who challenge him. He glorifies his criminal record and use of an AK-47. His use of predatory individualism and illicit economic activity tools are demonstrated in his narration of being a cunning and ruthless robber. He justifies his emotional non-responsiveness to all of this, another marginal tool, by stating he is indifferent to engaging in murderous behavior because he is crazy.

Most people agree that structural circumstances are the ultimate causes of the perpetuation of a culture of marginalization in inner-city communities, not the over-the-top claims of reality that so-called “gangsta” rappers contribute as public pedagogy (Bell, 1997; Bowman, 1989).

Notorious B.I.G in his song, “Things Done Changed” raps:

Step away with your fistfight ways / mother fucker this ain’t back in the days. (Wallace, 1994)

In this verse, B.I.G. is instructing youth not to use fighting as a way to resolve their problems like people did in the past. He is saying that today, shooting is the way to resolve problems. With 22.4% of all rap videos containing overt violence and 25% showing weapons being carried, these types of instructional lyrics are particularly troubling for young, African American males who are overrepresented as characters engaged in violence (DuRant et al., 1997).

The lack of structural opportunities, not the intrinsic pathologies of the people in marginalized communities, is largely to blame for intergenerational marginalization (Bell, 1997; Bowman, 1989). Although it is clear that people in marginalized communities share the values and aspirations of the middle class—education, friendships, stable marriages, steady jobs, and high incomes—due to the structural barriers to opportunities, many individuals in these communities develop behavior that is a defensive cultural adaptation to the structural barriers. As opposed to simply telling the news of these pathologies, rappers like 50 Cent contribute to the dehumanization of marginalized communities and the people who live there by exaggerating these conditions. Like Rick Ross, 50 Cent took his rapper moniker from a real person, Kelvin Martin, who was a 1980s Brooklyn robber known as “50 Cent.” Jackson chose the name because it gives him the persona of the having street credibility as a real robber. In his underground hit “How to Rob (An Industry Nigga),” 50 Cent describes how to rob individuals who are successful entertainers:

Aiyyo the bottom line is l’m a crook with a deal/If my record don’t sell l’m a rob and steal/You better recognize nigga I’m straight from the street/These industry niggaz startin to look like somethin to eat. (Jackson, Olivier, & Barnes, 1999)

Typical of rappers whose body of work glamorizes the marginal subculture is the use of such marginal tools as Machiavellianism and predatory individualism that are employed to cope with the stress that exists in those communities. Unfortunately many, if not most, of the rappers today use the marginal tool kit to rap about high levels of antisocial behavior that they pretend to be engaged in. Most of these corporatized rappers rap about using marginal tools that encourage fighting and gang-related activities as a means to make money in the rap music industry. What they ultimately do, however, is contribute, through their public pedagogy, to the historical dehumanization of marginalized people.

Whereas only some rappers whose narratives have an Anglocultural orientation have a pathological perspective of their communities and the people in them, the majority of rappers whose
narratives have a marginal orientation present their communities and the people in them as pathological. This might explain why they adopt the use of the marginal tool kit to express themselves. For instance, using the marginal tool of hypermasculinity may be perceived by some of the rappers as an effective way to mimic the warding off of threats from other aggressive males in their environment that exists among those graded by the streets. Of course, promoting the use of hypermasculinity increases the risk for aggressiveness that can lead to elevated levels of antisocial behavior and violence, especially when other males in the immediate environment are using the same marginal tool to cope with their situations. Nevertheless, it is logical to assume that if a rapper perceives the males in his community to be pathologically violent, he or she would also perceive hypermasculinity as an appropriate tool to appeal to others whom they perceive to be pathologically aggressive.

Afrocultural Orientation

Although the complexities found in hip-hop narratives can be explained by using both the Anglocultural orientation and marginal orientation, the Afrocultural orientation provides an alternative cultural orientation. The Afrocultural orientation suggests that African Americans have preserved and mobilized old cultural patterns from prior generations. Subsequently, the old cultural patterns have transformed into new adaptive resources to meet pressing imperatives. These adaptive resources function as an Afrocultural tool kit that provides Black people with expressions to help them cope with barriers they may face in major life roles. An example of the use of the Afrocultural tool kit in hip-hop narrative is rapper KRS-ONE’s use of adaptive coping resources that teach Black history in his song, “You Must Learn”:

I believe that if you’re teaching history/Filled with straight-up facts, no mystery/Teach the student what needs to be taught/Cause Black and White kids both take shorts/When one doesn’t know about the other one’s culture/Ignorance swoops down like a vulture/Cause you don’t know that you ain’t just a janitor/No one told you about Benjamin Banneker/What you don’t know about the other one’s culture/Ignorance swoops down like a vulture/Cause you don’t know that you ain’t just a janitor/No one told you about Benjamin Banneker/What you don’t know about the other one’s culture/Ignorance swoops down like a vulture/Cause you don’t know that you aren’t just a janitor/No one told you about Benjamin Banneker/A brilliant Black man that invented the almanac/Can’t you see where KRS is coming at/With Eli Whitney, Haile Selassie/Granville Woods made the walkie-talkie/Lewis Latimer improved on Edison/Charles Drew did a lot for medicine/Garrett Morgan made the traffic lights/Harriet Tubman freed the slaves at night/Madame CJ Walker made a straighten’ comb/But you won’t know this if you weren’t shown. (Parker, 1989)

KRS-ONE, known in hip hop as the “teacha,” uses the Afrocultural tool of ethnic pride to educate the public on some of the contributions that African Americans have made to society. Although the lyrics can be instructive to anyone, they are specifically intended to teach Black youths hoping that this knowledge would be transferred to a consciousness of ethnic pride. The Afrocultural tool kit includes spirituality, or the belief that all elements of reality contain a certain amount of life force. This tool can be found prominently displayed in the 1982 classic by rapper Melle Mel, “The Message”:

A child was born, with no state of mind/Blind to the ways of mankind/God is smiling on you but he’s frowning too/Cause only God knows what you go through. (Fletcher & Glover, 1982)

Hip-hop narratives that endorse the use of Afrocultural tools like spirituality have a greater potential to be used as pro-social public pedagogy than do those using tools from the Anglocultural and marginal tool kits (Bell, 1997). The greater the difference between spirituality, a pri-
mary element of an Afrocultural orientation, and an Anglocultural orientation, the greater the association with lower levels of both Machiavellianism and delinquent behavior (Flay, Graumlich, Segawa, Burns, & Holliday, 2004; Hahn et al., 2007; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009).

Another cultural tool found in the Afrocultural tool kit is communalism, which denotes awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people. Rapper Queen Latifah demonstrates the spirit of communalism in her song U.N.I.T.Y. where she calls on women to be unified in their protest against being verbally abused by men. In the chorus of that song Queen Latifah rhymes:

**Chorus**
U.n.i.t.y., u.n.i.t.y. that’s a unity
*Background Lyrics:* (you gotta let him know) (you go, come on here we go)
U.n.i.t.y., love a Black woman from Infinity to infinity
*Background Lyrics:* (you got to let him know) (you ain’t a bitch or a ho)
(here we go)
U.n.i.t.y., u.n.i.t.y. that’s a unity
*Background Lyrics:* (you gotta let him know) (you go, come on here we go)
U.n.i.t.y., love a Black man from Infinity to infinity
*Background Lyrics:* (you got to let him know) (you ain’t a bitch or a ho)

**Verse One**
Instinct leads me to another flow
Everytime I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho
Trying to make a sister feel low
You know all of that gots to go. (Owens & Gist, 1994)

In this song Queen Latifah employs the Afrocultural orientation to educate her listeners, calling specifically for the unification of Black women and men. Ultimately, she is calling on Black males to refrain from calling Black females bitches and whores because it leads to dehumanization.

Affect/empathy is another cultural tool prominently displayed in the Afrocultural tool kit. Affect/empathy implies the importance of emotional experiences, the affective values of information, and a particular sensitivity to the emotional cues given off by others. Rapper Tupac Shakur demonstrates the use of empathy in his song “Dear Momma” (1995). In this song Tupac narrates his emotional feelings for his mother:

Pour out some liquor and I reminisce/Cuz thru tha drama, I can always depend on my mama/And when it seems that I’m hopless/Ya say tha words, that can get me back in focus/When I wuz sick as a little kid/To keep me happy there’s no limit to the thangs ya did/And all my childhood memories/And for all the sweet things ya did 4 me/And even tho I act crazy/I gotta thank the Lord that ya made me/There are no words that can express how I feel/Ya neva kept a secret, always stayed real/And I appreciate, how ya raised me/And all the extra luv that ya gave me/I wish, I could take the pain away/If you can make it thru tha night, thers a brighta day/Everythang will be alright if ya hold on/It’s a struggle every day, got a roll on/And there’s no way I could pay ya back/But my plan is to show you that I undastand/You are appreciated

**Chorus**
Lady/Don’t ya know we luv ya/Sweet lady
*Background Lyrics:* (Dear mama)
Place no one above ya (You are appreciated)/Sweet lady/Don’t ya know we luv ya/Sweet lady (And dear mama)

(Dear mama) Lady/Lady/Lady. (Shakur, Sample, & Pizarro, 1995)

Affect/empathy was commonly used in earlier forms of hip-hop narratives, however, but became less common as this genre became more controlled by corporate record companies (Rose, 1994). Empathy is viewed as being critical to positive growth and development (Bowman, 1989). It suggests a very close relationship between persons, especially one resulting in mutual understanding or affection. Empathy conveys being sensitive to another’s feelings or ideas. Conversely, Machiavellianism implies a steadfast focus on personal goal attainment and suggests a willingness to exploit others in order to achieve one’s desired goals. A fundamental principle of street culture is based on the ideology of Machiavellianism. Stated in a variety of ways—“only the strong survive” or “I gotta get mine, you gotta get yours”—this self-centered consciousness is prevalent among young, African American males who are graded by street culture (Jagers, 1993). Currently, the most popular forms of hip-hop narratives endorse thug life, which is synonymous with Machiavellianism. Based on this orientation, most hip-hop narratives are accepting of the glamorization of being exploitative and opportunistic and willing to use deception or criminal activity to fulfill needs, wants, and desires. This is the over-arching theme of gangsta rap music that makes up the bulk of hip-hop’s public pedagogy.

Discussion

The cultural tool kit model presented in this chapter provides alternatives for contextualizing hip-hop narratives to facilitate a deeper understanding of hip-hop as a site of public pedagogy. I have presented approaches that concentrate on concepts such as institutional racism, adaptive behaviors, and cultural strengths to help rectify limitations of a one-dimensional perspective on hip-hop’s role in public discourse. Existing perspectives of hip-hop’s role in public discourse have a tendency to reflect three contending orientations—Anglocultural orientation (conformity), marginal orientation (pathology), and Afrocultural orientation (resistance). These distinct orientations differ in two major ways: (a) the degree of emphasis on maladaptive or adaptive behavioral patterns, and (b) the degree of emphasis on internal or external causal factors in analysis of their pedagogical patterns.

Most hip-hop narratives tend to focus on one orientation while paying little or no attention to the others. Differences among these three cultural orientations have significant practical as well as theoretical implications for hip-hop as a site for public pedagogy. The Anglocultural and marginal orientations tend to contribute to the standard view that focuses on maladaptive behaviors that seek to support the hypothesis that cultural or psychological deficiencies are the cause of the hood’s problems. The Afrocultural orientation, on the other hand, supports the counterhegemonic spirit of hip-hop such as the narration of institutional racism, internal colonialism, underclass entrapment, and urban poverty, to help explain the external sources of prevalent psychosocial problems among African American youth.

Certain tools prominent in the Anglocultural and marginal tool kits pose particular problems for African American youth, specifically with regard to antisocial behavior and delinquency. For instance, Machiavellianism has far reaching implications for antisocial behavior among African American youth. Machiavellianism suggests a social strategy that features willingness and ability to manipulate people for one’s own purposes (Christie & Geis, 1970). Duplicity, guile, and opportunism are characteristics associated with Machiavellianism personality (Geis, 1978). Wrightsman (1992) suggested that mainstream American society became increasingly more
Machiavellian in the 20th century. Thus it might be that the greater one’s Anglo-cultural orientation, the more one will demonstrate a Machiavellian attitude. Moreover, it has been well established in the literature on youth behavior that a marginal orientation is a contributing factor to a greater frequency of delinquent and aggressive behaviors among African American youth.

Jagers and Mock (1993) found that African American youth who embraced an Afrocultural orientation rather than marginal or Anglo-cultural orientations were less likely to possess such problematic attitudes and behaviors as Machiavellianism, delinquency, and aggressive behaviors. Moreover, the more likely African American youth were to embrace spirituality, affect, and communalism over an Anglo-cultural orientation, the less likely they were to demonstrate Machiavellianism and delinquent and aggressive behavior, and the more likely they were to demonstrate empathy. The Anglo-cultural orientation was implicated in higher levels of each of the undesirable outcomes assessed in the study. Thus, an Afrocultural orientation was consistent with more favorable social outcomes for African American youth.

The cultural tool kit paradigm combined with the triple quandary framework helps clarify hip-hop as a site of public pedagogy. In this chapter, I have used these theoretical tools to analyze hip-hop lyrics along with their cultural orientations. This has, in turn, helped us to understand and reflect on how youth and the broader public make meaning of the messages they hear when they listen to these forms of music.

References


