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# **Hip Hop Narratives: Understanding Adult Learners in Hip Hop Culture**

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In Tyler Perry's *Daddy's Little Girl's* (2007) actor Gabrielle Union goes on a date with a 40 year old rapper, who in an attempt to swoon her raps "Julia, I'll neva make a fool of ya". At this point, Julia is completely disgusted and seems to think "what a loser, surely by 40 the rapper phase should be over". The audience, along with Julia, laughed as if in agreement that grown up's who are part of Hip Hop culture are immature (Gordon, 2005). This vignette suggests that society has not taken adults in Hip Hop culture seriously (Price, 2005). Fast forward to 2012 and 45 year old rap artist and entrepreneur Jayz dresses in a suit, runs a multibillion-dollar industry and is married with children. These are not unique characteristics that Jayz encompasses; on the contrary, there are several others in the aging Hip Hop community who regardless of negative media portrayal live successful lives. Even still, the growing number of adults that rise above the norm in Hip Hop culture, they continue to be pegged as highly immature (Gordon, 2005) and lacking adult credibility.

## **Historical Context and Problem Statement**

Hip-Hop culture, an evolving international artistic movement, emerged out of New-York/ Caribbean ancestry during the 1970's (Chang, 2006, Rose, 1994). Hip-Hop is a culture of individuals, mainly African Americans (Kitwana, 2005) who share a worldview (Petchauer, 2007) that is expressed through break dancing, emceeing, graffiti art, deejaying, beatboxin, urban fashion, urban language, street knowledge and street entrepreneurialism (KRS, One, 2003). In this paper, Hip-Hop is discussed as a culture that is a relevant text of analysis for adult educators and scholars. While there has been an abundance of research surrounding Hip Hop culture (Chang, 2005; Dyson, 2007; Kitwana, 2003; Rose, 1994) it is mainly identified within an urban youth context (Chang, 2005, Petchauer, 2007; Land & Stovall, 2006). The literature rarely addresses adults within Hip Hop culture. Price (2005) suggests that adult educators do not take Hip-Hop culture seriously. The viewpoint of Hip-Hop culture often mirrors mainstream's consensus toward Black and Latinos as: violent, helpless, over sexualized and materialistic (Stovall, 2006). Yet, there are professionals, scholars and practitioners within Hip-Hop culture that the literature often ignores. For Price (2005) this lack of knowledge concerning Hip-Hop culture has created a cultural gap between adult educators and adult learners who situate themselves within Hip-Hop culture (Price, 2005), hence there is a lack of scholarship on the topic.

## **Purpose of Study and Epistemological Stance**

Hip-Hop is central to the identity development of many contemporary adults (Travis & Deepak, 2011). Yet, despite the growing body of literature within the field of Adult Education that discusses popular culture and entertainment media (Redmon-Wright & Sandlin, 2010; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007); a limited amount of this research solely addresses adults and Hip Hop culture. Nor does this literature take into account how being a part of this culture impact address adult identity, and worldviews. While, Adult Education scholars Guy (2004), Price (2005) and Hanley (2006) have attempted to discuss Hip-Hop culture in their scholarship, due to their not ascribing to any of the elements of Hip-Hop culture, and not being born within the Hip-Hop generation their gauge may have been limited in capturing the rich context that is within it. Therefore, there is need for scholarship about Hip-Hop culture and adults from

scholars who encompass a Hip-Hop worldview (Petchauer, 2007) and can address some of complexities that are within it. Therefore, with Hip-Hop as an epistemological lens, the purpose of this paper is to understand what the cultural relevance of Hip Hop is to adults, how it impacts adult development and what are the implications for adult educators?

### **Relevant Studies and Literature**

While there is a lack of literature that addresses Adults and Hip Hop culture, a number of dissertations have loosely discussed adults who identify with the culture. For instance, teachers and administrators (Runnell-Hall, 2011), community leaders (Richmond, 2011), and parents (Munn-Joseph, 2007). Runnell-Hall's (2011) study used grounded theory to discuss the pedagogy of 23 Hip Hop educators in their mid 30's to 40's. Findings indicated that the participants brought "Hip Hop" practices and worldviews into their workplaces. These were built upon social justice. Additionally, each participant shared similar attributes, political involvement, community involvement and artistry (Runnell-Hall, 2011). Their Hip Hop practice's fostered vulnerability, cultivated strength, encouraged critical thinking and allowed for diverse social identity. Munn- Joseph's (2007) completed a qualitative study of eight Black parents in their 30s-40's who self - identified with Hip Hop. Through in depth interviews, key similarities were found in their personality traits consisting of authenticity, directness and racial pride. Major themes that emerged were the participant's abilities to transform rather than conform to dominant ideology. One main message that is streamline through the aforementioned dissertations is the fact that Hip Hop adults do exist who are not immature, and who have a wealth of attributes that can contribute to our scholarship and provide a counter story to mass media's perpetration of those in the culture being young, nihilistic and purposeless (KRS One, 2003, Rose, 1994, Kirk-Duggan-Hall, 2011). Various transformational stories of adult Hip Hoppa's exist in this vein. For instance the community work of Common, Lupe Fiasco and Russell Simmons deem themselves as noteworthy to mention.

### **Conclusion**

As the culture of Hip Hop continues to mature and be a staple in today's society, it is evident that more empirical research is needed to understand these individuals. Those who educate, train and facilitate adults from the inner city must first be educated on the subject and persona of Hip Hop in order to facilitate the learning of these non-traditional students emerging from this culture. History proves that it is through education that stereotypical barriers such as those attached to the Hip Hop culture can be broken down. In an attempt to foster this, I have provided the reader with a brief landscape of adult Hip Hop culture and their worldviews, practices and accomplishments. Hopefully, this will help to illuminate adult Hip Hoppa in workplaces, communities and schools throughout the world and further aid these environments social justice and diversity initiatives.