IS IT COOL TO GO TO SCHOOL?
AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE BLACK–WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
AND HIP HOP MUSIC AND CULTURE

by
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. Achievement data were collected from the Connecticut Mastery Test scores of one suburban district’s middle school students. This mixed-method study collected qualitative and quantitative data from the 7th- and 8th-grade students using an in-school survey that asked questions about school and hip hop music and culture. Students also completed a take-home log to record how long they participated in various after-school activities, including listening to music. There was not a significant amount of data collected concerning the amount of time students listen to hip hop music in order to determine if this could be a factor in lower achievement levels for hip hop listeners. The results of this study showed that students who listen to hip hop music did not meet goal on all three state standardized tests, and consequently, achieved at a lower level than their non-hip-hop-listening peers regardless of race. This research also examined how the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning. When asked to describe the term acting Black, most student responses were derived from negative images and concepts about African Americans that they are exposed to through listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop videos.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research study to the people in my life that had to endure days of my partial absence from their lives: my son, Shane, and my daughter, Kayla, in whom I have instilled the importance of education throughout their lives as they continue their lifelong learning and become successful adults; my parents, Joseph and Linda Paul, who have inspired me to continue to challenge myself in this educational endeavor; my sisters, Tanya, Sonia, and Jodie, who were there to assist with my son and daughter when I needed them; and my best friend and love, Roger Eller. I especially dedicate this work to my Cape Verdean grandparents who emigrated to America and made this opportunity possible.
Acknowledgments

I would like to first acknowledge the late Dr. Terilyn Turner (may she rest in peace), my mentor with whom I began this journey, and who offered encouragement and direction at the beginning of what seemed to be such a daunting task. I have an abundance of appreciation for Dr. Philip Corkill, my mentor with whom I end this journey, and committee members, Dr. Melissa D. M. Brandly and Dr. Carol Pasanen, for their valuable insight and guidance during this research project. I thank all of my Capella university professors who provided me with enriching learning experiences. I would also like to thank Dr. Ronald A. Ferguson for granting permission for me to utilize his Secondary Student Survey, Dr. Sonja Peterson-Lewis and Dr. Lisa M. Bratton for granting permission for me to utilize their questions from their “Acting Black” study, and the superintendent of schools from the school district in which I conducted this research.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), African American educator, once stated, “Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed” (as cited in Lynch, 2006, p. 1).

The academic success of America’s students has come to be measured by a yearly test of their abilities at the state and national levels using standardized tests. There are many different student groups being compared with each other based on achievement-level data from these tests, and any differences among those groups are called achievement gaps. Common comparisons are low-income or minority to White students, Black to White students, Latino to White students, Asian students to any other group, or any combination of the aforementioned groups. The achievement gap being addressed in this research is between Black and White students. All across America, Black students are not achieving at the same academic levels as their White counterparts. This study will examine the relationship between the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. This will be accomplished by surveying middle school students about their education and leisure activities and examining their standardized test results.
Publication of achievement differences did not begin until the 20th century. The history of the achievement gap between African American students and their White peers can be traced back to the 1950s, when school districts began to publish results of student achievement tests after the desegregation of schools (Ipka, 2003). Numerous studies have shown that African American students perform better in desegregated schools. A recent study performed by the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute (2007) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that classroom and school characteristics had a larger effect on a student’s long-term reading abilities than the method of instruction or the child’s background. They found that students attending minority segregated schools (schools where the minority population exceeded 75% of the enrollment) underperformed even after controlling for the quality of the literacy instruction, the reading abilities of the classroom peer group, and characteristics of the students and their families (FPG Child Development Institute, 2007). An analysis of the achievement gap between resegregated and desegregated schools in Norfolk, Virginia provides another example of racial disparity and student achievement. Ipka (2003) reported that the 1998 fifth-grade scores in mathematics indicated a 20% achievement gap. The gap increased to 29% in 1999, decreased to 27% in 2000, and then increased to 11% in 2001. These gaps appeared to increase since the third-grade test results in mathematics for 1998 through 2001 when it was 28%, 19%, 10%, and 9%, respectively.

In 1954, the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education led to decades of progress in the school desegregation struggle. However, according to Orfield, Frankenberg, and Lee (2002), that progress has been reversed: Segregation has been increasing almost everywhere for a decade. With an increase of minority students in
schools, especially in urban areas, many Black and Latino students are attending schools where they are the majority. This resegregation has prompted researchers, such as Orfield et al., Ipka (2003), and the FPG Child Development Institute (2007), to study the effects of African American students living in economically disadvantaged conditions in which the quality of education does not measure up to other areas, where the students are achieving at higher levels.

The reasons for the Black–White student achievement gap are deeply rooted in the history and sociocultural aspects of race and inequality in America. Before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas decision, African American children were forced to attend inferior schools that were supposedly “separate but equal.” In order to understand racism’s effect on Blacks, one has to first realize that most White people thought themselves to be superior to Blacks, and Black people were very much aware of that fact. Since this was in our recent past, feelings of resentment and mistrust have been passed down to the next generation in many families, just as racism is sometimes passed down in some White families. As a result, many African Americans do not trust the educational system in America, and this has caused a divide between the school and home.

Ogbu (as cited in Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003) maintained that African Americans’ fight for equal educational opportunity has left them with a deep distrust for schools and school people. Fordham and Ogbu argued that African Americans have developed an oppositional identity, “a sense of peoplehood in opposition to the social identity of White Americans because of the way White America treated them” (as cited in Perry et al., 2003, p. 61), and an oppositional cultural framework that identifies certain
activities, including doing well in school, as “White activities” (as cited in Perry et al., 2003, p. 61). As a result, those who choose to participate in White-identified activities risk being ostracized by their Black peers. According to Ogbu’s theory, this negative view is passed down from adults to their children, and the youth are using the secondary hip hop culture to define themselves instead of their primary African culture. Ogbu believed that is the problem. Ogbu argued that street and hip hop culture is an unproductive, negative model of achievement for African American youth (Foley, 2004). If it is true that African American youth are defining themselves by being oppositional, and this opposition is being celebrated through hip hop music and culture, this fact will probably be prevalent and relevant in schools and classrooms across the country as well.

The history of racism and unequal education in America has been very important in shaping the foundation of hip hop music and culture. Hip hop has served as a vessel for artists to communicate the past and present inequalities experienced by Black youth. However, the problem may lie in the evolution of the hip hop genre, as it has come to be that there is often a negative attitude or hardcore image that goes along with the hip hop music and lifestyle that does not promote academic achievement. Students who emulate the hip hop lifestyle and develop the negative attitudes or hardcore image, are probably not going to be successful in school, as it is necessary to have a positive attitude when learning.

**Background of the Study**

The true beginning of the achievement gap could be said to have begun with the institution of slavery in America. Denied an education by law in slave states and facing
inequality of educational opportunities in free states, only 7% of the African American population was literate in 1863 (Spring, 2005). For the slaves, literacy was more than a symbol of freedom; it was freedom (Perry et al., 2003). After slavery was abolished in 1865, Blacks eventually became citizens and were able to attend segregated schools organized by former slaves, although the Black schools were not funded as well as White schools. By 1900, Spring states that the dream of education for African Americans in the South was shattered as the majority of public expenditures went to support White segregated schools, and large numbers of Black children were kept working in the fields. By 1900, the literacy rate for Black boys aged 10–14 was 64% and for Black girls aged 10 –14, the rate was 71% (Anderson, 2005). Segregated schools and unequal education for minority students continued to go unchallenged until the Civil Rights movement that began in the 1940s. The desegregation of American schools was the result of over half a century of struggle by the African and Latino communities (Spring). However, it was the existence of slavery and the struggle to be free and educated that has helped to shape the present attitudes and achievements of people of African descent.

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a case formed by National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leadership in Topeka, Kansas, because African American children could not attend school with White children and were being bused to separate schools specifically for African American children. This case was a class action lawsuit in 1952 consisting of five cases from around the country and almost 200 plaintiffs. The other four cases were out of Virginia, South Carolina, Delaware, and Washington, DC. The case was named after Oliver Brown of Topeka, Kansas, because he was the only male plaintiff.
In 1954, in Brown I, the court ruled that racial segregation in public education was unconstitutional. Following the Supreme Court’s decision, states around the country engaged in massive resistance to the Court’s desegregation mandate (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund [NAACPLDF], 2005), leading to the next case. After desegregation began, schools began to publish the results of student achievement tests. The results of these tests indicated that African American children lagged behind European American children (Ipka, 2003).

In 1955, in Brown II, the court ruled on the implementation of Brown I and “with all deliberate speed” (Willoughby, 2004, p. 44). This open-ended wording left much of the decision making up to local authorities and resisters were everywhere, even in the government. In his 1963 inaugural speech, George C. Wallace, governor of Alabama, declared “Segregation now, segregation forever” (as cited in NAACPLDF, 2005, p. 9), then stood in the University of Alabama doorway to block African American students from registration. Even though the Supreme Court’s decision called for the desegregation of schools, it could not control where people decided to live (Allen, 2004). As districts were busing Black students to integrate the schools, many White families were moving away, leaving some schools with a predominantly Black population.

It was not until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that advances were made. The act, supported by the executive branch, empowered the federal government to cut funding to schools that continued to segregate their students and gave the U.S. Department of Justice authority to file lawsuits seeking desegregation of schools (Willoughby, 2004). Willoughby explained how widespread integration did not begin until 1971, when a North Carolina case, Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of
Education forced school systems to bus students as a way of integrating schools in segregated neighborhoods.

In *Brown III*, in 1979, three African American attorneys reopened the case to determine if the schools were in fact desegregated. As a result, Topeka Public Schools built three magnet schools to comply with the court findings. According to the NAACPLDF (2005), history is repeating itself. Their argument is that anti-affirmative-action groups may succeed in preventing significant numbers of African Americans from receiving higher education if they are allowed to continue to pressure universities and colleges to abandon explicitly race-conscious outreach and recruitment, financial aid and scholarships, and retention programs, in addition to their continued assault on admission policies (NAACPLDF, 2005).

Many would say that although great progress has been made, the promise of educational equity still remains to be fulfilled (Allen, 2004). Allen told about one group that closely monitors the legacy of *Brown*, the Harvard Civil Rights Project. The Project’s report, *Brown at 50: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare?*, revealed that although desegregation has succeeded in many districts, others are abandoning desegregation plans and are backed by recent court rulings that favor a return to neighborhood school plans. Does the U.S. Supreme Court really expect schools to now start resegregating American schools across the nation? Because lower income families live in the same area, neighborhood school plans would place economically disadvantaged children in the same school, many of which are minority students, thereby lowering their access to academic opportunity and exposure to their White peers.
There is another important reason why the probability of minority children attending school with Caucasian children has declined. As Foster-Bey (2004) indicated, there have been dramatic demographic changes in the ethnic and racial composition of the nation’s school children. Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of White children in the U.S. schools decreased from 67% to 60% of all school children. While the number of White children rose by 13%, the number of Black and Latino children increased by 37% and 74%, respectively. Therefore, a very large portion of the decreased exposure of minority children to White children in public schools is an outcome of demographic changes.

The Harvard Civil Rights Project report calls for appointing judges and civil rights enforcement officials who will continue to fulfill the wider mandate of Brown; providing educational choice programs, such as magnet and charter schools, and prointegration vouchers, which ensure racial integration; and using housing subsidies to better advantage so minorities can attend middle class schools. Since the U.S. Supreme Court tells us that, in the name of Brown v. Board of Education, the best way to stop racial discrimination is to “stop discrimination by race,” Sacks (2007) suggested that districts use income to assign students to schools. The Century Foundation reports that 40 school districts across the country are already using this class-based system.

Resegregation would not matter so much if racial segregation were not linked to unequal education (Orfield et al., 2002). Nine tenths of intensely segregated schools for African Americans and Latinos have high concentrations of poverty (The Civil Rights Project, as cited in Orfield et al., 2002). Orfield et al. stated that the racial and poverty composition of schools is strongly linked to test scores, graduation rates, the ability to
attract and retain talented and experienced teachers, the range of course offerings, student health, parental involvement, and many other factors that influence educational opportunity.

During the 1970s and part of the 1980s, some achievement gaps between poor minority students and their affluent White peers lessened (Reynolds, 2002). According to the Educational Research Service (ERS, 2001), between 1970 and 1988, the African American/Caucasian achievement gap decreased substantially in reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as well as high school graduation, college attendance, and college completion rates. The ERS also reported that since 1988, however, the gap has been widening again. Achievement gap trends in reading and mathematics scores demonstrate a rise in the gap from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s. Scores for 1996–1999 show a slight increase in the gap with the exception of reading scores for eighth-grade students who decreased the gap by three points, with Grade 4 and 8 students closing the gap slightly in both reading and math from 1999 to 2007. The gap appears before children enter kindergarten, and it persists into adulthood (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

The following four charts show the trends in reading and math scores for Black and White students in Grades 4 and 8 since the early 1980s. All scores were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.), from the results of the NAEP.
### Table 1. Grade 4 Reading Average Scale Scores

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Gains made by Blacks and Hispanics from the late 1970s to the late 1980s on national measures eroded in the 1990s (Chubb & Loveless, 2002). The achievement gap has not only proven to be a problem in low socioeconomic areas, but also in many suburban middle class areas. As a result, numerous researchers have identified reasons for the gap and have suggested ways to narrow it.

During the same time period that the achievement gap was widening, hip hop music and culture was becoming very popular. Hip hop is mainly known as a music genre, but it is also a cultural lifestyle expressed through dance, music, and word/song. The nine elements of hip hop are break dancing, emceeing (rapping), deejaying (spinning records), graffiti art, beat boxing (making music with the mouth), street fashion, street language, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism (White, 2006). Only recently has research begun in this area to determine if hip hop music and culture has anything to do with the widening of the gap; however, students do emulate the hip hop lifestyle and are immersed in the music and culture on a daily basis.

While it is true that students of all ethnicities listen to hip hop music and mimic the hip hop style, Black students may be affected more than other student groups because...
there is also a cultural identification with the hip hop artists and hip hop lifestyle. Keynote speaker and Harvard professor Dr. Ronald Ferguson spoke at Taylor Academy in Cleveland Heights about minority achievement and social and cultural distractions over the years (Kurdziel, 2000). When Ferguson mentioned hip hop music as one of those distractions, a White student pointed out that White kids also listen to hip hop. Kurdziel writes that, according to Ferguson, hip hop is identification for Blacks, that is, it is Black and oppositional. He continues that with hip hop came the beginning of gangsta rap (rap lyrics portraying a violent, abrasive, gangster lifestyle). Ferguson said it led its listeners, Black and White, to be more likely to condone violence and to have a pessimistic outlook, according to random surveys of teens. One of the underlying factors is that students identifying with this negative outlook and lifestyle are not going to be too concerned with succeeding in school. If students are associating this lifestyle with being Black, then the message is that getting good grades in school is not a part of being Black. What is problematic is that the young people are operating with a very limited definition of what it means to be Black, based largely on cultural stereotypes that do not include academic achievement (Tatum, 1997).

Clemetson (1999) told how Ferguson conducted a survey of student attitudes in Shaker Heights, Ohio. When he asked what it takes to be popular, White students said an outgoing personality, while Black students said being tough. Ferguson said that tough kid is going to be more standoffish toward authority figures, and that social requirement works against achievement. This attitude is being construed by teachers as defiance and disobedience, while the student thinks it is what they need to survive.
According to Ferguson (as cited in Gray-Kontar, 2005), in 1988, 35% of Black students read daily for pleasure, while only 30% of White kids did. By 1992, the number of White readers was still the same, but Black leisure readers dropped to 14.7%. Ferguson said the drop in leisure time reading, combined with an increase in the number of students cutting class between 1988 and 1992, are the two factors that figure most decidedly in declining reading achievement scores for African American children. These two milestones also happen to occur at the beginning of hip hop’s mass influence. As stated by Ferguson, although hip hop artists began recording songs as early as the late 1970s, it was in 1988 that rap music record sales began to increase. From 1979 to 1987, only three rap albums sold more than 500,000 copies, attaining “gold” status. But in 1988 alone, 17 albums hit gold-level status. Four years later, in 1992, the number was 134. It is probably of great significance that in the early 1980s, hip hop videos began surfacing on television cable channels, premiering first on the Black Entertainment Television station, and then eventually on the more popular Music Television station. Ferguson also conducted research on Black student achievement, self-esteem, “acting White,” and the role of hip hop culture in students’ lives. The results of his research will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

**Statement of the Problem**

It was not known how and to what extent the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relates to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. The lower achievement level of minority students is a major problem that has been plaguing American schools for several decades, and because the
widest achievement gap has been the gap between Black and White students, that will be the focus of this investigation.

Research suggested that two of the main causes of the Black–White achievement gap are poverty and lack of opportunity, and they certainly are major contributors in many cases. However, the presence of a Black–White achievement gap in suburban areas where middle class African American families reside, has provided a reason for speculation and further research into this issue. According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), the most famous example of “something wrong in suburbia” (p. 121) is Shaker Heights, Ohio. Ferguson conducted numerous studies in Shaker Heights and other suburban districts using surveys that question students about self-esteem, self-identity, attitudes toward learning, teachers, and school, study habits, family background, and socioeconomic status. If poverty is not the common denominator, then we must determine what the common thread is by investigating other areas to increase our understanding of the problem.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. The study describes the academic achievement of middle school students and how it relates to their attitudes about school and hip hop. With the invention of new technologies, there are numerous distractions that potentially affect student achievement levels across the races. However, cultural distractions specific to young Black students, such as hip hop music and culture, could be related to the
existence of the achievement gap since the gap has persisted not only in poor urban areas, but in middle-class suburban areas as well. With the widening of the gap occurring at the same time as the growing popularity of hip hop, this study assists in evaluating whether this is a coincidence, or if there could be something more serious to consider when attempting to narrow the gap.

Rationale

The achievement gap between Black and White students persisted for several decades despite educators’ efforts to narrow the gap. These efforts have been accelerated with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act that requires all students to be proficient in reading and math by the 2013–2014 school year. Because the widest achievement gap is between Black and White students, examining the cultural differences and attitudes toward school between the two groups can provide additional insight into the reasons for their differences in academic performance. Any information gathered regarding cultural distractions and students’ attitudes toward learning are of high value to educators and parents, who can proactively and positively influence students to perform better in school. If it is found in this study that students are spending too much time immersed in the hip hop music and culture, and that students hold beliefs and attitudes that conflict with school and learning based on that culture, then educators and parents can use that information to guide students in a positive direction for higher academic achievement to effectively narrow the achievement gap.
Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

R1: What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?

H0: The achievement level of Black students is not lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos.

H1: The achievement level of Black students is lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos.

R2: What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

H0: Students spend less time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.

H2: Students spend more time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.

R3: How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?

H0: The negative lifestyle portrayed by hip hop artists does not influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.

H3: The negative lifestyle portrayed by hip hop artists influences the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.
Significance of the Study

It was important that a study be conducted to describe the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. Throughout the United States, there is a prevalent achievement gap between Black and White students that initially began primarily due to racism. Historically, when these racial issues have been challenged in the court system, changes have been made to make obtaining a quality education possible for Blacks. The presence of this achievement gap signifies a lack of basic reading and math skills for students of color. People with weak basic skills earn substantially less now, in real terms, than in the middle 1970s (Ferguson, 2006). Ferguson also stated that near the middle of this century, non-Whites will become the majority of the U.S. population and work force; the nation’s economic future will depend fundamentally on the skills of non-White workers. At the 2006 Second Annual Conference of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, Dr. Glenn C. Loury, a Brown University economics professor, stated that he is alarmed that America’s political leaders are leaving the job of fixing the nation’s racial disparities to education alone (Baard, 2006), citing the causes of the gap as a legacy of history.

With the requirements and sanctions of the No Child Left Behind Act affecting all schools in the United States, the results of this study could assist administrators, educators and parents in developing and implementing strategies to guide children in the right direction to raise achievement levels. School leaders that have knowledge of students’ positive and negative attitudes about learning, hip hop, and student achievement levels could lead teachers and parents in developing ways to motivate students to do well.
There has been speculation that hip hop has something to do with low student achievement because they seem to have begun at the same time, and the information presented in this study could assist in guiding the initiation of other research to define a relationship between this influential lifestyle and student achievement.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used operationally in this study.

**Academic achievement.** The student attainment of content knowledge and skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

**Achievement gap.** The measured disparity in intellective competence and academic ability that separates students of color and low income from more affluent, primarily White students (Lynch, 2006).

**Adequate yearly progress.** An individual state’s measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. *Adequate yearly progress* is the minimum level of improvement that states what school districts and schools must achieve each year (Connecticut State Department of Education, n.d.).

**African American.** Term used interchangeably with the racial category “Black (Non-Hispanic)”; an American of African and especially Black African descent (Spring, 2005).

**Caucasian.** Term used interchangeably with the racial category “White (Non-Hispanic)”; of, constituting, or characteristic of a race of humankind native to Europe, North Africa, and southwest Asia and classified according to physical features; used
especially when referring to persons of European descent having usually light skin pigmentation (Spring, 2005).

**Gangsta rap.** Rap music with lyrics containing profanity and that openly glorifies behavior such as drug abuse, gang rape, murder, and disrespect toward women (Waldron, 1996).

**Hip hop.** The nine elements of hip hop are break dancing, emceeing (rapping, from MC/master of ceremonies), deejaying (spinning records as in DJ/disc jockey), graffiti art, beat boxing (making music with the mouth), street fashion, street language, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism (White, 2006).

**Minority.** Any immigrant group that historically threatened to change the cultural domination of the Protestant Anglo-American culture in the United States (Spring, 2005).

**National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).** A set of federal exams in a variety of subjects given to a sample of students nationwide (Rothstein, 2004).

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. Students have performed to the best of their abilities on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), the standardized test given to all Connecticut students in Grades 3–8 every year.

2. The CMT has been tabulated and scored properly by the state of Connecticut.

3. The middle school teachers have properly prepared the students with the skills and knowledge needed to perform well on the CMT.
Limitations

The following limitations apply to this study:

1. The study has been limited to one suburban town’s two middle schools with a population of seventh- and eighth-grade students.

2. While there are many distractions in the media, this study has been limited to the possible influence that hip hop music and culture can have on students’ academic performance.

3. This study has not taken into consideration the variables of poverty, family background, former or current residence other than the town being studied, or teacher quality.

4. The academic performance data of the students has been limited to the scores that they receive on the 2009 CMT.

5. The findings from this sample of middle school students may not be generalizable to other communities.

Nature of the Study

This descriptive study used triangular mixed-methods research to study the attitudes of middle school students toward their learning and hip hop music relative to their achievement levels and the achievement gap. Using quantitative data has described students’ beliefs and attitudes about their schoolwork and learning, and the qualitative data collected have assisted in determining specific student perceptions about their attitudes and how much time students devote to academics and hip hop music. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from students through the Student Study
Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey (Appendix A) that was given to 42 students of all races in the two Connecticut suburban middle schools, in a town that borders the second largest urban school district in Connecticut. This town has a total student enrollment of 7,372. School B has a student population of 517, and School A has 616 students. Students will complete a daily log and answer several open-ended questions for in-depth qualitative data. The After-School Student Activity Log (Appendix B) was given to all participating students to complete for 4 days and required them to record information every hour listing what they spend time doing after school until bedtime. This qualitative data log has offered insight as to the amount of time students are spending on homework, reading, and leisure activities such as hip hop music and culture.

To collect quantitative data, the survey was given to selected middle school students to be completed in an agreed upon class during the school day. The two Grade 7 and 8 middle schools are located in a suburban community in Connecticut where there is a 20% to 30% population of Black students in each school. The total minority population is about 41% at School A and 45% at School B. The Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence student survey (Appendix A) has four sections and is adapted with permission from Ferguson’s Cambridge Education, Inc. Secondary Student Survey. The students’ answers have provided information on their point of view and attitudes regarding hip hop, school, and their own achievement. The quantitative data being utilized to measure the academic achievement of the students were retrieved from their 2009 CMT results in reading, writing, and math.
Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of this study is divided up as follows. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the history of the achievement gap, the history of hip hop music and culture, hip hop’s effect on Black youth, Black student identity, and school resistance/oppositional culture theory. It also contains current research related to the achievement gap, hip hop music and culture, and students’ views about hip hop, their education, self-esteem, and peer pressure as it relates to academic performance.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology that was used in the research study. Included in this chapter is the design of the study, a detailed description of the participants, the instrumentation used, and the process of data collection and analysis. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey (Appendix A) given to the middle school students. Additional qualitative data were collected through the After-School Activity Log (Appendix B) given to the middle school students to complete at home.

Chapter 4 consists of the presentation and analysis of data collected during the research study. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the research, and recommendations for further study on the achievement gap and hip hop music and culture.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In his song, “You Must Learn,” hip hop artist KRS-One told his listeners how important it is to learn about Black history and the African kings and queens that they descend from. Hip hop artist Nas enlisted the help of a multicultural group of children in his music video, and they recited the following chorus in his song that warned his listeners of the possible dangers in life if they do not become educated and dream big: “I know I can . . . Be what I wanna be. If I work hard at it . . . I’ll be where I wanna be.”

With hip hop songs such as these being sung, parents and educators would most likely appreciate the positive messages being conveyed in them. Unfortunately, these positive songs represent a very small sample of the hip hop music genre. As stated by Gosa (2007), most hip hop lyrics indicate that drugs, basketball, and hip hop are the only ways Blacks are likely to be successful. Gosa further explained that these are umbrella categories. Drugs represents all illegal street activities, such as selling drugs, robbing, gambling, prostitution, or selling stolen goods. Basketball represents all professional ball sports. Hip hop not only includes being a DJ or MC, but also the entire entertainment industry that surrounds it, including fashion and television. Gosa revealed that before 1994, hip hop songs contained a different message about the importance of education and the consequences of being a dropout.
The more popular hip hop lyrics pit one young rapper against another, disrespect young girls and women, and boast about money, violence, street life, and drugs. Instead of just being cool, it has become cool to be a gangster, whether you live in a tough neighborhood or not. This image infiltrated the seemingly harmless hip hop lifestyle, and it could potentially have an effect on the academic success of the young children who are exposed to it on a daily basis through the music they listen to and the music videos they watch on television.

One has to wonder what kind of effect this exposure to inappropriate situations is having on children. This research study is an important part of determining the role of hip hop music and culture in the lives of young teens. Numerous research studies have been conducted on the Black–White achievement gap, with many reasons being given for the gap’s existence, as well as many solutions being given for how to narrow the gap. Because of America’s history of racism, it may be difficult to pinpoint any one specific reason for the gap and, therefore, the solution may require a variety of resources. All areas of the lives of Black youth must be examined for the answer. Presently, a major part of the youths’ lives is hip hop music and culture. How much of an impact this lifestyle has on a student could determine their actions and reactions to others in school.

Topics reviewed in this chapter include the history of the achievement gap and the history of hip hop, which provide the historical context for this study. Hip hop’s effect on Black youth will be discussed based on several recent studies. The remaining topics that will provide additional knowledge on Black student achievement include peer pressure/self-esteem, Black youth identity, school resistance/oppositional culture theory, urban adolescents’ leisure reading habits, and teacher–student relationships.
History of the Achievement Gap

The history of slavery and racism in America legally prevented the academic success of Africans brought to the United States against their will. Even so, those hungry for education and freedom, such as abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass, found ways to learn and achieve success despite the constant roadblocks they encountered. After slavery was abolished, segregated schools with inferior buildings, materials, and education limited the advancement of African Americans. Blacks have made tremendous educational gains since the days of Jim Crow, when roughly 80% of African Americans grew up in the South, where they were legally required to attend segregated schools (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The landmark case Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was supposed to pave the way for equal education for Blacks, but the progress has been slow. In many cases, the progress has also been reversed, with segregated schools growing in number throughout the country, especially in urban areas where many lower income Blacks and Latinos tend to live.

A recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling has now made desegregating these schools extremely difficult. In Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education and Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, White parents sued the Louisville and Seattle school districts, respectively, claiming that the districts’ desegregation plans relied too heavily on race in determining which schools students could attend (Watson, 2007). Watson continued, in the 5–4 decision, the conservative wing of the U.S. Supreme Court argued that school districts should be prohibited from using race to integrate schools, a position that is seemingly at odds with the landmark
1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Since the segregated schools are mostly in areas where lower income minorities live, then the answer may lie in integrating the schools by social class.

Though not segregated by law, these schools still provide unequal education and opportunity based on larger class sizes, lower quality teachers, and lower income families in attendance, which further influences student learning. Rothstein (2004) explained that there are personality and childrearing differences on average, between families in different social classes since upper-middle-class parents have jobs where they are expected to collaborate with fellow employees, create new solutions to problems, or wonder how to improve their contributions. They are more likely to talk to their children in ways that differ from the ways of lower class parents whose own jobs simply require them to follow instructions without question.

Rothstein (2004) further explained that children who are raised by parents who are professionals will, on average, have more inquisitive attitudes toward the material presented by their teachers than will children who are raised by working class parents. This factor, when combined with the many other social class differences, such as health, housing and student mobility, cultural differences, and length of time in poverty, has an effect on a student’s ability to achieve academically. The focus has been on testing American students and pressuring schools to improve teaching and learning, but the social factors cannot be ignored as they also affect the academic success of students.

The NAEP was created by Congress in 1969 to test samples of students in fourth, eighth, and 12th grades. The results over the years have shown a gap in achievement between the average Black or Latino student and the average White or Asian student.
Black and Latino students did make progress from the 1970s through 1988. According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), Black students consistently scored below the 20th percentile, but by 1988, Black 17-year-olds reached the 28th percentile. The authors stated that if the trend had continued, the gap in reading skills would have closed within a generation or so. Unfortunately, the gap grew wider from that point on. The achievement gaps for math and science are even wider.

Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) reported that, according to the NAEP results, in 1978, the average Black student was in the 13th percentile in math, behind seven out of eight Whites. By 1990, African Americans had moved up to the 24th percentile. However, over the 1990s, the average Black math score fell dramatically to the 14th percentile, only 1 point more than it was 21 years earlier. In 1977, the average Black student was in the 8th percentile in science, behind 92% of all White students. Scores in 1986 reached a high at the 14th percentile, and then plunged to the 10th percentile by 1999.

By 12th grade, on average, Black students are 4 years behind those who are White or Asian, and Hispanics do not do much better (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). This is not a promising situation to be in for minority students who plan to attend college and have to struggle with college-level coursework, or who may have to take remedial courses just to prepare for the required courses.

Viadero (2008) stated that new research into the Black–White achievement gap suggests that the students who lose the most ground academically in the U.S. public schools may be the brightest African American children. These studies show that as Black students move through elementary and middle school, the test score gaps that
separate them from their better performing White counterparts grow fastest among the most able and the most slowly for those who start out with below-average academic skills. Viadero reported that some experts believe the pattern has something to do with the fact that African American children tend to be taught in predominantly Black schools, where test scores are lower on average, teachers are less experienced, and high-achieving peers are harder to find.

**History of Hip Hop**

Many thought it was just a fad and would not last long, but hip hop has grown to be one of the most popular styles of music in America and around the world. As the major cultural movement of our time, hip hop (music, fashion, attitude, style, and language) is undoubtedly one of the core influences for young African Americans born between 1965 and 1984 (Kitwana, 2002). Between the mid-1970s and early 1980s, when rap was in its infant stages, it was not at all common to see and hear from young Blacks unless they were on the evening news, and the news usually was not good news at all. At this time, Black youth in New York City were setting trends for hip hop fashion and language, which initially seemed odd to other Black youth from around the country. With the commercialization of hip hop in the early 1990s came the uniformity of hip hop music and culture, placing youth around the country on the same page. However, the popularity of rap brought forth the music, fashion, attitude, style, language, and voices of young Blacks not only nationally, but internationally as well.

Kitwana (2002) stated that hip hop as a culture indisputably emerged in the South Bronx in the late 1970s, and in other parts of the northeast shortly thereafter, before
branching out around the country in the early 1980s. George (2005) told how Afrika Bambaataa, former Bronx gang member turned disc jockey, described the fading of 1970s gangs that were replaced with various hip hop expressions (graffiti, break dancing, disc jockeying, and rapping). Bambaataa does not attribute the end of the gangs to hip hop, however. He believes they ended because the women were tired of the gangs and killing. It is very ironic that the gang members’ women were helpful in ending gangs, but today many gangsta rap artists disrespect women in their music. In 1974, Bambaataa founded the Zulu Nation, a collective of disc jockeys, break dancers, graffiti artists, and homeboys that filled the fraternal role gangs play in urban culture while de-emphasizing crime and fighting (George, 2005). The author stated that none of the three original disc jockeys, Bambaataa, along with Herc and Flash, expected anything from the music but local fame, respect in the neighborhood, and the modest fees from the parties given at uptown clubs or the old midtown ballroom. Hip hop began as a fun way for the youth to come together and have parties centered around disc jockeying, rapping, and dancing in their homes, parks, and community centers. What began as a fun pastime for the neighborhood youth, has turned into a music genre, cultural phenomenon, political movement, and a way of life for many.

In 1979, this recreational activity began its commercial journey. Hip hop’s first successful album was recorded by three young men, later called the Sugarhill Gang. They were gathered together by a woman named Sylvia Robinson, a rhythm and blues musician, singer, songwriter, and producer, with the help of her son (Watkins, 2005). Watkins stated that it is improbable that in an industry dominated by young men, the genre’s commercial breakthrough can be attributed, in large measure, to a 43-year-old
woman. Hip hop began with disc jockeys playing records and rapping over the music, and as a result, even today most hip hop lyrics are recorded over previously released songs. The success of the Sugarhill Gang’s first single was almost immediate once the radio stations finally agreed to play it, partly because the rappers performed with a live band’s recording of a very popular dance tune at the time. Watkins stated that although mostly light-hearted and fun, the lyrics display much of the male swagger and self-boasting that continue to be steadfast qualities in hip hop.

In 1982, Robinson recorded the first rap message song. The record went on to reach as high as number 4 on the rhythm and blues chart and 62 on the pop chart (Watkins, 2005). Rap artists began sending messages about their struggles and injustices in life, and gained popularity with other Blacks and Latinos who could relate to them. The recorded songs became a forum for youth to voice their observations and concerns about life.

By the mid-1980s, rap became more political, bringing forth a new radicalism shaped by the economic changes affecting Black youth. The new and very controversial subgenre of rap, called gangsta rap, was abrasive, profane, and hardcore. Watkins (2005) stated that as the gangsta style evolved throughout the decade, for some it became the unfiltered voice of a generation of angry and alienated young Black men who inhabited America’s abandoned ghettos. For others, the gangsta style was a meticulous pose, a shrewd, market-driven performance that craftily exploited America’s fear of poor, ghetto youths (Watkins, 2005). One popular and former homeless rapper, KRS-One, recorded one of the first gangsta rap albums with his partner, Scott La Rock. Once Scott La Rock was murdered, KRS-One took a different outlook on life. Watkins says that KRS-One
and other socially conscious rappers took on some of the major issues of the period, such
as poverty, violence, racism, the ravages of drugs, corrupt law enforcement, the
shakedown ways of the music industry, and the commercial takeover of hip hop.

The problem was that with the new wave of youth radicalism, or gangsta rap,
came a new theme: The very same contempt that young Black men held for racist
policing, high incarceration rates, and limited employment options was also directed at
Black women (Kitwana, 2002). Various political, community, and women’s groups have
called for the end of this disrespect toward women. The words used in the songs are
denigrating toward girls and women, and the music videos almost always feature scantily
dressed young girls, even if the video has nothing to do with girls or relationships. With
adolescents being major consumers of hip hop music, there is great cause for concern
about how this will affect them and their relationships with the opposite sex. Dr. C.
Delores Tucker was a civil rights and women’s rights activist who was one of the first to
speak out against gangsta rap. She called it “pornographic filth” and said it was
demeaning and offensive to Black women (as cited in Shinhoster Lamb, 2005). Her war
against rap music caused record companies to sue her, and she also sued one rapper who
used her name more than once in a derogatory manner on his album.

During the 1990s, hip hop merchandising and popularity grew rapidly as it
crossed over into mainstream American pop culture. With the increasing sales of hip hop
albums, followed the first hip hop magazines, clothing lines, films, art, and marketing.
Rap, along with film soundtracks, took home the honors in 1998 as the genre that
collected the most weeks at number one on the Billboard music charts (Watkins, 2005).
Hip hop courses even began to make their way into colleges and universities. In addition,
there have been numerous articles, academic papers, and books written on hip hop, as well as websites devoted to hip hop facts and commentary.

Kitwana (2002) stated that probably no other event in rap’s history has received as much coverage in the mainstream media as the so-called East Coast/West Coast conflict, which is the real and imagined antagonism between rappers and fans on the East Coast (mostly New York City) and the West Coast (mostly rappers and fans in Los Angeles). The author said that the conflict climaxed with the gang-style murders of two popular rappers in 1996 and 1997, but the efforts and words of several well-known rappers helped to reduce East–West antagonism. The conflict has lessened considerably. However, the violent and harsh lyrics can still be heard in the gangsta rap music genre.

There are positive and less abrasive hip hop songs being recorded. There are even Christian hip hop artists who rap and sing with religious themes. Unfortunately, these are the least popular hip hop artists with virtually no radio airplay.

**Hip Hop’s Effect on Black Youth**

According to various recent studies, violent and misogynistic rap music does have an effect on the lives of adolescents of all races. While the focus of this research was rap and hip hop because it is the most popular music genre with Black youth, it is important to note that negative lyrics and images appear in country, rock, and heavy metal genres as well. The marketing of violence and misogyny is reinforced in mainstream society, not just in rap music (Hobson & Bartlow, 2008). However, the difference with rap or hip hop music is that there is a hip hop lifestyle that accompanies it. With the large role that music plays in the lives of teens, the lyrics presented in the songs may be sending
harmful messages that could jeopardize their future success. Most of the rap artists claim that their music is not for everyone, and parents need to monitor what their children are listening to. Parents do need to monitor their children, but it is unlikely that all parents will be able to do so all of the time. Some do not monitor children at all because of their hectic work or home schedule. Despite parental monitoring, inappropriate songs are played on the radio all throughout the day, and music videos full of sexual innuendo, drugs, and violence are shown on television just as often. The undeniable fact is that young children and teens are being exposed to age-inappropriate language and situations through the music and videos.

According to Reddick and Beresin (2002), music forms a social context and informs the adolescent about the adult world through the lens of artists’ lives, language, and presence as models. The authors further explained that in their relationships through music, teens can equate the sense of community that has partially disintegrated as a result of technological advances that promote isolation (such as Internet), fragmentation of family structure, homogenization and sprawl of the suburbs, and lack of community resources in the inner city. Teens looking for a sense of community, that find it in hip hop music, are not necessarily getting the best substitute for family and other relationships they are lacking. Very few hip hop songs are telling the listener to learn all they can and to succeed in school. Many songs say quite the opposite, especially in the popular gangsta rap subgenre where success on the streets is more important than anything else.

Wingood et al. (2003) conducted a study to determine whether exposure to rap music videos at baseline could predict the occurrence of health risk behaviors and sexually transmitted diseases among African American adolescent girls over a 12-month
follow-up period. A total of 92.2% of the 522 14- through 18-year-old study participants completed the follow-up assessments. The results indicated that 37.6% of the participants had contracted a new sexually transmitted disease, 4.8% had struck a teacher, 12.1% reported being arrested, 14.8% had engaged in sexual intercourse with someone other than their steady partner, 44.2% reported using drugs, and 44.4% consumed alcohol. The researchers found that greater exposure to rap music videos at baseline was associated with the occurrence of health risk behaviors and having a laboratory-confirmed new sexually transmitted disease 1 year later. Wingood is not saying that there is a causal relationship between these behaviors and rap music, but it could certainly be a major contributor due to its popularity among teens. Peterson, Davies, DiClemente, Harrington, and Wingood (2007) stated that the study was limited to 14- to 18-year-old African American girls who reside in neighborhoods with high rates of unemployment, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases. In logistic regression analyses, adolescents who perceived more portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos were more likely to engage in binge drinking, test positive for marijuana, have multiple sexual partners, and have a negative body image.

Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker (2005) conducted a study to examine the impact of both regular and experimental music video exposure on adolescent viewers’ conceptions about gender. As expected, more frequent music video viewing and more frequent listening to popular music were each associated with holding more traditional gender role attitudes and with assigning greater importance to flashy qualities, such as physical appearance and sexiness in one’s gender ideals. The researchers stated that Black adolescent’s exposure to the media’s stereotypical images of gender may have
grave implications. Because of the popularity of music videos and music artists among Black teens, it is particularly troubling that the images available for emulation portray women and men in such limited and frequently offensive ways.

Ferguson (as cited in Kurdziel, 2000) stated that with hip hop came the beginning of gangsta rap. He said that it led its listeners, Black and White, to be more likely to condone violence and to have a pessimistic outlook, according to random surveys of teens. Hip hop music and gangsta rap began as political critiques to expose the poverty stricken and violent inner-city lives of hip hop artists. However, it has become difficult to distinguish a genuine representation of that kind of life from a fabricated one since hip hop has become so commercial.

Wade and Thomas-Gunnar (as cited in Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003) conducted a study of gangsta rap’s influence on college students’ actual attitudes and potentially their behavior. According to the authors, the researchers presented a compelling argument that “explicit rap lyrics are generally inappropriate and harmful to society” (p. 95), as they discovered that contemporary Black college students, especially men, believe that rap music accurately portrays gender relations. The study concluded that men who listen to rap music favorably were more likely to harbor attitudes that could be described as rape-prone. It seems that the youth who grow up listening to the gangsta rap lyrics that supposedly depict gender relationships could not only be very misinformed and abusive, but could also have difficulty sustaining those relationships because of their misguided notions.

Harvard University sociologist Patterson (as cited in McShepard, Goler, & Batson, 2007) suggested that the achievement of African Americans and their cultural
differences are intertwined into a “cool-pose culture” (Patterson, as cited in McShepard et al., 2007, p. 6) of self-destructive behaviors and toxic attitudes. The following describes the addictive subculture of Black teenage boys using information gathered in interviews that Patterson’s colleague conducted with high school students:

So why were they flunking out? Their candid answer was that what sociologists call the “cool-pose culture” of young Black men was simply too gratifying to give up. For these young men, it was almost like a drug, hanging out on the street after school, shopping and dressing sharply, sexual conquests, party drugs, hip hop music and culture, the fact that almost all the superstar athletes and a great many of the nation’s best entertainers were Black. Not only was living this subculture immensely fulfilling, the boys said, it also brought them a great deal of respect from White youths. This also explains the otherwise puzzling finding by social psychologists that young Black men and women tend to have the highest levels of self-esteem of all ethnic groups, and that their self-image is independent of how badly they were doing in school. (p. 6)

These self-destructive behaviors and toxic attitudes that Patterson speaks of are very popular in the hip hop culture. Hip hop artists that rap about such behaviors and attitudes are validating its acceptance for their young Black fans who are following their lead, and who are not concerned with doing well in school. With the cultural norm being based on this type of lifestyle, anyone who does not follow it could become the victim of constant teasing and criticism if they do not submit to the peer pressure.

Page (2004) reported the results of a survey by Motivational Educational Entertainment funded by the Ford Foundation and California Endowment. The study found Black urban youth from households earning under $25,000 a year to be remarkably untouched by positive messages from schools, parents, the media, and healthcare providers about responsible sexual behavior. However, the teens did display attitudes consistent with the cool macho pose of hip hop rappers.
Peer Pressure/Self-Esteem

The phenomenon of peer pressure and its impact on academic achievement has reached catastrophic proportions (Kunjufu, 1988). Kunjufu stated that it has now reached a point that to do well academically in school is to “act White” and risk being called a nerd or a brainiac, and this is not solely due to integration. He says there are schools that only African American students attend, there are no White students, and they still say to be smart is to be White. Ferguson (as cited in Williams, 2004) stated that it is not so much that African Americans are equating intelligence with Whiteness. Black students are telling their high achieving peers not to act like they’re better than everyone else. He explained that acting White is the way it is articulated because that is the way it feels to the people who are making the accusation, the feeling or vibe that they get from the people they accuse is similar to the vibe they get from White folks who sometimes behave in superior ways and are condescending.

Kunjufu (2002) said it is difficult to change the mindset that being smart is acting White if African American students are in schools with very few African American teachers and little exposure to positive Black role models. He stated that role modeling is significant, and students are exposed to many Black athletes and entertainers, but very few engineers, doctors, computer programmers, and accountants. Therefore, teachers should invite, on a weekly basis, positive role model African Americans, preferably male, to speak about math and science and their professions. Consistency is important, since the only time these people are mentioned, if at all, in most schools is one month out of the school year during Black History Month.
Kunjufu (1988) posed the questions: If being smart is acting White, how do you act Black? What is Blackness? In talking with youth around the country, the author states that many of them defined Blackness based upon the way you talked, the type of music that you listen to, and where you went outside of school. If students spoke standard English, listened to rock or classical music, and went to museums, they were White. If students spoke “Black English,” listened to rap or rhythm and blues, and went to parties, they were Black. With these views being popular with the youth, anyone who strays from these beliefs risks being teased. McShepard et al. (2007) stated that Black boys in Cleveland high schools share examples of how their peers discourage them from valuing their education: Shouting out answers in class gets them a negative response from their peers, and one student said he had even taken the approach that getting D’s instead of B’s would keep other students from picking on him. The student said, “People like to see you do bad. They want you to be on the same level as they are” (as cited in McShepard et al., 2007, p. 7). This attitude is all too common for Black youth who want to fit in with their peers, and their academic achievement and futures suffer greatly as a result. This is also more prevalent in the city of Cleveland and other urban areas, than it is in the suburban areas.

Conversely, based on the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) survey results received by Ferguson (2002b), the Black students in suburban areas reported spending about as much time on homework as other racial/ethnic groups. This could indicate a true desire to achieve, despite the general belief that getting good grades is considered acting White. Ferguson (2006) stated it is a matter of style. Often Black students that receive high grades may have styles that violate the endorsed expressions of
racial authenticity, such as speaking a certain way or listening to rock instead of rap music. He said that in order to fit in with your friends, you do not have to be a low achiever or resist high grades, but you do need to be able to speak in informal settings the way kids speak in informal settings, and you do have to be the kind of kid who does not tolerate disrespect without a response even if it comes from an adult in an authority position. It is very common for someone who works or goes to school in a formal environment to be able to switch to the informal environment or language when the situation warrants it. Those that have not learned to switch between environments, or choose not to, could be subject to others making assumptions about them because of the way they talk. However, it is the student that responds to an adult in authority that disrespects him or her that will be seen as a troublemaker.

Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) conducted a study of 60 African American high school students to obtain their descriptions of the meaning of “acting Black.” Their research uncovered five underlying content dimensions: (a) academic/scholastic: education or school-related qualities or dynamics; (b) aesthetic/stylistic: attire, style, or leisure-related qualities or activities; (c) behavioral: concrete, specific acts or activities; (d) dispositional: qualities that reflect intentions, motives, values, philosophies and worldviews that may underlie, motivate, or inform behavior; and (e) impressionistic: the overall impression, image, or effect that one projects.

The authors found three evident patterns in the students’ responses. First, all respondents conceptualized “acting Black” multidimensionally, with over 90% of the respondents citing qualities that represented at least three different dimensions. Second, there was a high consistency among the 56 respondents’ descriptions for “acting Black”
such that the descriptions that any one respondent named tended to be highly similar to those named by any other respondent. The researchers reported that a third and perhaps most critical pattern in the data is that respondents’ descriptions for “acting Black” were largely negative, with the only arguable exception being the aesthetics/stylistic dimension. This dimension includes qualities related to preferences in music, clothing, hairstyle, and physical presentation.

Future research must be done to concentrate on why students hold these particular views about what is defined as “acting Black.” Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) reported that several respondents specifically mentioned television and videos as being responsible for their exposure to what they perceived as negative images of Blacks. However, the authors also reported that researchers who study social influences on youth’s lives (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Holliday, 1985; Spencer, 1985; Spencer et al., 2001) have shown that those systems closest to youths, families, schools, communities, and peers, tend to play the major role in shaping youth’s social attitudes. Therefore, it is likely that the youth in this study developed their views from a variety of sources. It is also probable that these views will continue to be held by youths as long as the media continue to portray these negative images of Black people on television, movies, and in music videos.

Kunjufu (1986, 1988) offered the following information from the University of Michigan and the Motivational Educational Entertainment Group, which confirms how much life has changed over a 50-year period. Table 5 shows the major influences on children’s lives nationally, covering all demographics.
Table 5. Major Influences in Children’s Lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1950 University of Michigan</th>
<th>1992 Motivational Educational Entertainment Group</th>
<th>2000 Motivational Educational Entertainment Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. School</td>
<td>2. Rap</td>
<td>2. Rap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Church</td>
<td>3. Television</td>
<td>3. Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Television</td>
<td>5. Church</td>
<td>5. School</td>
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</table>

Table 5 demonstrates several interesting changes. In 1950, television was last, as it was just invented in 1948. However, it then moved up to third, with church placing last in 1992. Does this mean that fewer families are attending church, and this has had an effect on the children’s lives? Kunjufu explained that it has always been difficult to measure church attendance, since there are people who are officially registered but do not attend services. Nonetheless, the absence of church as one of the top five influences in 2000 is telling. Peers move from fourth place to first place, with rap music, just over a decade old at the time, placing as the second influential factor on youth. Home was most influential in 1950, but fails to make the top five at all in 1992. Interestingly, the home does appear as the number 4 influence in the 2000 survey. Kunjufu stated that 1950 was a period in which 80% of African Americans lived in two-parent homes. In March 1993, only 37% of African Americans lived in two-parent homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 1994). Does the fact that home does not even make it into one of the top five influential factors...
in 1992, say that family values have dissipated? With school dropping from number 2 in 1950 to number 4 in 1992, and finally last place in 2000, are parents not stressing the value of academic success? Or have the influences of peers, rap, and television taken over because they are more easily accessible to students?

According to the NAEP (NCES, n.d.), nearly 50% of Black fourth graders watch television for 5 or more hours a day, compared with almost 20% of White students and almost 30% of Hispanic students. With cable and satellite programs, there are literally hundreds of channels available to children after school. Many of those channels provide satellite radio shows and music videos that do not provide many positive images of what it means to be Black. Some argue that it is the job of the parents or family to shape the ideas and values of their children. Based on the fact that the home did not even make the top five influences in 1992 (Table 5), it is worth considering whether youth are forming and holding on to negative ideas about what “acting Black” is from these top influences.

Kunjufu (1988) explained that there is a direct, positive relationship between peer pressure and age. There is an inverse relationship between age and parental influence; as age increases, parental influence declines. Therefore, by the time students are in high school, family and school influences are very weak, and peer pressure influences are very strong.

Whiting (2006) recounted a story about a Black male student who boarded a van transporting Black students to an awards event for outstanding academic achievement. The student entered the van dressed in baggy pants, an overly large sweatshirt, and a headband. He then proceeded to pull off the outer layers to expose a crisp dress shirt and creased khaki pants, and he swapped his tennis shoes for casual shoes. Before anyone
could question him, the young man asserted, “I have an image to maintain” (as cited in Whiting, 2006, p. 225).

Whiting (2006) explained that negative peer pressures compromise and test the motivation and achievement of gifted Black boys. In several studies, Ford (as cited in Whiting) found that gifted Black boys were more likely to be accused of “acting White” or selling out when they are academically inclined, when they participate in gifted education and advanced placement classes, and when they are self-disciplined in school. The author further stated that the achievement barriers facing gifted Black boys include identity and self-perception, peer pressures, social injustices, beliefs about achievement, and notions of masculinity.

Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) surveyed gifted Black fifth- through 12th-grade students regarding their achievement-related attitudes and behaviors and perceptions of “acting White” and “acting Black.” The researchers reported that many of the gifted Black students demonstrate an attitude–behavior discrepancy, face negative peer pressures, and attribute acting White to school achievement, intelligence, and positive school behaviors and attitudes. Conversely, most attribute acting Black to negative school achievement, low intelligence, and poor behaviors and attitudes.

Gardner (2007) stated that poverty can make it difficult to develop a child’s self-esteem. He explained that poor children’s enriching experiences may not be the kind valued by the larger community, and when the greater society does not value a child’s culture, then his or her likely response is anger, resentment, loss of trust, and seeing school as an obstacle rather than a way out. Gardner stated that these factors drive down motivation and confidence, and many poor children are stuck in this cycle.
Black Youth Identity

Today, more and more Black youth are turning to rap music, music videos, designer clothing, popular Black films, and television programs for values and identity (Kitwana, 2002). Simply turning on the television or logging on to the computer can provide instant examples for youngsters to follow, adapt into their lifestyle, and identify with. Rap music is the most influential source of identity for Black youth, and it is used by businesses to advertise and sell numerous items to young consumers of all races. This nationwide exposure to hip hop culture has definitely united the hip hop generation across all states, unlike the pre-hip hop era when the Black youth in urban and suburban areas did not necessarily share the same cultural norms. Within the arena of popular culture, rap music more than anything else has helped shape the new Black youth culture (Kitwana, 2002). It is this new Black youth culture that also helps to shape the identities of the Black youth.

As children grow and enter adolescence, they begin to explore their identity and question who they are. For Black children, this also includes who they are ethnically and/or racially (Tatum, 1997). The author stated that the reason that Black youths think about themselves in terms of race is because that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. Tatum offered an explanation of racial identity development given by psychologist William Cross. In his book Shades of Black: Diversity in African American Identity, he said that there are five stages of racial identity development: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization–commitment. Stages one and two are relevant for adolescents.
Tatum (1997) explained that in the first stage, pre-encounter, the Black child absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the idea that it is better to be White. The stereotypes, omissions, and distortions that reinforce notions of White superiority are breathed in by Black children as well as White. The author continued, simply as a function of being socialized in a Eurocentric culture, some Black children may begin to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty represented by the dominant group more than those of their own cultural group. She also mentioned that this effect can be reduced if parents are race-conscious, or actively seek to encourage positive cultural images and messages about what it means to be Black.

Sadly, this distorted self-image of young Black children was proven in the 1940s by psychologist Kenneth B. Clark, who developed a test along with his wife to study the effects of segregation on Black children (Library of Congress, 2004). In the test, 3- to 7-year-old Black children were asked to identify the doll (Black or White) that they preferred, had positive characteristics, or looked like them. The majority of the children chose the White doll. When asked to color figures of the dolls the same color as them, the children chose a white or yellow crayon to color with. The Clarks concluded that “prejudice, discrimination, and segregation” (as cited in Library of Congress, 2004, p. 2) caused Black children to develop a sense of inferiority and self-hatred. Even more disturbing is the fact that this test was duplicated in 2005 by 17-year-old film student Kiri Davis, and she received the same results (Feng, 2007).

Tatum (1997) stated that transition to the encounter stage is typically precipitated by an event, or series of events, that force the young person to acknowledge the personal impact of racism. As the result of a new and heightened awareness of the significance of
race, the individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism. Cross described this process as one that takes place in late adolescence and early adulthood, but Tatum stated that research suggests that an examination of one’s racial or ethnic identity may begin as early as junior high school. It is in junior high school or middle school when schools begin to use ability grouping or tracking to form classes, and most of the Black students are placed in the lower level classes. On the other hand, the one or two honors students in the higher track may feel different than other Blacks because they are the only Black students in the class.

Some students have gone so far as to de-emphasize the fact that they are Black. Tatum (1997) interviewed a young man who would not play basketball and ran long distance track instead of sprinting, in order to show his White classmates that there were exceptions to the stereotypes associated with being Black. Sadly, one stereotype that does not exist about being Black, is high academic achievement. Tatum stated that during the encounter stage of racial identity development, when the search for identity leads toward cultural stereotypes and away from anything that might be associated with Whiteness, academic performance often declines. Doing well in school becomes associated with being White, and being smart becomes the opposite of being cool. Noguera and Akom (2000) stated that in schools where few minority students are enrolled in advanced placement courses, even students who meet the criteria for enrollment may refuse to take such courses out of concern that they will become isolated from their peers. The authors further explained that the same is true for the school band, newspaper, debating team, or honor society because when these activities are seen as the domain of White students, non-White students are less likely to join. In addition, with Noguera and Akom’s research
at Berkeley High School in California, they found that even when minority students are
enrolled at schools that offer a large number of advanced placement courses, they are
more likely to be discouraged from taking them by teachers and counselors.

Black girls in predominantly White neighborhoods may have a heightened
awareness of race when they want to date boys like their White girlfriends, but are not
asked out or to the prom because they do not look like everyone else. The underlying
factors that fuel all of these situations are stereotypes. Unfortunately, the negative images
of Black people that are portrayed in the news, on television programs, and in the movies,
stay in the minds of people in society, and that preconception often interferes with their
ture identity. Kitwana (2002) reported that, according to a 2001 joint study by Berkeley
Media Studies and the Justice Policy Institute titled Off Balance: Youth, Race, and Crime
in the News, as homicides decreased 32.9% between 1990 and 1998, homicide coverage
on network news increased 473%. The study also found that Blacks were too often
portrayed as perpetrators and disproportionately as victims, whereas Latinos were nearly
invisible in the news media except in crime reports.

School Resistance/Oppositional Culture Theory

The idea that low-achieving Black students view academic success as “acting
White” was widely noted in a 1986 study by Ogbu and Fordham (as cited in Viadero,
2000) in a District of Columbia high school. Viadero stated that this controversial idea
has more recently become the subject of even more heated debate, with some experts
contending that the notion may be more of a symptom than a cause of the achievement
gap. According to Viadero, Ferguson said that even if that kind of social pressure does not create achievement gaps, it still can be an impediment to closing them up.

Fordham and Ogbu proposed two central factors as explanations for the failure of African Americans in education: an oppositional cultural frame of reference and an oppositional collective or social identity (Lundy, 2003). Lundy explained that within an oppositional cultural frame of reference, African Americans develop devices for protecting their identity and for maintaining boundaries between themselves and White Americans. If Black students are under the impression that doing well in school is something that White students do, then they believe that their cultural identity must be preserved by doing something else (oppositional) associated with their peer norms. Fordham and Ogbu stated that those who are academically successful suffer from internal psychological stress, anxiety, and general feelings of alienation. Tatum (1997) also stated that she has interviewed many students who described some conflict or alienation from other African American teens because of their academic success in high school.

Cook and Ludwig (as cited in Lundy, 2003) conducted a study on oppositional culture theory to determine (a) Do Black students report greater alienation from school compared to their White counterparts? (b) Does academic success lead to social ostracism among Black students? and (c) Do the social costs of academic success differ by race? Once they control for family background and socioeconomic status variables, they find no differences between African American and White respondents, thereby leading to a categorical rejection of Fordham and Ogbu’s “acting White” hypotheses.

In another study, Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (as cited in Lundy, 2003) measured academic orientation with the student’s self-report of whether other students
think they are a good student. Lundy said the term *good student* is ambiguous and does not adequately capture the achievement-orientation thrust of Fordham and Ogbu’s thesis. Therefore, they also reject oppositional culture theory.

Lundy (2003) stated that one of the most thorough tests of oppositional culture theory can be found within Kao and Tienda’s (as cited in Lundy, 2003) investigation of how educational aspirations are formed and maintained from eighth through 12th grade. The researchers found support for the role of family background and family resources in the formation and maintenance of respondents’ aspirations, and that the experience of repeating a grade does greatly dampen the college aspirations of Hispanics and African Americans. However, they found contrary results when they control for family background.

Lundy (2003) stated that despite these failures to support oppositional culture, it has maintained its appeal to many. Voluntary minorities, or those minorities that willingly immigrate to the United States, perform better academically than involuntary minorities, or those minorities that were brought to the United States, as African Americans were initially. Lundy offered continued support of this: (a) African American students, in fact, perform worse in school than do voluntary minorities such as Asian Americans, and it is reasonable that involuntary minorities would oppose the majority culture more than voluntary minorities; (b) oppositional culture provides a plausible explanation for the puzzling fact that African American students do worse even when controlling for socioeconomic status; and (c) ethnographic studies of student culture (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; MacLeod, 1992; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu, 1991) have found evidence of oppositional culture.
Lundy (2003) conducted a study using the same survey data as Kao and Tienda (1998), Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998), and Cook and Ludwig (1998), but stated he provides a more thorough test of oppositional culture theory. He used multiple indicators of both peer culture and academic orientation, and examined the effect of academic orientation on peer culture and vice versa. Lundy also included Hispanics and Asian American students, and examined race differences by gender.

The research findings indicated that Asian Americans had higher scores on standardized tests, followed by non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, then African Americans. Lundy (2003) said that one of the problems with the oppositional culture thesis is that surveys consistently find that African American students have more positive attitudes toward school than do White students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey; Hochshild; Mickelson; all as cited in Lundy, 2003). The researcher reported the same results as those reported earlier. African American students reported the better attitudes, but had the worst behaviors (such as not bringing materials to class). Lundy also found that the results reveal greater oppositional behavior among African Americans and Hispanics, but not for the reasons given by the theory. He said that contrary to the theory, race/ethnic differences in oppositional behavior do not narrow when peer relations are taken into account.

Lundy (2003) stated that the findings suggest that the oppositional identity notion has merit, but that the oppositional identities are associated with gender, and not with race or ethnicity. He speculated that this may be based on the roles that males are forced to play in society. The male student’s resistance could stem from their desire to be
distanced from femininity, their need to be looked up to, and a manly air of toughness, confidence and self-reliance, and finally, an aura of aggression, violence, and daring.

In her book *Tough Fronts*, Dance (2002) denounced the oppositional theory as well, stating that the problem for urban and inner-city students is not that they fail to embrace America the beautiful, but that America the mainstream refuses to embrace them. She said that Black and Latino students in low-income urban neighborhoods find themselves caught between the rock of an American mainstream that views them as thugs and villains, and the hard place of urban streets that often require these students to don hard postures to survive. The American mainstream includes the schools and educators that do not accept these students for who they are, but have assumptions about them because of their appearance, posture, and way of talking.

Dance (2002) talked with many students during her research that did not work to their ability in school. One such student needed to receive an A on an eighth-grade science project to pass a class, but had no intention of doing so because the teacher did not expect him to. He related to Dance that he would not do the project because his teacher “didn’t have his back” (p. 35) or believe in him, so the desire to achieve was not there. He did eventually complete the project successfully, with Dance’s guidance, but dropped out of high school the next year because of the same low teacher expectations.

Dance (2002) stated that contrary to popular stereotypes, the low-income, male students in her study have American mainstream dreams and aspirations. However, because they resemble the popular social construct of the urban gangster, Black and Brown boys from low-income neighborhoods are more likely than their peers to be rejected by representatives of American mainstream institutions. Dance continued, this
mainstream rejection eventually takes its toll with some students: It deflates and levels aspirations, creates a fertile ground for survivalistic, antimainstream sentiments, and renders individuals who are Black, Brown, male, urban, and low-income more vulnerable to involvement in illicit street cultural activities. The author stated that during middle and junior high school years, most of the students in her study held fast to their dreams despite the rejection, but as they mature into their late teens and early 20s, the constant mainstream rejection begins to weaken their resolve. Dance stated that other urban students, female and non-Black, also exhibited vulnerability to involvement in illicit street cultural activities, because of the same mainstream rejection and street cultural pressures, though to a lesser degree than Black boys.

**Urban Adolescents’ Leisure Reading Habits**

Ferguson (as cited in Kurdziel, 2000) stated that with the rising popularity of hip hop, came the decline of leisure reading among Black children in the last decade. Hip hop is probably not the only distraction in a world full of more technology, but it certainly consumes much of the free time of adolescents who listen to this type of music and emulate the hip hop lifestyle. Ferguson noted that the rise in sales of hip hop records correlates with the decline in African American students’ leisurely reading and reading achievement scores. He reported that the percentage of Black students who read for enjoyment in their free time declined between 1988 (40%) and 1992 (14%), while the percentage among Whites has remained relatively constant at 30% (Ferguson, as cited in LaRuffa, 1999). In a study of students at Shaker Heights High School near Cleveland,
Ferguson found Black middle class teens watched television 3 hours a day compared to half that amount of time by White students.

Gray-Kontar (2005) reported that Ferguson studied the reading achievement rates of a group of African American students who graduated in 1988 to a group of African American students who graduated in 1992. He followed both groups of students from their freshman years through graduation, noting that reading scores for the students who graduated in 1988 rose steadily for 4 years prior to graduation, as per the norm. However, when Ferguson looked at the degree of improvement in reading scores for students graduating in 1992, the growth in reading scores declined by a two to one ratio in comparison to the 1988 graduates’ scores.

**Teacher–Student Relationships**

Ferguson (2002a) conducted a study of secondary students in high-performing suburban school districts. He said that until recently, racial and ethnic achievement disparities in elite suburban school districts were seldom discussed in public. However, in 1999, 15 middle- and upper-middle-income districts in Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, California, and Virginia formed the MSAN. After acknowledging their racial and ethnic achievement disparities, they resolved jointly to seek ways of narrowing gaps between European American and Asian American students, versus Hispanic and African American students. This particular study contained a variety of questions such as family characteristics, quality of instruction, enjoyment of studies, achievement motivations, course-taking patterns, effort, comprehension, and grade point averages.
Black and Hispanic students reported less understanding of their teachers’ lessons and less comprehension of the material that they read for school, which Ferguson (2002b) said is predicted in part by differences in family background and home learning resources. He said this also accounts for homework completion gaps even though Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites report spending about the same amount of time on homework and studying. Eighty-six percent of Black and Hispanic students surveyed say they could do better in school, while Asian students stand out as studying and doing homework on the weekdays after school more than any other group.

When students were asked, “When you work really hard in school, which of the following reasons are most important to you?” Black and Hispanic students are more likely to indicate, “My teachers encourage me to work hard” (47% and 41%, respectively) as a motivational factor than “My teacher demands it” (15% and 19%, respectively). A few students’ comments suggest that they appreciate the assurance from the teacher that they have the ability to succeed. Conversely, a demand is an order to submit to the power of the person making the demand and carries no assurance that the person making the demand really cares about the student or will offer any assistance (Ferguson, 2002b).

Students were asked to identify the characteristics of the most popular crowd in their first year of middle or junior high school. Ferguson (2002b) reported that the Black and mixed-race students answered “tough” more than did Whites, Hispanics, and Asians. Black students’ percentages were similar in that they responded “tough” (35%), “outgoing” (36%) and “self-confident” (39%). White students cited “outgoing” (54%) and “self-confident” (53%) more than twice as they identified “tough” (22%).
Ferguson (2002b) stated that based on homework completion rates and the ways that students carry themselves, teachers may assume that Black and Hispanic students not only work less hard than White classmates, but also place a lower priority on earning good grades and enjoy school less. However, the MSAN survey results did not support such inferences. When questioned on attitudes about school achievement and whether their friends believe that working hard to get good grades is important, 56% of Black students (the largest percentage) and 42% of White students (the smallest percentage) said it is very important. Questions concerning effort and motivation produced similar results. Almost half of each group agreed: “If I didn’t need good grades, I’d put little effort into my classes,” and two thirds agreed: “I don’t like to do any more school work than I have to;” Whites agreed most with the latter statement. Non-White students reported more tutoring hours, as well as more desire to receive more tutoring.

Student responses were also similar in percentages reporting that they enjoy reading school books or doing math problems. Students who like the books and plays read in English range from 53% (Black) to 62% (Hispanic). Those who enjoy doing math problems range from 45% (White) to 62% (Asian). Additionally, students who think that history and science books are interesting range from 35% (White) to 51% (Hispanic).

Finally, Ferguson (2002a) noted one small but nonetheless notable difference among students with grades in the A– to A range. Among these students, Whites are consistently the most likely to consider grading fair, to feel close to their teachers, and to say that friends do not avoid asking for help. He explained that a plausible explanation for why this is so for most individual MSAN districts, that is impossible to prove or disprove with the present data, is that teachers are more friendly and supportive to high-
achieving White students than to White students with lower grades or students of other racial and ethnic groups.

Based on these findings, Ferguson (2002a) made four recommendations for schools and communities to help narrow the achievement gap: (a) assume no motivational differences among student groups; (b) address specific skill deficits for specific racial/ethnic groups; (c) supply ample encouragement routinely, given the importance that Black and Hispanic students assign to teacher encouragement; and (d) provide access to resources and learning experiences that students may not have at home.

At the forefront of Ferguson’s suggestions is the importance of teacher–student relationships. Content, pedagogy, and relationships are the three legs of his instructional tripod. He stated that under his tripod model, teachers who attend well to all three legs will affect their capacity and commitment to engage students effectively in learning and, therefore, will influence students’ preparation to reach prescribed performance standards in the domains of particular content standards that state policies have articulated.

According to Ferguson’s tripod model, a combination of content, pedagogy, and relationships is necessary to teach successfully. Noguera (2002) conducted research in northern California where nearly 90% of the Black male participants responded agree or strongly agree to the questions, “I think education is important” and “I want to go to college.” However, when responding to the following: “I work hard to achieve good grades” and “My teachers treat me fairly,” less than a quarter of the respondents, 22% and 18%, respectively, responded affirmatively. Noguera received similar results when surveying 537 seniors at an academic magnet high school. He stated that if students do not believe that their teachers care about them and are actively concerned about their
performance, the likelihood that they will succeed is greatly reduced. Noguera further stated that results obtained from the Metropolitan Life annual survey on teaching stated that 39% of students surveyed indicated that they trust their teachers only a little or not at all. Even further, significantly higher levels of mistrust were reported from 47% of minorities and 53% of poor students.

It would seem that if students report that they think education is important, but also report they do not work hard to achieve good grades and do not trust their teachers, improving relationships with these students could also improve their academic achievement. Teachers with low expectations of their students continue to have students who do minimal work. Noguera (2002) stated that there is research that suggests that the performance of African Americans, more so than other students, is influenced to a large degree by the social support they receive from teachers. Ferguson (2002a) received similar results from his research study in high-performing suburban school districts, concluding that there is a distinctive importance of teacher encouragement as a reported source of motivation for non-White students, especially African American students. He stated the special importance of encouragement highlights the likely importance of strong teacher–student relationships in affecting achievement, especially for African American and Hispanic students.

**Summary**

For decades, researchers studied the reasons for the Black–White achievement gap, as well as suggested ways to alleviate it. One fact that remained constant is that the widest achievement gap that exists is between Black and White students. Besides the
obvious historical reason for the initial gap in academic achievement, there are questions as to why it has persisted over the years. Researchers identified many factors that are believed to contribute to the gap, such as poverty, racism, classism, children’s healthcare, cultural beliefs and lifestyle, poor teacher quality, poor school conditions, lack of preschool education, poor curricula, and dangerous neighborhoods. However, it was not known to what extent one, several, or a combination of all of these variables has affected the academic progress of Black students. It seems possible that different combinations of any of these variables, along with different living and educational environments could affect academic progress.

The history of the achievement gap tells us that it widened just as hip hop music and culture was becoming popular with the Black youth. Original hip hop music was harmless and fun, and some songs still possess those same qualities. However, the hardcore changes that have taken over the music genre, with their negative messages and insults to certain groups, cannot be good for young Blacks who listen to the music daily and live their lives parallel to the images portrayed by the hip hop artists. Most of the images being portrayed in the songs and videos glorify life on the streets, violence, drugs, careless sexual activity, and money; none of which are going to help students succeed in school.

With hip hop music and culture being a major part of the lives of most Black youths, and rightly or wrongly defining their Black identity and lives, it is beneficial to all to determine if students have the same attitudes portrayed in hip hop that may lead to negative perceptions about school and high achievement. Such attitudes and perceptions about school and learning will not aid in the efforts to narrow the Black–White
achievement gap. It seems the tough-kid and hardcore hip hop attitude that some are bringing into the schools is part of the problem with the achievement gap. It may be required on the streets, but it is not a requirement for learning and often disrupts the learning process. Though that type of persona can be disruptive, educators do have to realize that it is reality in the lives of many of their students and that fact should be validated. Meeting students where they are and accepting their differences will help form the relationships necessary to build trust and foster learning.

While it is a fact that the Black–White achievement gap does exist and research has shown that some Black students do not always do their best in school, research has not shown whether hip hop is related to the lower achievement level of Black students. This research provides specific information related to the attitudes that students have about their achievement and hip hop music and culture. This study used surveys to gain information from students about their perceptions and attitudes toward education and learning, as well as collected information from students regarding their exposure to hip hop outside of school.

It is more important now than ever to improve the learning of minority students and narrow the achievement gap. The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka ruling was necessary to desegregate American schools that have once again taken a turn toward segregation, but the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling severely limits the use of race in K–12 integration plans (Watson, 2007). Therefore, it is extremely important to examine all possibilities for the continued existence of the Black–White achievement gap, and help young students move past the barriers and toward higher academic achievement.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Descriptive research involves describing characteristics of a particular sample of individuals or other phenomena (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). This type of research was selected in order to examine middle school students’ 2009 standardized achievement test data, and describe students’ attitudes toward education and hip hop music and culture. Mixed-methods research involves collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. It also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, as cited in Creswell, 2009). In this study, the quantitative data carried more weight with the qualitative data supplementing the quantitative data for a deeper understanding of participant responses. This was a concurrent, mixed-method, nonexperimental, descriptive study of one Connecticut town’s seventh- and eighth-grade middle school students and their attitudes about school and hip hop music and culture, as it relates to the Black–White achievement gap and how much time they are immersed in hip hop music and culture.

This chapter presents the research problem, research methodology, and research design. Next, the population and sampling procedure, instrumentation, and sources of qualitative data will be discussed. The validity of the data collected and reliability of the
instruments will then be discussed, followed by a discussion of the data collection procedures and data analysis procedures. Finally, ethical considerations will be discussed.

Statement of the Problem

It was not known how and to what extent the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relates to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. The lower achievement level of minority students is a major problem that has been plaguing American schools for several decades, and because the widest achievement gap has been the gap between Black and White students, that is the focus of this investigation.

Research suggested that two of the main causes of the Black–White achievement gap are poverty and lack of opportunity, and they certainly are major contributors in many cases. However, the presence of a Black–White achievement gap in suburban areas where middle class African American families reside, has provided a reason for speculation and further research into this issue. According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), the most famous example of “something wrong in suburbia” (p. 121) is Shaker Heights, Ohio. Ferguson (Tripod Project, n.d.) conducted numerous studies in Shaker Heights and other suburban districts using surveys that question students about self-esteem, self-identity, attitudes toward learning, teachers, and school, study habits, family background, and socioeconomic status. If poverty is not the common denominator in the Black–White achievement gap, then we must determine what the common thread is by investigating other areas to increase our understanding of the problem and work toward closing the gap.
Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

R1: What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?

H0: The achievement level of Black students is not lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos.

H1: The achievement level of Black students is lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos.

R2: What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

H0: Students spend less time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.

H2: Students spend more time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.

R3: How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?

H0: The negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists does not influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.

H3: The negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.
Research Methodology

Mixed-method research involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: (a) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (b) direct observation; and (c) written documents (Patton, 1990). These observations, documents, and interviews allow the researcher to gather information from participants that may not be included on a survey of general questions.

Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned (Patton, 1990). There is more insight to be gained from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research than either form by itself, and their combined use provides an expanded understanding of research problems (Creswell, 2009).

In this study, the reason for combining both qualitative and quantitative data was to better understand students’ attitudes by merging the numeric trends with students’ perceptions about themselves and others as successful students. Students’ perceptions and possible misperceptions about education and hip hop could provide valuable insight as to ways to narrow the achievement gap. If misperceptions are guiding students’ actions and reactions in school, then redirecting those misperceptions could positively change their attitudes and improve academic achievement.

In their research study of Black and White students in a suburban high school in relation to oppositional culture, Diamond, Lewis, and Gordon (2007) used mixed-methods research. They used quantitative student data gathered from school records, which were supplemented with qualitative data retrieved from student interviews. The
quantitative data gathered were used to determine student achievement level and categorize students by social class, and the qualitative data were used to evaluate students’ perceptions about peer pressure and school achievement. The researchers found that while Black students were much more likely than White students to perceive that their race would limit their life chances (as oppositional culture arguments suggest), this did not lead them to the development of oppositional orientations toward school. Ford et al. (2008) also conducted a mixed-methods research study when researching the achievement gap and the experience of gifted Black students. The researchers collected both quantitative and qualitative data about academics and extracurricular activities through a survey administered by teachers in school. The results of their research were discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

**Research Design**

This study used a concurrent triangulation approach. In this approach, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, differences, or some combination (Creswell, 2009). Creswell states that ideally, equal weight is given to the two methods, but priority may be given to one or the other. A comparison of the qualitative and quantitative data assists in validating the results of the study. Triangulation helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data collection method (Gall et al., 2003).

The quantitative data collected from the survey being utilized in this study provided basic similarities and differences between the research study participants. The
The qualitative data provided on the survey and daily log were compared to the quantitative data to identify additional similarities and differences and provide additional insight specific to the research questions. The data were collected concurrently in the study (Creswell, 2009), which required one visit to each research site for the data collection process.

The Ford et al. (2008) research study discussed in Chapter 2 used concurrent triangulation with all quantitative and qualitative data being collected from the same instrument. The instrument elicited yes or no responses, Likert-type ratings, and open ended responses that were all examined and analyzed by the researchers.

**Population and Sampling Procedures**

Middle-school-aged students were chosen for the population of this study because it is at this age that adolescents begin the search for personal identity (Tatum, 1997). Tatum stated that for Black youth, asking, “‘Who am I?’ [includes thinking about] ‘Who am I ethnically and/or racially?’ [and] ‘What does it mean to be Black?’” (p. 52). Because values and preferences are explored during this process, students’ music and lifestyle preferences are also determined at this time. Hip hop is not a lifestyle that is necessarily prevalent in the community or even in a student’s home. This lifestyle originated in the urban streets of America, and the music, videos, and entertainment industry have all been a part of spreading this culture to mainstream America. It is the music and lifestyle of the hip hop music artists that expose youth around the world to the hip hop culture. The specific population chosen to be included in the study consists of the Grades 7 and 8 middle school students in a suburban community in Connecticut.
To obtain the research study sample, the total student population at both middle schools received a request for participation letter with a parental consent form and a children’s assent form. Eligible participants included both male and female seventh- and eighth-grade students, as well as all racial subgroups in the schools in order to compare results across gender and racial groups proportionately. According to Gall et al. (2003), Sudman suggested a minimum of 100 participants in each major subgroup and 20 to 50 in each minor subgroup.

The major subgroup in this study is the total of middle school students in the town; therefore, the survey sample was limited to 50 students in each school for a total of 100 students. If it were necessary to limit participants, proportional stratified sampling of the racial groups would have been used. Using this type of sampling means that the proportion of each subgroup in the sample is the same as their proportion in the population (Gall et al., 2003). For example, the Black student population in School A is 22.1%; therefore, 22% of the 50 students, or 11 students, in the sample would be Black; The White student population in School A is 54.5%; therefore, 54% of the 50 students, or 27 students, in the sample would be White. The subgroups in this study are the racial groups in the population (middle school), and each racial group is considered a separate stratum. Using an alphabetical list of all respondents, the names would be divided into racial subgroup categories to allow for an appropriate proportional stratified random sample to be drawn from the population for the purpose of this study. The names on each stratum list would be numbered, the numbers would be written on small pieces of paper and placed in an envelope, and then chosen randomly to satisfy the required proportions. The students’ gender would also be considered during the process so that both boys and
girls would be represented. Using this method would ensure that the survey sample would accurately represent the population.

When all parental consent forms were received, proportional stratified sampling did not have to be utilized, as there was a total of 42 students who participated in the study. The percentages of each racial group were closely proportionate to the percentages for each group in the district totals. These totals will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Instrumentation and Sources of Data

Instrumentation

This study used one survey that elicited both quantitative and qualitative data. The Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey (Appendix A) was used to collect quantitative data from students about race, hip hop, their perceptions of teachers and school, their self-perception, and “acting White” or “acting Black” perceptions. Sections I through IV of the survey were adapted and borrowed from Cambridge Education and the research of Harvard University professor Ferguson with the Tripod Project. Permission has been granted by Ferguson for this survey to be utilized. Section I of this survey asked students 21 questions about their academic performance and behavior in the particular class they were removed from to answer the survey on the date of data collection. Students were asked to answer with the following responses: totally untrue, hardly at all, somewhat, mostly, or totally true.

Section II of the survey asked students to answer 25 questions relating to their class, teacher, and learning experience. Student response choices were totally untrue, hardly at all, somewhat, mostly, and totally true. There were six more questions at the
end of Section II that requested information about homework time, class subject and
level, and student grade level.

Section III of this survey included 14 questions about students’ demographics
including parents, siblings, and whether students have computers, televisions, and books
at home. The last part of this section included 36 questions that asked students their
perceptions about race, school behavior, music, and attitudes toward school and learning.

Section IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey asked the
students nine researcher-developed questions specific to their opinions of hip hop music
and culture. Participants were given five choices to respond with: totally untrue, hardly at
all, somewhat, mostly, or totally true. These nine questions were developed to elicit
information from students directly related to their opinions about hip hop music and
videos and whether students think they represent reality. Questions 10 and 11 of Section
IV asked students two open-ended questions. These questions were adapted from the
research of Peterson-Lewis and Bratton. Permission has been granted to use their
questions in this study. Their study, Perceptions of “Acting Black” Among African
American Teens: Implications of Racial Dramaturgy for Academic and Social
Achievement (2004), was described in Chapter 2 of this research. These questions, “Some
students use the term ‘acting Black’ to describe others. What does this term mean?” and
“What do you think of this term?” were chosen to assist in answering Research Question
3, “How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of
students toward their school and learning?”
Daily Log

Students were also asked to complete a 4-day (Monday–Thursday) log to report what they did every hour after school until bedtime, or from 3:00–10:00 p.m. The purpose of the After-School Activity Log (Appendix B) was to examine the amount of time that students spent immersed in hip hop music and culture compared to the amount of time students spent completing homework. This researcher-developed log’s purpose was to provide valuable information for answering Research Question 2, “What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend completing homework?” These data were also compared to the student responses on the survey that answer questions about homework completion time, listening to music, and watching music videos.

Standardized Tests

Student achievement data were retrieved from each school based on students’ 2009 CMT results in reading, math, and writing. This information is reported by district, school, and each individual student to every district in the state of Connecticut. These data coupled with several questions in Sections III and IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey aided in answering Research Question 1, “What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?”
Panel of Experts

The research instruments were reviewed by a panel of experts to validate their use in the research study since Section IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and the After-School Student Activity Log were developed by the researcher. The panel of experts consisted of three Southern Connecticut State University professors. These individuals were chosen to be on the panel of experts because all three professors have experience working with elementary, middle, and high school students, teaching college graduate students, and conducting research in the field of education. Dr. A is a professor in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department and is a former urban school teacher and administrator. Dr. B is a professor in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department and is a former teacher and school administrator. Her research interests include leadership and educational change. Dr. C is a professor in the Elementary Education Department. She is a former teacher and administrator, and her research interests include educational law, curriculum design, teaching and learning, and social issues affecting education.

Validity

Connecticut Mastery Test

The student achievement data retrieved from the CMT results are valid data. The CMT is designed based on state standards that Connecticut school districts use to design their curriculum. The State Board of Education in Connecticut designed the test to (a) help schools and teachers identify curriculum weaknesses for improvement, (b) establish high expectations for Connecticut students, (c) identify students who need extra help, (d)
improve the accountability of the education system, and (e) help parents and teachers monitor a child’s achievement over the years (State Board of Education, n.d.). The state of Connecticut has been administering this test and providing results for 25 years, and it requires stringent testing administration procedures with specific testing conditions that all schools must follow. Grades 3–8 students are currently tested in math, reading, and writing, and students in Grade 5 and 8 are also tested in science.

The CMT is the standardized test that the Connecticut State Department of Education utilizes to comply with the No Child Left Behind legislation. General CMT results are published categorically by school and district reports online; however, individual student scores are not available to the public. Permission was granted by the district superintendent for the researcher to have access to the participating students’ CMT scores in order to record the student achievement levels and satisfy the data analysis portion of the study. This was also contingent upon parental permission granted through the informed consent letters.

The validity of the student achievement scores are based on the standard scores developed by the state of Connecticut. Students are given a score of one through five for each test subject. A score of 1 is considered in the “below basic” range, a score of 2 is considered the “basic” range, a score of 3 signifies the student is “proficient,” a score of 4 indicates the student is at state "goal," and a score of 5 places the student in the “advanced” range.

Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey

The content validity of Sections I, II, and III of this survey was established many times by Ferguson and the MSAN who have used this instrument with over 100,000
previous student responses on numerous occasions to conduct descriptive research in school districts (Tripod Project, n.d.). The researchers collected valid data about student attitudes, self-esteem, study habits, and opinions regarding teaching and learning and the academic achievement of student populations in many schools. The objectives for conducting these studies were to research and improve minority student achievement in the quest to narrow the achievement gap. To increase validity, many of the items on the survey were designed to be similar in order to compare the answers and determine if students are answering questions sincerely. The validity of Section IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence will be discussed in the next section.

**After-School Student Activity Log and Section IV of Survey**

To determine the validity of the After-School Activity Log and the researcher-designed questions in Section IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence survey, these instruments were reviewed by a panel of experts (Appendix C) and subjected to Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. Another way that the validity of these questions was established was with the triangulation of data, or when the student responses to Section IV were compared with the qualitative data that students provided in the After-School Activity Log and other survey questions that are similar in nature. Section IV questions were also designed to supplement related questions on the survey.

To ensure validity of all findings, the study sample included both male and female participants. In addition, all ethnic groups from the population were represented even though the focus of the study was the Black–White achievement gap.
Reliability

Connecticut Mastery Test

The reliability of the CMT results is evident in the state’s 25-year history of test administration and reporting. Tests are secure, standard, and given in specific testing conditions in a school setting with time limits and specific procedures for administration. The CMT tests students in math, reading, writing, and new to the 2008 testing year was a science evaluation for Grades 5 and 8 only. All individual student results are reported to the schools and districts, and the state reports general results by school and district on the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (n.d.) website.

The CMT results are reliable data as long as students perform to the best of their ability when taking the test. Students who have attended the town’s public schools are expected to be able to perform the tasks presented to them on the state assessment, and teachers are expected to teach and review information that is presented on the test. Reliability also lies in the fact that school curricula are based on the Connecticut state standards, which is the same basis for the content presented on the CMT.

Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey

The reliability of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey lies in the fact that Ferguson (Tripod Project, n.d.) and the MSAN used its results numerous times to report their research findings in many communities. The MSAN survey has been used to understand what students of different racial and ethnic groups were experiencing in school that might be affecting their achievement. The survey results have provided a knowledge base on many topics: family characteristics, attitudes about school and achievement, course-taking patterns, conditions under which students work hard, and
students’ understanding of teachers’ instruction and comprehension of assigned reading (Cooper, 2007). The data are presented in multiple configurations to help schools diagnose conditions, build consensus around priorities, and craft strategic action based on real data that highlight key differences and similarities among and across segments of the school community (Tripod Project, n.d.). Ferguson has also used these survey results to write reports and make numerous presentations describing student responses and recommendations on how students and educators can help improve minority student achievement.

**After-School Student Activity Log and Section IV of Survey**

In order to ensure the reliability of the qualitative data collected, the student responses were carefully evaluated to capture the authentic interpretation from the students’ point of view. Since the open-ended responses were outside the realm of the quantitative survey questions and in the students’ own words, it was important for the researcher to study the results objectively and look for similarities and differences to other qualitative and quantitative responses. Depending on the participants’ responses, the researcher sought ways to group them into similar constructs that were in turn compared to quantitative items.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Connecticut Mastery Test**

Letters to request participation in the study were given to students through their homeroom teachers with a specific return date. Permission was granted by the district superintendent of the town being surveyed to conduct the study and use the individual
CMT results for the middle school students participating in the research study as this information is not available to the public. Student achievement data that were used for this study were reading, math, and writing results from the 2009 CMT. This information was gathered from the principals at each school once the parental consent forms were returned and students completed the surveys in school.

**Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey**

Permission was granted by Ferguson to use his Secondary Student Survey licensed by Cambridge Education, Incorporated. This survey was adapted for the purposes of this study and renamed the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey. Use of the last two qualitative questions in Section IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey has been approved by Peterson-Lewis. Peterson-Lewis and Bratton developed the questions for their research study, *Perceptions of Acting Black Among African American Teens: Implications of Racial Dramaturgy for Academic and Social Achievement.*

Once all consent letters were received, the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey (Appendix A) was given to students during one of their daily academic classes. The school principal called all participating students down to the auditorium.

The surveys were administered to participating students in the auditorium. The students in the two different schools were surveyed at different times so that the researcher could be present during the survey process to distribute surveys, children’s assent forms, pencils, and clipboards to write on, give directions, and answer any questions. It was explained to students that it is a voluntary and confidential survey, and they would not be identified by name in any way. The children’s assent form was
reviewed, and students signed and turned in their forms. The directions and possible responses for all four sections on the survey were read to the students, and they were instructed how to make their choice by placing a check in the box that contained their answer choice. Students were also told to write in their answers for the short answer and open ended responses. Any questions that students had about filling out the survey were answered during this process. The surveys, student activity logs, and return envelopes were number coded to correspond with each student participant in order to keep track of who returned their log, as well as to compare survey results with the 2009 CMT scores for student achievement data.

**After-School Student Activity Log**

A copy of the After-School Student Activity Log was attached to each student’s clipboard and Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey so that the researcher could explain its proper use to the participants before they began the survey. Because students were dismissed from the auditorium upon finishing the survey, it was important to discuss the directions for the take home log before they began. The students were given the option to write their first name on each sheet of the log at the bottom of the page in the event that they accidentally exchanged forms with a friend also involved in the study. The instructions were given that students should list what general activities they participated in throughout the evening from Monday through Thursday of that week only. They were given examples such as eating, napping, doing homework, reading, listening to music, using the computer or phone, or watching television. The students were then given an opportunity to ask questions about the log completion process.
As the students were working on the survey, they were assisted with any questions they had, and they were monitored during survey completion to ensure students were staying on task and following the directions given. After students completed the survey, they turned in their clipboards and pencils, and they took with them their After-School Student Activity Log with an attached stamped return envelope addressed to the researcher. The logs and envelopes were coded with a number that was assigned to each student to monitor their return.

Several postcard reminders were sent to students as a way to increase the chances of a high return rate. A reminder postcard was sent to all participating students on Tuesday (the following day) as a friendly reminder to complete the log daily, and to aid in the prompt return of the logs by mail to the researcher using the stamped envelope. On Thursday, a second postcard was mailed to the participants to remind them to mail back their completed logs by Friday. To ensure that a sufficient daily log return rate was received, a third postcard reminder was sent to any students that did not return the log within a week (the following Thursday) of the final day of the log completion. A fourth and final reminder was sent to several students that did not return the log. An additional incentive for students to complete the log was that they were told that they would receive a professionally made mixed music compact disc upon completion of the survey and daily log process. This compact disc was mailed to the students with a participation thank you note once all logs were received and data analysis was in process.
Data Analysis Procedures

Results were reported for how many students in the sample actually return their Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and After-School Student Activity Log. Priority was given to quantitative results with the results of the qualitative open ended questions providing supplemental student-specific detail for each student’s perceptions from personal experience.

Descriptive statistics, mathematical techniques for organizing and summarizing a set of data (Gall et al., 2003), were used to analyze data in this study. Ferguson (2002b, 2006) and other researchers have used descriptive statistics to describe educational phenomena after surveying students and educators while researching ways to close the achievement gap and improve minority student achievement. Categorical data are summarized by creating frequency distributions, tallying the frequency distribution for totals, and consequently determining percentages (Gall et al., 2003). The quantitative data were examined by category, both with the students’ 2009 standardized test scores and with the survey questions. The distribution of data was given by both frequency, or number of responses for each category, and the percentages that correspond to those amounts. Most questions on the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey give the student five categories to choose from for their answer. The categorical data were examined and grouped using frequency distribution tables and charts and graphs in Microsoft Excel.
Research Question 1

What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?

To analyze the data collected regarding Research Question 1, the students’ CMT results were utilized to determine student achievement levels. The achievement levels were then compared to student responses in Sections III and IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey that provide information about students’ music preferences and whether they watch hip hop videos. Participants who answered any of the questions positively that are related to listening to hip hop music or watching hip hop music videos were considered for the analysis of this question.

The CMT scores are reported numerically and by strand in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as by level of achievement based on five ranges. Students who fall in range 1 score in the “below basic” range, and students who fall in range 2 score in the “basic” range. A score of 3 is given to students who fall in the “proficient” range, students who receive a 4 meet state “goal,” and students who receive a 5 score in the “advanced” range. The results of participating students’ 2009 math, reading, and writing tests were examined and reported for this research study.

The participants were grouped by race, their achievement levels were recorded, and the student responses to specific questions from the survey about whether they listened to hip hop music and watched hip hop music videos were examined and matched with the achievement levels. Frequency tables were constructed in Microsoft Excel to show the number of students who listened to hip hop music and watched hip hop music
videos for each CMT achievement level one through five. The percentages were also calculated, and all results were presented in tables or charts made in Excel. This information had to be tabulated by race in order to answer the research question that was about race.

Research Question 2

What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

The data collected from the After-School Student Activity Log were analyzed to address this question. The log required students to write in activities done after school on Monday through Thursday and the time spent on each one between 3:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. The responses of the students who listened to hip hop music and watched hip hop music videos were used to answer this question.

Content analysis was performed to code listed activities into groups that have to do with the two variables, homework and hip hop music, since the open-ended questions can garner many different responses. The homework variable was inclusive of any academic activities listed, such as “studying,” “working on a project,” or “reading.” Students could listen to hip hop music on compact disc players, stereos, radios, iPods, or computers, and videos could be seen on televisions, computers, or iPods. The variable, hip hop music, was inclusive of all ways to listen to hip hop music or watch hip hop videos.

The time students spent listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos was examined and combined into categorical ranges, and this was totaled.
according to the time amounts given by the participants on the log. The same procedure was used to tabulate the amount of time that students reported that they spent on homework. The categorical ranges that were used were less than 30 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, 90 minutes, 2 hours, and more than 2 hours. Further tabulation was done to total the number of hours spent listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop videos so that the total could be compared to the amount of time students spent on homework-related activities. Both the homework and hip hop totals were tabulated and presented in frequency distribution tables in Microsoft Excel for each racial group in order to answer the research question. The percentage for each group was also calculated in Excel. The analysis of this procedure either proves the second hypothesis to be true: “Students spend more time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework,” or it proves the null hypothesis to be true: “Students spend less time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.”

**Research Question 3**

How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?

The third research question was answered using the data collected from the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and the After-School Activity Log. The student responses to the survey were calculated and reported as percentages by the sample whole, and subgroups of gender and race. The sample subgroup respondents needed for this particular question were only those students who reported listening to hip hop music. Student responses were examined and totals were evaluated to determine if
their perceptions about hip hop and “acting White” or “acting Black” may have had an effect on their academic performance, behavior, and attitude toward school.

Results from the student surveys were tabulated and presented categorically in Microsoft Excel showing both the frequency and percentage of student responses. The questions of interest on the survey were those that ask about student attitudes and perceptions about teaching and learning in school. These results were examined and compared to find trends in students’ attitudes toward education, hip hop, and their standardized test results. Any trends discovered were disaggregated by gender, race, and achievement level according to students’ 2009 standardized test scores.

Triangulation, the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena (Patton, 1990), was especially useful in analyzing the After-School Student Activity Log. Throughout the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey, students were asked questions about how often they studied, read, and participated in other nonacademic activities. The researcher evaluated the data analyses for these questions very carefully, while also considering the information students provided in the log about how much time was spent on homework and listening to hip hop music, in order to discover any similarities or differences in their responses.

Other qualitative data that were compared to student responses about their attitudes toward school and learning were the two open-ended response questions in Section IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey. These questions asked students about the term acting Black and what it meant. Student responses were analyzed and coded for similarities and differences in wording, and then they were compared to the quantitative responses in the survey that may be mentioned in their
answers, such as those questions about music preferences, school behavior, academics, and school performance. Student responses regarding negative attitudes and misperceptions about what it means to be Black or White were evaluated to determine if they mirror the negative attitudes and themes present in hip hop music, such as violence, opposition, street life, gangs, money, drugs, sex, and being cool.

**Ethical Considerations**

To protect the human participants in this study, the proposed research project was subjected to IRB review. This research did not use language that was biased against participants because of gender, racial ethnic group, or age. Results of the study are genuine and do not contain fraudulent information that was not obtained from the investigation. A panel of experts committee of three examined the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and the researcher-developed After-School Activity Log to test their proper use and validity.

In order to protect the identity of the middle school student participants, a number was assigned to each student who returned a parental consent form to participate in the study so that monitoring the completion and return of surveys and logs was possible. This system was necessary in order to track the CMT results that provided information on student achievement state standardized test levels. Individual student standardized state test results are not available to the public; however, permission was obtained from the school district superintendent and through the parental consent form to access student test results. No individual student’s CMT results have been identified or shared publically in order to protect the privacy and academic performance of each student.
Summary

This study was conducted to describe middle school students’ achievement levels and their attitudes about education, as they relate to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. Research linked the achievement gap with poverty and lack of opportunity, but because there were also gaps between Black and White achievement levels in suburban areas, other relationships and research areas were explored. Because the widest achievement gap was one based on ethnicity, it was plausible that hip hop music and culture should be explored as a commonality since it was invented by Black youth, and it has became a popular lifestyle based on the culture they have developed and enjoy so much. Youth of all races listen to hip hop music, but Black students who emulate the lifestyle and develop attitudes and ideas that prevent them from succeeding in school could be denying themselves the success that they deserve. Therefore, discovering a connection between low student achievement levels and students’ participation in the hip hop music and culture could be valuable for educators and parents as they attempt to raise the achievement levels of these students. This study could contribute to the foundation of examining the effect that current hip hop music and culture has on students and their ability and willingness to excel in school.
CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The main objective of this study was to describe the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. This was a concurrent, mixed-method, nonexperimental, descriptive study of one Connecticut town’s seventh- and eighth-grade middle school students and their attitudes about school and hip hop music and culture, as they relate to the Black–White achievement gap and how much time they are immersed in hip hop music and culture.

The data were analyzed utilizing the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study:

R1: What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?

H0: The achievement level of Black students is not lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos.

H1: The achievement level of Black students is lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos.
R2: What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

H0: Students spend less time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.

H2: Students spend more time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework.

R3: How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?

H0: The negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists does not influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.

H3: The negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.

The rest of this chapter contains descriptive data about the study, followed by the data analysis and results. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

**Descriptive Data**

The middle school students in the town attend two middle schools. School A has a population of 616 students, School B has a population of 517 students, which totals 1,133. This suburban district was chosen because it has a substantial minority population with a history of a Black–White achievement gap. According to the school district’s Strategic School Profile 2008–2009, the district had a total enrollment of 7,372 with 3,116, or 42.3%, being minorities. This is an increase of 9.9% (from 32.4%) in 2001–
2002. Table 6 shows the number and percentage of each student racial group throughout the town.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1,661</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3,969</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total minority percentage at School B was 29.6% in 2001–2002 and has increased 17.7% to 47.3% in 2008–2009. The total minority percentage at School A was 31.8% in 2001–2002 and has increased 13.8% to 45.6% in 2008–2009. Table 7 shows the number and percentage for each racial group in the two middle schools.

According to the chosen population’s CMT results for 2008, 64.1% of the seventh graders scored at or above goal in mathematics, 74.4% scored at or above goal in reading, and 59.7% scored at or above goal in writing. Out of the town’s eighth graders, 54.2% scored at or above goal in mathematics, with 59.8% scoring at or above goal in reading, and 61.3% scoring at or above goal in writing. These results are displayed in Table 8.
Table 7. Middle School Student Population Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Middle School Students Who Met Goal, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 9 and 10 show the percentage of the middle school students scoring at or above goal in math, reading, and writing, disaggregated by ethnicity in 2008. The results show that both the Black and Latino student percentages fall below the total percentage of students in the district that met goal for each subject as displayed in Table 8.
Table 9. Percentage of Grade 7 Students At or Above Goal, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Percentage of Grade 8 Students At or Above Goal, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>N/A, &lt; 20 students</td>
<td>N/A, &lt; 20 students</td>
<td>N/A, &lt; 20 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2009 CMT results show a decrease in most scores for the Grade 7 students and an increase in scores for most Grade 8 students. When comparing Grade 7 student results, all Grade 7 racial subgroups scored lower in 2009 (Table 11) than the Grade 7 students in 2008 (Table 9), except for the Black subgroup, which increased from 36.7% in 2008 to 45.2% in 2009 on the writing test. Therefore, as a group, the incoming seventh-grade class scored lower on their CMT in 2009 than the previous 2008 class of
seventh-grade students. In contrast, the incoming eighth-grade class in 2009 (Table 12) scored the same or higher than the eighth-grade class as a group in 2008 (Table 10). In comparing the two eighth-grade tables, the Grade 8 2009 scores increased in every area except for the Latino subgroup in writing, which stayed about the same, decreasing from 60.3% in 2008 to 60.2% in 2009. Table 11 and Table 12 show the percentage of the middle school students scoring at or above goal in math, reading, and writing, disaggregated by ethnicity in 2009.

Table 11. Percentage of Grade 7 Students At or Above Goal, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>N/A, &lt; 20 students</td>
<td>N/A, &lt;20 students</td>
<td>N/A, &lt; 20 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12. Percentage of Grade 8 Students At or Above Goal, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that these results, as reported, represent two different groups of seventh- and eighth-grade students from one year to the next as this is how adequate yearly progress is determined for the No Child Left Behind requirements. The next set of charts illustrates the CMT results of the same cohort of students as they move from seventh grade in 2008 (Table 9) to eighth grade in 2009 (Table 12). However, this does not take into account the number of students who registered or unregistered in the district during those school years. All ethnic subgroups show a decrease in reading scores from seventh to eighth grade, whereas all subgroups’ writing scores increased between 5.4% to 14.8% from seventh to eighth grade. In math, the Latino and Asian subgroups show a slight increase in students who met goal (52.9% to 53.1% and 95% to 95.5%, respectively); however, both Black and White student subgroups’ scores decreased (41.1% to 36.8% and 75.7% to 73.2%, respectively). In analyzing the CMT scores, it appears that eighth-grade reading scores increased from 2008 to 2009 for all subgroups. However, when looking at the cohort reading scores from seventh to eighth grade, it is evident that all subgroups’ scores decreased between 2.9% to 10.6%, with the Black and Latino subgroups both having the largest decrease in scores of 10.6%.

Upon analysis of these CMT results, there is a definitive Black–White achievement gap present, and that gap widened in every subject except math when examining the 2008 (Table 15) and 2009 (Table 16) results. During that time period, the seventh-grade achievement gap in math remained constant at 34.6% from 2008 to 2009, whereas the eighth-grade gap narrowed slightly in math from 37.9% to 36.4%.
Table 13. Percentage of Cohort Grade 7 Students At or Above Goal, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14. Percentage of Cohort Grade 8 Students At or Above Goal, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15. 2008 Student Scores At or Above Goal, Achievement Gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16. 2009 Student Scores At or Above Goal, Achievement Gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year’s gain</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+.9%</td>
<td>+8.9%</td>
<td>–1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 represents the number and percent of students who participated in the study. These totals are representative of the student population in the district and the school, with the exception of the Asian American population, which was not present in this research.

Table 17. Study Sample Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

To analyze the data related to Research Question 1, “What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?” the researcher first used the students’ CMT results to determine student achievement levels. The achievement levels were then compared to student responses in Sections III and IV of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey that provided information about students’ music preferences and whether they watch hip hop videos. Participants who answered any of the questions positively that are related to listening to hip hop music or watching hip hop music videos were considered for the analysis of this question.

Question 2, “What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop videos, and how much time students spend on homework?” was analyzed using the data collected from the After-School Student Activity Log. The log required students to write in activities completed after school on Monday through Thursday and the time spent on each one from 3:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. Students were given instructions at the time of surveying to write in any time past that given time. All responses were examined, but only the responses of the students who listened to hip hop music and watched hip hop music videos were used to prove or disprove the hypothesis for this question.

The researcher performed content analysis to code listed activities into groups that have to do with the two variables, homework and hip hop music, since the open-ended questions could garner many different responses. The homework variable was inclusive of any academic activities listed, such as studying, working on a project, or reading.
Students could listen to hip hop music on compact disc players, stereos, radios, iPods, or computers, and videos could be seen on televisions, computers, or iPods. The hip hop music variable was inclusive of all ways to listen to hip hop music or watch hip hop videos. Triangulation was used to analyze student responses to ensure understanding and validity of data (Gall et al., 2003). The categorical ranges of time used for each day on the After-School Student Activity Log were as follows: less than 30 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, 90 minutes, 2 hours, and more than 2 hours. The total number of hours for the 4 days was used to compare the amount of time students spent listening to music and the amount of time students spent studying.

The third research question, “How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by the hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?” was analyzed using the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and the After-School Activity Log. The only sample subgroup needed for analysis of this question was the group of students who reported listening to hip hop music. However, the responses of all students were reported to demonstrate how hip hop music and video images shaped the perceptions of the students. Student survey responses were examined, and totals were evaluated to determine if their perceptions about hip hop and “acting White” or “acting Black” may have had an effect on their academic performance, behavior, and attitude toward school. Triangulation of the data retrieved from both the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and the After-School Activity Log was performed in order to compare the similarities and differences in responses about hip hop music and education.
Results

Research Question 1

What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?

The data from Research Question 1 were analyzed using the CMT scores for each student to compare achievement levels and whether students listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos. The results of the students’ 2009 CMTs were used to determine student achievement levels. The CMT scores are reported as follows for the three subjects, math, reading, and writing: A score of 1 is within the “below basic” range, 2 is in the “basic” range, 3 is “proficient,” 4 is within the “goal” range, and a score of 5 is “advanced.” A score of 4 or 5 indicates that a student has satisfied grade-level expectations.

Figures 1–3 demonstrate the total number of students in each racial category who scored at each level (score range 1–5) of the CMT for each subject. Forty-two students were surveyed, but only 41 students are included in these data because one student’s scores were not available since he did not attend school in the district in the previous year that the test was taken. Twelve of the students were male and 30 of the students were female. Of the 41 students’ scores reported, there were 25 White students, seven Black students, eight Latino students, and one Native American student.

In each of the three subjects, math, reading, and writing, most of the White students scored in the “goal” and “advanced” range, whereas in math, the Black students’ results were more evenly distributed in the “basic” (2 students), “proficient” (1 student),
“goal” (2 students) and “advanced” (2 students) ranges. In reading, one Black student scored in the “below basic” range, four Black students met “goal,” and two Black students scored in the “advanced” range. In writing, three Black students were “proficient” and four Black students scored within the “goal” range.

Figure 1. CMT math scores by race.

Figure 2. CMT reading scores by race.
Figure 3. CMT writing scores by race.

The majority of the participants in the student sample met goal on the 2009 CMTs. Table 18 displays the percentage and number of students, disaggregated by race, that scored in the goal or higher range for each subject. For this student sample, the 2009 CMT results demonstrate a Black–White achievement gap of 31% in math, 10.4% in reading, and 34.9% in writing.

Table 18. Percentage of Student Sample Who Met Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>88% (22/25)</td>
<td>96% (24/25)</td>
<td>92% (23/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>57% (4/7)</td>
<td>85.6% (6/7)</td>
<td>57.1% (4/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>72.5% (5/8)</td>
<td>62.5% (5/8)</td>
<td>62.5% (5/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>100% (1 student)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black–White Gap</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twenty-six students (61.9%) met goal in all three subjects, and 15 students (35.7%) did not meet goal in all three subjects. Out of those 15 students, eight students met goal in two of the three subjects, three students met goal in only one subject, and three students did not meet goal in any of the subjects. All 15 of those students (35.7% of the 42 students surveyed) reported listening to hip hop music. Table 19 represents the percentage and number of students who listen to hip hop, and who scored at the goal level or higher on one or two of the three tests, disaggregated by race. The scores of a 16th student who reported listening to hip hop music are not available, as he did not attend school in the district in the previous year that the test was taken.

Table 19. Percentage of Hip Hop Listeners Who Met Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25% (1/4)</td>
<td>75% (3/4)</td>
<td>50% (2/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>25% (1/4)</td>
<td>75% (3/4)</td>
<td>50% (2/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>50% (3/6)</td>
<td>50% (3/6)</td>
<td>33% (2/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>100% (1 student)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed in Table 19, six out of 15 (40%) hip hop listeners met goal in math, compared to 32 out of 42 (76%) of the full sample. Nine out of 15 (60%) met goal in reading, compared to 35 out of 42 (83%) students in the full sample. Six out of 15 hip hop listeners (40%) met goal in writing, compared to 32 out of 42 students (76%) in the full sample.
Out of the 12 male students surveyed, five (41.6%) reported listening to hip hop music. Ten of the 30 (33.3%) female students reported listening to hip hop music. Table 20 disaggregates the hip hop listeners further by race and gender.

Table 20. Hip Hop Listeners by Gender and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21 displays the number of hip hop listeners who met goal in each subject, disaggregated by gender. Of the four girls who met goal in math, one was White, one was Black, and two were Latina. Three of the seven girls who met goal in reading were White, two were Black, and two were Latina. Out of the five girls who met goal in writing, two were White, two were Latina, and one was Black. Of the two boys who met goal in math, one was Latino and one was Native American. The two boys who met goal in reading consisted of one Latino and one Black boy. The male student who met goal in writing was Black.

When examining the 2009 achievement gap data for the district’s Grade 7 students, Grade 8 students, and the research sample, there appears to be a higher percentage of high achieving students in the sample than in the district totals as is evidenced by the fact that the achievement gap values are as different as shown in Table 22.
Table 21. Hip Hop Listeners Who Met Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22. 2009 Achievement Gap—District Versus Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black–White gap</th>
<th>Math %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7 gap</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8 gap</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research sample</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 2**

What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

The data from Research Question 2 were analyzed using the After-School Activity Log. Students completed a log after school for 4 days, Monday–Thursday, from 3:00 p.m. until bedtime. The amount of time that each student spent listening to music or completing homework was first totaled for each day and then for the 4-day period. Twenty-nine out of the 42 students surveyed (69%) returned their After-School Activity Log. According to the student responses given on the After-School Activity Log, seven
out of 29 (24%) listened to music the same amount of time or longer than they spent on homework during that week. This included two students who reported spending no time either listening to music or doing any homework, as well as two other students who reported spending an equal amount of time doing their homework and listening to music.

Three students (Student A, Student B, and Student C), or 10%, reported listening to music for more time than they reported completing homework, studying, or reading. Two of the students reported listening to hip hop music, and the other reported listening to rock music. Student A, a Black boy who reports listening to hip hop music, also reported doing homework for 3 hours for the week and listening to music for 4 hours. His CMT scores were not available as he was new to the district. Student B, a White girl who listened to rock music reported that she did homework for 6 hours during the week, and she listened to music for 14 hours. Student B also scored at the “advanced” level (5) for all three sections of her CMT. Student C, a White girl who listened to hip hop music, reported that she did homework for 3 hours that week and listened to music for 8 hours. Student C’s CMT Scores show that she met “goal” (4) in reading, but she scored in the “proficient” range (3) in math and writing.

It is interesting to note that two male students, who listened to hip hop music, did not report listening to any music or doing any homework in that week, even though many other students reported working on projects and studying for final examinations. One student is White and Native American, and scored at the “goal” level (4) in math, but he scored in the “proficient” range (3) in reading and writing. The other student is Black, scored in the “proficient” (3) range in math, and scored in the “goal” range (4) in reading.
and writing. The results also showed that a total of eight hip hop listeners reported listening to no music during that week.

Table 23. More Music Than Homework, Per Daily Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>CMT Math</th>
<th>CMT Reading</th>
<th>CMT Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hip hop</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hip hop</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the remaining 22 students (76%) who did not report listening to music and watching music videos for more time than they did homework, the difference in time ranged from 30 minutes to 9 hours. The average difference between how much time students spend listening to any kind of music and watching music videos, and how much time students spend on homework was 4.5 hours, with more time spent being spent on homework. Sixteen of the 22 students (73%) reported that they listened to hip hop music. Upon examining the difference between how much time students who listen to hip hop spend listening to music and watching music videos, and how much time students spend on homework, the range of hours was still 30 minutes to 9 hours. The students who listen to hip hop music also averaged a difference of 4.5 hours more time doing homework than listening to music.
Students were asked on the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence survey to indicate how true it was that they spend more time listening to music than doing their homework. Out of the 11 students who reported that they do not listen to hip hop music, five (45.4%) reported that it was *totally untrue* or *hardly at all*, one (9%) student said *somewhat*, and five (45.4%) students said *mostly* or *totally true*. For the hip hop listeners, responses were distributed similarly, with the same percentage of students responding *totally untrue* or *hardly at all* as the percentage of students stating *mostly* or *totally true*. Thirteen students (41.9%) answered *totally untrue* or *hardly at all*, five students (16%) answered *somewhat*, and 13 students (41.9%) *mostly* or *totally true*.

![Listening to Music vs. Homework Time](image)

Figure 4. Listening to music versus homework time.

**Research Question 3**

How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?
To answer Question 3, the After-School Activity Log and the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey were examined to determine which students listen to hip hop music or watch hip hop videos. In analyzing the responses to the qualitative questions on the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey, the student responses were separated into two groups based on whether they listen to hip hop music or not. Eleven of the 42 participants (26.1%) responded never or usually not to the statement, “Hip hop or rap music is an important part of my life.” These students also responded with totally untrue or hardly at all to the statement, “I watch hip hop videos.”

Students were asked to write in their answers to two questions. Question 10 asked: “Some students use the term ‘acting Black’ to describe others. What does this term mean?” Question 11 asked students, “What do you think of this term?” The responses of the 11 students who did not listen to hip hop will be discussed first.

The students who reported not listening to hip hop music responded more vaguely or were unsure what the term could mean. One White girl is the only one whose answer to Question 10 was, “That you’re trying to be cool.” She also stated that she thinks acting Black is a racist term. Another White girl simply stated that she thinks it means to “act different.” A White boy reported that he thought it was an awful term associated with how the Black race acts, and he thought it could cause more division between the races. A White girl and White boy who do not listen to hip hop both stated that this term means that people are acting the way African Americans act, but they should not use this term because it is wrong and unkind. Five White girls gave negative descriptions for the term acting Black, such as “acting ghetto,” “acting loud, obnoxious, stupid,” “doing what you want,” “disrespectful,” “using slang words,” “likes hip hop,” and “dresses in hip hop or
ghetto fashions.” Even though the students’ responses given were all negative, these students also stated that this is a stereotype and it is racist. One Black girl who does not listen to hip hop music stated that she hears students use the term, but she does not really know what it means “because every person acts different and has a different personality so the term means nothing.”

The study participants who reported listening to hip hop music were more positive about what the term acting Black means. Only two students in this group were unsure of their answer. One White girl reported that people who use this term usually mean “mean” or “dangerous.” A Black Boy stated that it could mean that people are “acting disrespectful in some way or having an attitude.” Even though they seemed unsure of their answer, these two students’ responses were very similar to the remaining hip hop listeners.

While those two students were unsure of their negatively connotative responses, the remaining hip hop listeners were very assertive in their answers. One word that was used repeatedly and synonymously with acting Black was acting “ghetto.” These words were used interchangeably to describe someone who is “loud,” “being bad,” “acting out,” “being disrespectful,” “immature,” “ignorant,” “has an attitude,” “swears,” and “uses slang.” It was also said to describe someone who wears their pants down low, walks slow, dresses in hip hop clothing, acts “gangster,” listens to hip hop music, and acts “tough.” One White girl stated that the term means “acting like the rappers in their songs and music videos, such as talking with Black language or walking slow and slouched over.” One Black boy thinks this term is nothing to be ashamed of, a White girl reported that she thinks it is funny and she might say it as a joke to one of her friends, but all other
hip hop listeners felt that the term is “racist,” “stupid,” “disrespectful,” or just did not like it.

Students were asked five questions related to what they think of the meaning of hip hop songs and videos. When asked to respond to the statement, “The words to hip hop music are important,” only 19.3% of hip hop listeners and 63.5% of non-hip hop listeners responded totally untrue or hardly at all. When students answered whether “Hip hop artists use their songs to tell how they live their lives,” 3.2% of hip hop listeners and 45.4% of non-hip hop listeners answered totally untrue or hardly at all. About half of each group answered totally untrue or hardly at all to the statement, “The words to hip hop songs tell how Black people live their lives.” Though the remaining 45.4% of non-hip hop listeners answered somewhat, the hip hop listeners were more apt to believe this statement with 34.3% stating somewhat, 9.7% stating mostly, and 3.2% answering totally true. Even though 96.8% of the hip hop listeners believed that hip hop artists use their songs to tell how they live their lives, 64.5% thought that rappers in hip hop videos show how they live their lives. When asked whether “What is shown in hip hop videos is how life really is,” 64.5% of hip hop listeners answered totally untrue or hardly at all, compared to 81.7% of non-hip hop listeners. The remaining non-hip hop listeners (18.2%) answered somewhat, while 6.4% of hip hop listeners responded somewhat, 9.6% said mostly, and 3.2% said it was totally true.

The following tables summarize the student responses separated into two groups: those who listened to hip hop music (31 students) and those who did not listen to hip hop music (11 students). All numbers are given in percentages.
Table 24. The Words to Hip Hop Songs Are Important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop listeners</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlisteners</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25. Hip Hop Artists Use Their Songs to Tell About Their Lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop listeners</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlisteners</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26. The Words to Hip Hop Songs Tell About Black People’s Lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop listeners</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlisteners</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27. Rappers in Hip Hop Videos Show How They Live Their Lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop listeners</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlisteners</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 28. What is Shown in Hip Hop Videos is How Life Really Is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop listeners</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlisteners</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, more students who reported being hip hop listeners answered the questions positively indicating that they believe hip hop songs and videos represent the lives of the music artists or real life. Those who did not listen to hip hop music did not believe that hip hop represents real life, and those students answered more negatively to the idea that hip hop lyrics are important. One question garnered the largest percentage of responses for the students in both groups who answered somewhat to whether they think that the rappers in hip hop videos show how they live their lives.

**Summary**

This study was conducted to describe the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. Descriptive data were given for the district’s population as well as the middle schools’ population. Historical data were reviewed and charted regarding the achievement levels and Black–White achievement gap that was present in the middle schools in 2008 and 2009.

The results of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey, the students’ CMT scores, and the After-School Activity Log were presented in order to
interpret the findings for the following chapter. It was hypothesized that (a) the achievement level of Black students is lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop videos, (b) students spend more time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework, and (c) the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning. These findings and hypotheses will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study, followed by a summary of the findings and conclusions based on the research data. Recommendations for future research and practice will be made. Finally, implications for the research will be made.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research study examined the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. Students were surveyed to gather quantitative and qualitative data, and students’ 2009 standardized test results from the CMT provided academic achievement levels. Data were analyzed and results were presented in the previous chapter for the following three research questions:

1. What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?

2. What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

3. How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?

The remainder of this chapter presents a summary of the study, a summary of the findings and conclusions, and recommendations for future research and practice. Finally, the implications of this research are discussed.
Summary of the Study

This was a mixed-method design research study that used descriptive statistics to evaluate the data. The study was conducted in a suburban district that has a history of a Black–White achievement gap. Forty-two middle school students were surveyed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data regarding students’ attitudes about school and hip hop music and culture. Students took an in-school survey that asked quantitative and qualitative questions regarding their attitudes about school and music. They also provided additional qualitative data by completing a take-home after-school activity log for 4 days on which they recorded all of their activities until bedtime. The students’ achievement levels were determined using their 2009 standardized test results.

Three hypotheses guided the study. It was hypothesized that (a) the achievement level of Black students is lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop videos, (b) students spend more time listening to hip hop music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework, and (c) the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Research Question 1

What are the differences in achievement levels that exist between Black and White middle school students who listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop music videos?
When analyzing the CMT results of the 41 participants, it was found that 15 of the students did not score within the “goal” range or higher for all three of the testing subjects. Out of the 15 students, eight students met goal in two of the three subjects, three students met goal in only one subject, and three students did not meet goal in any one of the subjects. All 15 of those students reported that they were hip hop music listeners. Based on these results, it was concluded that the achievement level of students who reported listening to hip hop music is lower than the achievement level of students who did not report being hip hop listeners. Therefore, the hypothesis that stated that the achievement level of Black students is lower than that of White students if they listen to hip hop music and watch hip hop videos was supported. According to the results, it appears that all students in this sample who reported listening to hip hop music, regardless of race, achieved at a lower level than their non-hip-hop-listening peers. Of the 15 hip hop listeners, four were White, four were Black, Six were Latino, and one was Native American.

Research Question 2

What is the difference between how much time students spend listening to hip hop music and watching hip hop music videos, and how much time students spend on homework?

Upon examining the After-School Activity Log responses, it was found that seven out of 29 (24%) of the students reported listening to music the same amount of time or longer than they spent on homework during that week. Of the three students who reported on the After-School Activity Log that they listen to music for more time than they spend completing homework-related activities, only two of them also reported listening to hip
hop music. The remaining 13 students who reported that they were hip hop music
listeners did not report listening to music for more time than they spent doing homework
on the After-School Activity Log. However, when the students were asked on the
quantitative survey how true it was that they spend more time listening to music than
doing their homework, 41.9% answered totally untrue or hardly at all, 16% responded
somewhat, and 41.9% said mostly or totally true. Even though 41.9% responded
positively on the survey, there was a conflicting result when examining the After-School
Activity Logs.

In conclusion, the hypothesis that students spend more time listening to hip hop
music and watching music videos than they spend completing homework was not
supported. There are several limitations affecting the results of this research. It is possible
that the study sample size and the time of the year that the study was completed may have
had an effect on the results. Conducting this study within a larger district to garner a
higher population of hip hop listeners could present different data since there were so few
participants who responded positively to listening to hip hop music. The time of year may
have made a difference in the results received because it was the end of the school year
when students were studying for finals, working on end-of-year projects, and attending
award ceremonies. An additional limitation of this study was revealed upon examining
the 2009 CMT scores and the achievement gap data. There appears to be a higher
percentage of high achieving students in the sample than in the district totals as is
evidenced by the fact that the achievement gap values are as different as shown in Table
28. It would be expected that a sample made up mostly of the top students would not be a
true representation of the student body.
Research Question 3

How do the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning?

The students who reported that they did not listen to hip hop music had ideas about “acting Black” that relate to hip hop music and culture. However, those ideas did not appear to affect their attitudes about learning because they thought the term was wrong, and they were not as familiar with the culture as the hip hop listeners.

The hip hop listeners were more assertive in their answers because the hip hop songs and videos contain all of the words used by the students to describe “acting Black”: ghetto, bad, loud, gangster, tough, walking slow and slouched over, acting out, being disrespectful, and having an attitude. If the students think there is nothing wrong with these behaviors, and that it is nothing to be ashamed of, then this will no doubt have an effect on their attitudes toward school and learning. Both hip hop listeners and non-hip hop listeners used similar language to describe this term, and their idea of what it means to be Black may be coming from images presented in hip hop music and videos.

In conclusion, the hypothesis that stated that the negative lifestyles portrayed by hip hop artists influence the attitudes of students toward their school and learning is not supported because although many students had ideas that hip hop song lyrics and videos are important, they did not answer questions positively that would indicate that it would affect their school work. It is necessary to research this further with a larger sample of hip hop listeners, as this group did not represent the population in the district that has contributed to the Black–White achievement gap.
Recommendations

This study researched middle school students and their attitudes about school and hip hop music and culture, as they relate to the Black–White achievement gap and how much time they are immersed in hip hop music and culture. Following are recommendations for future research and educational practice to improve student achievement and narrow the achievement gap.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to examining the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of one Connecticut’s suburban town middle school students relative to the Black–White achievement gap and hip hop music and culture. Further study is recommended to examine the following:

1. The Black–White achievement gap and whether there is a direct relationship between student achievement and hip hop music and culture using a correlational study with participants who are hip hop listeners. A correlational study could discover the magnitude of the relationship between student achievement and hip hop music and culture.

2. Students’ attitudes toward “acting Black” and “acting White” using an in-depth qualitative study to garner additional information to determine from where their opinions come. In-depth interviews with students could provide specific sources for their beliefs and perceptions so that misperceptions about education can be identified.

3. Attitudes and perceptions about the achievement gap through a mixed-method study of students, teachers, administrators, and parents. The data collected
could be compared to discover similarities and differences in attitudes and perceptions that would provide guidance for improving teaching and learning.

4. Students’ attitudes and perceptions about homework and their relationship to classroom performance using a mixed-method study. Identifying students' attitudes and perceptions about homework would assist in improving their concern for completing homework.

5. Students’ perceptions of hip hop music and culture as they relate to their own self-identity through the use of a mixed-method study. Questioning students who listen to hip hop music in detail about their self-identity and the images they see in hip hop videos, may provide valuable data that could be used to counter negative self-identity traits found in hip hop.

6. The academic achievement of a student cohort being followed from year to year to track whether there is improvement in scores over a period of time using a quantitative study of state standardized test scores. This would be valuable data to determine whether the achievement gap was narrowed utilizing test scores of the same group of students.

7. Replication studies on the Black–White achievement gap in larger suburban districts as it relates to hip hop music and culture so that a larger sample, specifically a larger minority sample that listens to hip hop music, can be researched. A mixed-method design should be used to determine student achievement levels, attitudes toward school and learning, and study habits.
Recommendations for Practice

The academic achievement of middle school students can be easily influenced by their perceptions of the world, music, and many other distractions. The following is recommended for educational practice in schools:

1. Because students who listen to hip hop music have misperceptions about what “acting Black” is, it is important to invite successful and prominent Black role models into the schools to talk to students and dispel those myths that appear to hinder learning.

2. Schools should invite motivational speakers or career day speakers of all races from various fields into the schools to demonstrate to students that it is acceptable to be Black and smart, and anyone can be successful. This would reduce the usage of the terms acting Black and acting White.

3. Time management and good study habits should be taught to students so that they are more aware of the benefits of doing homework and studying regularly. This could lead to higher student achievement and a narrowing of the achievement gap.

4. School counselors can lead group sessions to discuss the misperceptions about life that students learn about in songs and music videos. These sessions could highlight the benefits of being a good student and valuing education, as well as narrow the achievement gap.

5. School counselors and students can offer informational sessions with parents and students to discuss and explore the topics of acting White and acting
Black within the community and how they may affect student attitudes and achievement in school.

6. School personnel should collaborate with parents to excite students about the possibility of attending college, being successful in life, and inform them what must be done in order to be accepted into college to ensure a bright future. This would highlight the importance of education and planning for future success instead of following hip hop music and culture and adapting negative attitudes.

7. Former students from the school who were or are hip hop listeners can return to speak to current students about their experiences in college and obtaining a good job. This would demonstrate to students that they must look forward to a future that is based on a solid educational foundation and not hip hop music and culture.

**Implications**

This research study has shown that there is a definite Black–White achievement gap in one suburban town’s middle school population. Since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the district studied for this research has made progress to narrow the achievement gap. However, during the span of study for this research, there was not a significant narrowing of the gap, which implies that there is still a need to make changes to improve teaching and learning. The research findings suggested that there are student misperceptions as a result of listening to hip hop music and watching music video images that may not properly represent real life. If there are cultural distractions that
detract students from their homework and studying, then it is important for schools to recognize this and determine ways to steer students in the right direction. The goal of No Child Left Behind is for all students to be proficient in reading and math by 2014, and while many districts are making improvements to their curricula and teaching methods, it is also important to study the student and determine if they have other needs that are not being met in the classroom.

The results of this study indicated that the achievement level of students who reported listening to hip hop music is lower than the achievement level of students who did not report being hip hop listeners. The research implied that those students who listen to hip hop music have definite opinions about what people mean when they use the term acting Black. All of the students’ explanations gave negative descriptions that can all be found in hip hop songs and videos. What is not portrayed in the songs and videos is how to be a good student and excel in school. If this is the way that “acting Black” is perceived by the students, then it is possible that they believe it is acceptable to act that way if they are Black. If parents and educators are aware of this possibly detrimental belief, then they can be proactive and counter those beliefs with positive learning experiences for students.
REFERENCES


Anderson, J. D. (2005). *The historical context for understanding the test score gap.* Retrieved from http://www.qece.org/Public_Qceq.nsf/b0d68e9071bc7a90852568b00050531a/f1411a9c36ee77058525707c00567e6c/$FILE/History_of_Achievement_Gap1.doc


**APPENDIX A. STUDENT STUDY HABITS AND HIP HOP INFLUENCE SURVEY**


Section I. Please indicate how true each statement is for you in THIS class. The reason that some questions are similar to others is to help make it really clear what you think. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will be combined with other students’ answers, so no one will ever know how you as individual answered. Please be completely honest. Thank you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In this class, it is important to me to thoroughly understand my class work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of my goals in this class has been to learn as much as I can.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My behavior in this class is good.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like the topics we learn about in this class.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like asking the teacher in this class for help, even if I need it.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I work hard in this class, an important reason is the teacher demands it.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would ask the teacher for help if I needed it.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if the work in this class is hard, I can learn it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My teacher in this class makes me feel that he/she truly cares about me.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of my goals is to show others that classwork is easy for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have pushed myself hard to completely understand my lessons in this class.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could do much better in this class if I worked harder.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to me that others do not think I’m dumb in this class.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes hold back from doing my best in this class because of what others might say or think.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of my goals has been to show others that I am good at my classwork.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My behavior in this class sometimes annoys the teacher.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to be popular sometimes distracts me from my work in this class.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have done my best quality work in this class all year long.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I care about pleasing my teacher in this class.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with what I have achieved in this class.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I feel close to my teacher in this class.

Section II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel out of place in this class, like I don’t really fit in.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel like this class has nothing to do with real life.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher in this class treats the students with respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this class, students get teased for making mistakes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hardest lessons in this class are very difficult for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things I am learning in this class will help me in my life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this class, really understanding the material is the main goal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems outside of school sometimes keep me from doing work for this class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher never makes people who ask questions feel stupid.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this class, getting the right answers is important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this class, some students try to keep others from working hard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this class tease people who get wrong answers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This class makes me a better thinker.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher makes learning enjoyable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates behave better in here than in other classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher in this class encourages me to do my best.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher doesn’t let people give up when the work gets hard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this class, getting good grades is the main goal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this class, students get teased if they study hard to get good grades.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I need help after school with this class, I can usually get the help I need.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For most students, this class is harder than other classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher grades me fairly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher makes lessons interesting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates behave the way my teacher wants them to.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in this class treat the teacher with respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When homework is assigned for this class, how much of it do you usually COMPLETE?</td>
<td>Never assigned</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some of it</td>
<td>Most of it</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27. What is the FINAL GRADE that you think you will get IN THIS CLASS? (Darken one choice.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>A−</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B−</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C−</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D−</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

28. About how much time IN A WEEK do you usually spend studying or doing homework FOR THIS CLASS? (Darken one choice.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No time</th>
<th>Half an hour</th>
<th>1 hour</th>
<th>2 hours</th>
<th>3–4 hours</th>
<th>5–7 hours</th>
<th>8+ hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

29. This class is: (choose one subject) Mathematics  Art  Science  Phys. Ed  English  Music  Health  Social Studies  World Language  Other

30. Is this an honors or advanced placement class? (Darken one choice.)  
Yes  No

31. What grade are you in?  
7th  8th

**Section III**

1. Are you male or female?  
Male  Female

2. Which parents or guardians do you live with during the school year? (Mark all that apply).

   - My Mother(s)
   - Stepmother
   - Grandparent(s)
   - My Father(s)
   - Steppfather
   - Other Guardian(s) or foster parent(s)
   - With Friends

3. How many books are there in your home?  
0–10  11–24  25–100  100–250  more than 250

4. Is there a personal computer at home that you have access to? (Mark one circle).

   - No
   - Yes, one
   - Yes, two
   - Yes, three or more

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (Mark all that apply).

   - White
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic
   - Asian
   - Native American
   - Pacific Islander
   - Arabic/Middle Eastern
   - West Indian
   - South Asian or East Indian
   - Other

6. How many brothers and sisters do you live with?  
None  1  2  3  4  5 or more

7. Do your parents speak a language other than English at home?  
No  Seldom  Half the time  Mostly  Always

8. Indicate **ONLY THE HIGHEST** education level completed by your parent(s) or guardian(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8a. Mother (or Stepmother) (Mark only the HIGHEST level)</th>
<th>8b. Father (or Stepfather) (Mark only the HIGHEST level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark here if you don’t know:</td>
<td>Mark here if you don’t know:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not finish high school:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished high school:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or 2-year degree:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college graduate:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9a. Is there a television in your bedroom?  
Yes  
No

9b. Is there a computer in your bedroom?  
Yes  
No

10. Which of the following best describes how your parents treat you? (Mark one on line a, then one on line b).

a.  
Hugs & Helpful  
Strict & Firm  
Hugs & Helpful AND Strict & Firm  
Neither Hugs & Helpful nor Strict & Firm

b.  
Encouraging  
Demanding  
Encouraging AND Demanding  
Neither Encouraging nor Demanding

11. How many of your friends are of a different racial group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>A few</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Please rate how often you think each of the following happens to you because of your race or ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Less than monthly</th>
<th>Once a month</th>
<th>Twice a month</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because of race, I get disciplined harder or less fairly in school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of race, some teachers think I’m less smart than I am.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. For each of the following statements, indicate whether you agree or disagree. (Please mark one circle on each line).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To live in a racially diverse community is important to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At our school, my race does not affect how the adults here treat me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race has almost NO effect on how students treat each other.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a very safe school. I almost never worry about being hit or hurt.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live in a racially diverse community is very important to my parent(s).</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of my race have to work harder than other races to get ahead.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our school’s books, supplies, and equipment are in very good condition.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our school would be better if we talked more about race and ethnicity.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. How often is each of the following true for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Usually not</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak proper English, even with my friends outside of school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I treat the adults at this school with respect, even if I don’t like them.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that people might think I am too serious about my schoolwork.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>People would probably describe my behavior style as &quot;ghetto.&quot;</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In my opinion, kids who get the highest grades think they are *too special*.
The way adults treat me at this school makes me angry.
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
I stay up too late at night and then get really sleepy in class.
My friends think it’s important to work hard and get high grades.
Some teachers seem afraid of me.
I trust the people I hang around with at school.
Rock music is an important part of my life.
I fool around the night before a test instead of studying like I should.
I trust other students at this school, even if I don’t know them.
Hip hop or rap music is an important part of my life.
I would work hard in school to learn, even if I didn’t need good grades.
At this school, people like me get accused of “acting White."
At this school, I must be ready to fight to defend myself.
On a typical day, I read a paper, magazine, or book just for fun or pleasure.
On a typical day, I chat (or use instant messaging) on my home computer.
On a typical day, I send text messages on my cell phone.
I would quiet down if someone said I was talking too loudly in the hallway.
I take a positive attitude towards myself.
I start my homework too late to be able to finish it.
I participate actively in class discussions.

Section IV.
Please indicate how true each statement is for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Totally untrue</th>
<th>Hardly at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Totally true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The words to hip hop songs are important.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hip hop artists use their songs to tell how they live their lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The words in hip hop songs tell how Black people live their lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I watch hip hop music videos.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Rappers in hip hop videos show how they live their lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. What is shown in hip hop videos is how life really is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I dress in hip hop fashions.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The hip hop culture is popular in my school.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

131
9. I spend more time listening to music than doing my homework.

Please write in your answers for the following questions.

10. Some students use the term “acting Black” to describe others. What does this term mean?

11. What do you think of this term?
APPENDIX B. AFTER-SCHOOL STUDENT ACTIVITY LOG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Please write in every activity that you do during each hour block of time for each day of the week after school (Monday through Thursday).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
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<td>7:00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name ________________________________
APPENDIX C. EXPERT PANEL’S RESPONSES

Following are the responses from the Panel of Experts regarding the validity of the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influence Survey and the After-School Student Activity Log.

Dr. A is a Southern Connecticut State University professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She stated that the survey certainly asks the right questions, the questions are clear, and do not have double meanings. Dr. A suggested that questions be included to ask students how they feel about the school to gather information about the whole school’s influence on students.

Dr. B is a Southern Connecticut State University professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Dr. B thought that the survey was constructed well and should elicit very helpful information from the students.

Dr. C is a Southern Connecticut State University professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Dr. C stated that the surveys were constructed well but thought that the Student Study Habits and Hip Hop Influences Survey was a little lengthy.