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"Trapped": How Mainstream Hip-hop Affects the Post-Incarceration Reentry Process

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CST 411: Communication Across Barriers

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Abstract

It is undeniable that hip-hop has transformed from being an ignored inner city art form to one of the most influential musical and cultural genres in recent memory. The images created and disseminated through hip-hop, more commonly through mainstream rap, inform the self-conception of communities it is meant to represent, but it also informs the dominant culture's opinion about life in communities of color and low-income communities. These communities are often thought of as being criminal, a notion often affirmed in mainstream rap lyrics. The perception of criminality in these communities has played a role in justifing policies that have led to the disproportionate incarceration of its members. In this study I sought to see how criminality stereotypes propagated by mainstream rap affected the reentry process for formerly incarcerated people as they attempt to negotiate their identities individually, socially, communally, and institutionally in society. Qualitative interviews with five people experiencing the reentry process revealed impacts of mainstream rap on their self-conceptions as they attempt to reintegrate and redeem themselves in society. Findings and their implications are interpreted in light of existing theory and research.

KEYWORDS: incarceration, reentry, recidivism, hip-hop, stigma, crime, race

"Trapped": How Mainstream Hip-hop Affects the Post-Incarceration Reentry Process

Stemming from a desire for low-income and minority people to have more political voice, hip-hop's history in popular culture can be likened to the fairy tale *Cinderella*. Starting as a little known counter-cultural movement, hip-hop has come to infiltrate every part of society from marketing, fashion, and politics (Stoute, 2011). Although it has become a cultural force in the mainstream, there still are a lot of negative stereotypes associated with hip-hop culture (mostly through rapping, as the graffiti, breakdancing, and DJing aspects of the culture are often ignored; Perry, 2008). Commentaries and critiques of hip-hop often are codes for criticisms of minority groups, namely black people. Mainstream hip-hop depicts certain images of criminality through the trifecta of the gangsta, the pimp, and the ho, and these images are often used to define an entire population of people (Rose, 2008). These images have a lasting impact on dominant cultural perceptions of people involved in hip-culture, damaging their political voice, especially as those images get consumed by increasingly more white people (Kitwana, 2005; Yousman, 2003). By promoting images of criminality, mainstream hip-hop helps justify the "tough on crime" mentality that often has been directed toward low-income communities and communities of color (Cummings, 2012; Alexander, 2010; Rios, 2011).

However, these images and perceptions persist when people are released from incarceration. All formerly incarcerated people, not only those of color, already face the collateral consequences of incarceration such as lack of access to federal services, denial of job opportunities, and the inability to vote in some states (Alexander, 2010). So, managing their identity in a society overrun with positive and negative images associated with hip-hop is an additional burden that can have a damaging impact on their ability to reenter their

communities successfully and avoid recidivism. These images continue to inform people's perceptions of themselves and how others perceive them including potential employers, community members, family members, and social service providers.

As hip-hop continues to become a part of mainstream culture, it is important to critically analyze the social impact it has. It is especially essential to understand the popular messages that are projected through hip-hop regarding communities of color that are disproportionately affected by incarceration. The anti-prison-industrial complex song "Trapped" by famed political rapper Tupac Shakur inspired the title of this paper. The song speaks to impact that incarceration has on communities of color and low-income communities but also calls for change and keeping the government accountable for ensuring the rights of every citizen, regardless of their criminal past.

In this study I sought to explore how the negative image projection of people of color through mainstream rap affects formerly incarcerated people's perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of how the society around them perceives them. It was important to see if these perceptions and images had negative impacts on their reentry into society as they were forced to negotiate their identities for themselves, their communities, and the dominant society.

Specialized Terms

The "dominant culture" consists of any group or person with significant social capital and social power, namely white people and wealthy people. When I refer to "mainstream rap" I will be referring to aspects and characteristics of the larger hip-hop culture that have been packaged and often distorted by corporate entities for consumption by dominant culture consumers. Mainstream rap contains problematic images of black and brown people, but the creation of those images is usually blamed on black and brown people

themselves while the majority-White-led firms that have created and sold them do not deal with the consequences. Finally, "recidivism" refers to when a formerly incarcerated person gets reincarcerated.

Literature Review

Negotiating Identity

People always need to negotiate their identities when communication with people from other culture or different social groups in order to make sense of the interaction. Culture must always be reconfigured in the present tense in order for people to understand their surroundings (Dimitriadis, 2009). There are many theories about the process of identity negotiation, but to inform my understanding of the findings I used three notable theories: Stella Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory, Claude Steele's stereotype threat, and Henri Tajfel's social identity theory.

Ting-Toomey's theory is based on the belief that identity is acquired and developed through interaction (Ting-Toomey, 2005). People are constantly struggling to answer the questions: "who am I?" and "who are you?" when in an interaction with someone else. People come to understand their ingroup and outgroup memberships by communication through a set of core assumptions about "emotional security" and "identity consistency" in a communicative encounter, but ultimately the goal is to feel a sense of self-security (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Additionally, culturally competent communicators really do want to understand the experiences of other people and their identities in order to make everyone involved in an interaction feel valued, respected, and comfortable (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Negotiating identity through the core assumptions helps people to better understand themselves and, ultimately, helps others understand themselves to create a space in which people are comfortable and their experiences are significant.

Steele conceived stereotype threat in relation to the experience of black college students. He defines stereotype threat as the fear of being viewed as a negative stereotype toward your social group and inadvertently behaving in a manner that confirms to that stereotype (Steele, 1999). For black college students stereotype threat was present when they were reminded of the racial otherness before a testing situation (Steele, 1999). Since black students are stereotypically less intelligent than their white counterparts being reminded of their blackness prior to the test made them conform to the stereotype and do worse on the test (Steele, 1999). Marginalized people are always trying to negotiate their identities with people in the dominant culture so they do not conform to the negative stereotypes associated with their groups.

Tajfel noted the importance of a person's self-conception in relation to various social categories in how they negotiated their identity (Tajfel, 1982). When interacting with members of another social group individuals begin to engage "intergroup behavior" (Tajfel, 1982). In order to enhance one's self-image people will work toward enhancing the image of the group as a whole (Tajfel, 1982). Additionally, to improve their own self-image a group will work to diminish the self-concept of another group in order to boost their own self-esteem. Stereotyping, as Tajfel conceived it, is a natural behavior of humans trying to understand their environment by placing people into groups. Thus, divisions based on different social groupings inform social interactions between humans.

Hip-Hop as Political Rhetoric

Hip-hop culture came about as a way for people in low-income communities and communities of color to foster creativity and to give a "voice to the voiceless" (Rose, 1994). Hip-hop scholars view the origins of hip-hop culture as an answer to the question: "what is it like to be a problem?" (Perry, 2008). Hip-hop also comes from a place of innovation, not

solely from deprivation (Perry, 2004). Hip-hop traditionally has been seen in dominant culture as consisting only of "rapping," but hip-hop also includes graffiti, breakdancing, DJing, and rapping (Kitwana, 2005; Perry, 2008; Adams, 2009).

For traditionally marginalized communities hip-hop was used as a way to bring Black voice from the margins to the forefront of political and social discourse (Rose, 1994; Kitwana, 2005). For many people in the dominant culture hip-hop is the only means through which they hear the concerns of black and brown youth (Perry, 2008). Chuck D., of the rap group Public Enemy, once described rap as the "black CNN" in its ability to share information about the state of communities of color with the dominant culture (Engstrom & Williams, 2013).

However, these conversations about race were closely attached to their simultaneous marginalization because of their social class (Hess, 2005). Communities of color have historically been impacted by unemployment and lack of "legitimate" opportunities for fiscal success (Rios, 2011). Hip-hop's political message is a direct descendent of the rhetoric used in the Black Power movement, questioning the systems of power that continued to disadvantage people of color despite the gains of the Civil Rights movement (Tibbs, 2012). People had concerns and hip-hop gave them the opportunity to express them with a higher likelihood of being heard.

With the introduction of Public Enemy and De La Soul, political rap began to find its way into popular culture (Rose, 1994). The political rapper has come to embody the archetype of the "antiheroic outlaw" who is meant to bring about fear to both black and white upper class citizens through their advocating of defiance and rebellion (Quinn, 2003). This "antiheroic outlaw" mentality used to address political and social issues is most

prominently seen in the *gangsta* rap subgenre (changed spelling of the word "gangster") as personified most notably by N.W.A. and Ice-T (McCann, 2012; Adams, 2009; Quinn, 2003).

The most prominent example of this archetype's manifestation is Tupac Shakur. In the 1990's Shakur introduced the dominant culture to his "thug life" movement, a code he promoted through his music (Hoya & Ali, 2003). People in the dominant culture perceived "thug life" as promoting having a "cavalier attitude," embracing materialism, and celebrating violence as a viable means of conflict resolution (Adams, 2009). Also, they perceived his movement as promoting violence, Shakur conceived "thug life" as the mentality social "underdogs" looking to succeed adopt (Shakur, 2003). He did not see his message as any different than Patrick Henry's historic declaration: "Give me liberty or give me death!" (Shakur, 2003). For many consumers of hip-hop and artists it still has not lost its political potential and power, especially as it has gain international prominence as an art form.

Many supporters of rap and hip-hop culture discuss its power to address salient, current issues such as the issues addressed by hip-hop at its conception (Adams, 2009). One issue that rappers of decided to address in recent times is the prison industrial complex and the mass incarceration of communities of color (Engstrom & Williams, 2013). Rappers such as Shakur, Nas, Krs-One, Wu-Tang Clan, Kanye West, Capital "X," and others have used their music as a method of starting a national conversation about the criminalization and incarceration of black and brown men and women (Engstrom & Williams, 2013). These artists are continuing to use their music to highlight issues within their communities, while concurrently inviting those in the dominant culture to join in the conversation. By using rap to address the prison-industrial complex and improper use of police power, these artists are also subverting and undermining the criminal justice system (Cummings, 2009). This public discourse has led to social and political discussions of prison reform.

Hip-hop becoming mainstream (tanning)

Through time hip-hop began to infiltrate and influence the greater popular culture. This process of hip-hop culture becoming mainstream is referred to as "tanning" (Stoute, 2011). For many, the beginning of this national "tanning" process was inevitable because of white culture's historic, intense admiration of black culture (Rose, 1994). Hip-hop had begun to move from being just a cultural event to becoming part of the social fabric (Dimitriadis, 2009). "Tanning" seemingly began with Run D.M.C.'s hit "My Adidas" and the subsequent partnership between the sportswear brand Adidas and the group (Stoute, 2011). After that artists like the Beastie Boys made hip-hop appealing to a wider audience and even allowed for MTV to embrace hip-hop culture, even if it was a whiter version of it (Kitwana, 2005; Stoute, 2011).

The process of "tanning" continued to penetrate the national culture through marketing, television, film, fashion, and politics. Hip-hop culture was prevalent in marketing campaigns for children's cereal in the 1990s and 2000s which welcomed the culture into the homes of families (2011). Meanwhile, Will Smith's presence on *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* , The Wayans Brothers on *In Living Color,* and Arsenio Hall made the presence of black and brown bodies in mainstream media more acceptable and common place (2011). Also, the rise of films about life in communities of color made by black directors John Singleton, Mario van Peebles, and Spike Lee legitimized black art's significance in the dominant culture (Kitwana, 2005; Stoute, 2011). Lastly, hip-hop has had a prominent place in politics from P. Diddy's "Vote or Die" campaign to encourage non-traditional voters to become politically active or politicians quoting rap lyrics in their speeches (Stoute, 2011). Hip-hop has even made its way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, also known as the White House. People in the hip-hop community supported the presidencies of both Bill Clinton and Barack Obama as

both presidents symbolized a promising beginning to political landscape in which the concerns of communities of color and low-income communities would be taken seriously and be addressed (Stoute, 2011).

The "tanning" of the United States culture has positive and negative impacts. One the one hand, it has allowed for more people to participate in different elements of hip-hop culture (Kitwana, 2005; Hess, 2005; Stoute, 2011). For example, hip-hop has helped to inform racial politics and allowed for a new generation to adopt the mentality that "all men are created equal" through the inclusiveness of art (Kitwana, 2005). However, this media driven culture has blurred the lines defining space and place and has effectively begun disconnecting individuals from community (Dimitriadis, 2009). Also it has allowed for the corporations and executives to package the messages of mainstream hip-hop that is disseminated to a broader audience without dealing with the ramifications of sending those messages (Kitwana, 2005; Rose, 1994; Rose, 2008). Mainstream hip-hop, in the hands of mass media executives, has become a "playground for caricatures of black gangstas, pimps, and hoes" (Rose, 2008). This has led to public critiques of communities of color, codified and masked as critiques of "hip-hop" and urban culture, that are justified by the distorted messages created by mainstream hip-hop (Rose, 2008)

White Audience: Eavesdropping and Traveling vs. Embracing

Even though its beginnings were to represent the voices of marginalized groups, hip-hop is no longer a marginalized art form. Hip-hop, as an art form, was itself marginalized until it became mainstream (Rose, 1994). Through "tanning," mainstream rap is now consumed heavily by white audiences. It is important to consider the white consumption of rap because white record executives construe mainstream rap to inform the dominant culture's perception of blackness and criminality (Perry, 2008; Kitwana, 2005). The white

audience's role in hip-hop is often contested. Some argue that white audiences use hip-hop to "eavesdrop" and "travel safely" to communities they would not usually experience (Hess, 2005; Stoute, 2011; Yousman, 2003; Rose, 1994). Meanwhile, some argue that white audiences are attempting to truly embrace hip-hop culture through their consumption and attempting to make progress toward a post-racial society (Stoute, 2011; Rose, 1994).

For some white audience members, hip-hop and mainstream rap grants them the opportunity to "travel" to low-income communities and communities of color, without even leaving their homes (Hess, 2005; Stoute, 2011). Hip-hop, from its creation, called for a "reverse-crossover" in which white audiences would need to come to it, not vice versa (Stoute, 2011). While hip-hop was intended for marginalized communities, white consumership was inevitable and unavoidable because of how white people have historically been so infatuated with elements of black culture (Rose, 1994). The rapper Ice Cube once stated that hip-hop is directed at a black audience, but white people are merely "eavesdropping," but it is essential for white audiences to hear the stories in order to effect change (Hess, 2005). However, this mentality also affirms the socially constructed belief that there are inherent differences between how white people and non-white people experience life. White audiences listen because they are fascinated by the difference and "they are drawn in by mainstream social constructions of black culture as a forbidden narrative, as a symbol of rebellion" (Rose, 1994). Although white people may consume hip-hop and rap extensively, they do not have to deal with the social ramifications of the images it creates or the experiences it is meant to represent (Kitwana, 2005).

Mainstream rap also allowed for white audience members to partake in a culture they saw as "cool" or "hip" (Kitwana, 2005; Stoute, 2011; Rose, 1994). Hip-hop helps to inform racial politics for a new generation, but embracing of hip-culture does not necessarily

symbolize the beginning of a post-racial society. Unlike at its conception, mainstream rap is a part of the popular culture, so to avoid it and its influence completely is to be uninformed about an important aspect of life in the United States (Rose, 1994; Rose, 2008; Stoute, 2011). Through MTV, Vanilla Ice, and Eminem white audience members have been invited to participate in hip-hop (Rose, 1994; Hess, 2005; Stoute, 2011). This invitation removed the white barriers from hip-hop and allowed white people to embrace the culture fully in order to empathize with different communities. By seeing themselves reflected in the community, their membership in the community is justified.

However, White embrace of hip-hop is not as innocent as it seems. Mainstream rap has supported by White supremacy because the selling of images of Black criminality and Black inferiority reinforces White superiority (Yousman, 2003). The embracing of hip-hop also allows for white people to "contain their fears and animosities toward blacks" through rituals of adoration, not of ridicule as in previous era (Yousman, 2003). Also, this embracing of hip-hop also contributes to myth of a post-racial society and the nonexistence of institutional racism because white audience members can easily identify the success of black celebrities, black athletes, and black wealth (Yousman, 2003). However, white engagement with hip-hop and its culture does not extend beyond a sort of cultural safari (Kitwana, 2005). Ultimately, the myth of a post-racial society also leads to a false sense of comfort and progress in which white people feel it is now acceptable to engage in racial jokes and blame "sensitive" people of color for taking offense (Cabrera, 2014). Consequently, white consumption and embracing of hip-hop does not lead to a racially equitable society, but impedes the possibility of progress.

Rap has shifted from being a marginalized art form to being one of the central attributes of popular culture. Thus, white consumption of hip-hop was inevitable. Although

it provides an opportunity for white people to learn about different lifestyles, it also affirms the mentality of white superiority through its images of criminality. White consumption of hip-hop fails to provide a platform for post-racial progress because it communicates that the goal has been reached and allows white people to engage in the culture without dealing with the social or institutional ramifications.

Images of criminality

Criminality and people who are incarcerated are often referred to by the popular culture as being the worst aspect of society. Socially, people have been conditioned to not see "criminals" as inhuman and not deserving of respect or rights (Maruna, 2001; Alexander, 2010). There is usually a "bogeyman" image attached to people who have experienced incarceration in which they are viewed as bad guys deserving of the worst forms of punishment because they are deviant and "not normal" (Maruna, 2001). There is a common misconception of people who have experienced incarceration, that they are unable to become essentially good (Maruna, 2001). So, the "waste management model of justice" in the goal of the criminal justice system is no longer to rehabilitate or punish, but to incapacitate (Maruna, 2001). The societal beliefs about formerly incarcerated people as inherently deviant makes it difficult for them to reenter successfully because they are attempting to reenter into a society that has made it clear they did not want them back to begin with.

However, popular culture, specifically through mainstream rap, disseminates messages about the criminality of black and brown people. Criminality is most often associated with black people (Thompson, 2008). Mainstream rap is a conversation between, mostly white, record company executives and the dominant culture (Perry, 2008; Kitwana, 2005). Frequently, these images are of black and brown people as deviant, violent, and

hypersexual (Perry, 2008). The entities who propagate the images of black and brown criminality through the manipulation of their artists often avoid community backlash because their faces are not being directly linked to the images and messages (Elkouby, 2013). They live in comfort while political pundits and critics of hip-hop makes racially codified complaints about the negative effects of rap. The images of criminality, besides increasing record sales, helps them financially as many record and big media conglomerates such as Viacom are investors in private prisons, thus making substantial income from mass incarceration (D, 2013).

These messages have manifested into tangible policies that have impacted the lives of communities of color and low-income communities. For example, the youth control complex in which school officials, law enforcement officers, families, community members, the media, local businesses, and other institutions treat the lives and actions of communities of color and low-income communities as criminal (Rios, 2011). Further, this youth control complex leads to a system of punitive social control that justifies the regulation of the lives of marginalized youth (Rios, 2011). Criminalization can occur both material and symbolic ways. Material criminalization occurs through zero-tolerance policies at schools that lead to the suspension of students or police harassment through "stop and frisk" procedures (Rios, 2011). Symbolic criminalization occurs through daily microagressions that contribute to lower self-esteems for youth of color (Rios, 2011). Being labeled as a criminal from a young age often leads to the students or youth succumbing to the expectations they have been made to believe is inevitable (Rios, 2011). This colloquial connection between criminality and people of color has led to formerly incarcerated with people to identify as non-white after their incarceration (Saperstein & Penner, 2010). Another example is the "war on drugs,"

which will be discussed more in depth in the next section, that has directly led to the mass incarceration of marginalized communities (Alexander, 2010; Cummings, 2012).

How we talk about formerly incarcerated people or "criminals" in social and political contexts is important. Messages in the media about the criminality of black and brown people lead to policies that directly impact these communities. However, the corporate entities that disseminate the negative images and messages do not have to deal with the consequences they produce; rather, they reap the financial rewards. Finally, these conversations are important because they make people think that incarceration and punishment is justified because criminals are inherently bad and not capable of becoming better citizens. This mentality and perception of criminality makes it increasingly difficult for people to reenter into society.

Reentry process

For formerly incarcerated people one of the most difficult tasks is to reenter their communities. The reentry process "is an internal, interpersonal, cultural, and social transition from a highly controlled, predictable, and dangerous world in which compliance is paramount to a highly unpredictable, confusing, also dangerous world in which expectations are subtle and conflicting" (Kenemore, 2014). One reason is because of the common belief in the dominant culture that formerly incarcerated people are inherently bad (Maruna, 2001). Another reason is that the collateral consequences attached to a criminal record make it difficult for formerly incarcerated people to participate in society (Alexander, 2010; Pinnard, 2010). To understand the difficulties of reentry it is important to first understand the racial undertones of mass incarceration.

Rapper Nas once referred to the U.S. prison as a beast that feeds on black meat (Engstrom & Williams, 2013). During his presidency President Nixon identified drug

abuse as "public enemy number one" (Cummings, 2012). Since then the "war on drugs" has dominated political discourse and made people struggling with social inequality and drug addiction domestic enemies, deserving of punishment (Cummings, 2012; Alexander, 2010; Rios, 2011; Engstrom & Williams, 2013; Thompson, 2008). The enemies were most often black people, brown people, and people in low-income communities. Drug addiction officially became criminalized when President Reagan passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act in 1986 (Cummings, 2012). The solution was not rehabilitation, but incarceration (Rios, 2011; Alexander, 2010; Cummings, 2012). Although black people make up about thirteen percent of the population they make up almost half of the state and federal prison population (Thompson, 2008). Of the total prison population at least ninety-five percent of those in prisons or jails will have to go through the reentry process at some point (Kenemore, 2014).

Once they are released from prison they must begin their effort to reenter society. The biggest obstacles they must overcome are collateral consequences. Collateral consequences are the "negative predicaments in which families, communities, and individuals find themselves as a result of incarceration" (Rios, 2011). This can be the psychological or emotional suffering caused by incarceration, lack of access to public services including public housing and food stamps, limited employment opportunities, and voting disenfranchisement in some states (Alexander, 2010; Rios, 2011; Thompson, 2008; Pinnard, 2010). Collateral consequences have a more damaging impact on people of color and further "degrade, aggregate, and stigmatize the formerly incarcerated" (Pinard, 2010). In a controversial study, which tested how employers perceived applications with reported criminal backgrounds, it was found that having a criminal record provided a substantial burden for men applying to entry-level positions (Pager, 2003). More interestingly, it was

discovered through the study that white men with criminal records were more likely to be asked for an interview than black men with no criminal record (Pager, 2003). This result highlights a racial barrier to reentry.

However, the reentry process, if reconfigured, does have the potential of leading to meaningful change in a person's life. Social service providers and parole officers, as the main link for formerly incarcerated people to a better future, need to work with their clients in order to meet their need and help equip them with the tools to succeed. For communities that are disproportionately affected by incarceration they have historically not been able to trust authority figures, so social service providers and parole officers must make a concerted effort to gain their trust and ensure them they are trying to help them succeed (Kenemore, 2014; Rios, 2011). The reentry process is an opportunity for communities to confront and work against systemic and institutional forms of racism (Lyles-Chockley, 2009). For young adults going through the reentry process it is an important opportunity to be encouraged to seek the psychological and emotional support to help avoid recidivism (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004).

Research Question

RQ: In what ways did prevalent themes of mainstream rap appear in the self-identity stories told by formerly incarcerated people?

Method

It was important for me to see how these theories and conclusion were manifested in the lives of formerly incarcerated men and women attempting to navigate their reentry process. Access to the site was fairly: I had spent a summer interning at a reentry center (the Center) in the Pacific Northwest. The aim of the organization is to provide social services for people beginning their reentry process by helping with job training, aiding in the

attainment of identity cards or driver's license, access to job training, references to housing, mediation services, free haircuts, and more. Since I already had an established relationship with that organization and its clients I decided to return there for my interviews. In this paper I refer to it as "the Center."

After getting approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Portland, I pursued my interviews. I thought it was important, considering time restraints due to parole or curfews from their different housing arrangements, to have my conversations come about organically and not be too formal. One Mondays and Wednesday a barber, Greg, comes into the center and gives free haircuts, so I used that opportunity to talk to people. I went to the Center on haircut days and sat in the "barbershop" for the duration of the time it was open.

Behaving ethically as a researcher is crucial. I provided all of the collaborators with informed consent forms that told them about the goals of the research and the sensitivity of the research questions. It was also important for me to clarify that in no way would the information affect their relationship with the Center or the United States criminal justice system. I decided not to audio record my interviews, but instead take notes because recording seemed inorganic and inauthentic to the environment I was entering. On those two days I informally interviewed five people. Four of the people identified as men and one identified as a woman. Two of the collaborators were racially classified as white, two identified as black, and one identified as Latino. All of the collaborators were under the age of forty, except one who was sixty-years-old. I gave each of the collaborators pseudonyms during interviews, field, and observation notes.

Collaborators

Greg. Greg was the volunteer barber during both days I was at the Center. Greg is an older white male who has been in and out of incarceration since moving to Oregon from Berkeley, California in his early twenties. He was always immersed in black communities growing up so he identifies with being both white and black. At the time of the interview Greg was living in a halfway house, a transitional living arrangement for formerly incarcerated people as they begin their reentry process.

Jamie. Jamie is a very energetic Latino male. He is in his late twenties and early thirties and recently beginning his reentry process. When I talked to him he was beginning to look for employment in order to support his family.

Tony. Tony is a young male, originally from Miami. He moved to the Pacific Northwest shortly before getting into trouble He was recently employed at a fast food restaurant, but had recently been experiencing homelessness in the local area. He previously worked as a pimp in the area. He was recently released from prison for domestic violence but has been working hard to overcome his past in order to make a better life for himself.

Aisha. Aisha identifies as black and is also a single mother of four. She was formerly incarcerated, but is now volunteering at the Center. She has been struggling to deal with the perceptions of black women in the community, but also with stigmas associated with formerly incarcerated women in the larger society.

Bobby. Bobby was only out of prison for a couple days when I talked to him. He is white man, but he was dressed in stereotypical hip-hop clothing such as a baggy sweatshirt and pants. He wished that after spending so long in prison he wished he had worked out more. In addition to dealing with the stigmas associated with being formerly incarcerated, he also been dealing with the stigmas associated with his several cognitive disabilities.

Findings

Going into the study I expected to find many examples of formerly incarcerated people working effortlessly to overcome the stereotypes ascribed to them due to race, class, and criminal record. However, it was interesting to see how most not only were dealing with the stereotypes and perceptions of others, but they also were trying to navigate those stereotypes internally. The collaborators had adopted the messages of hip-hop and that affected how they perceived themselves and the people they were encountering during their reentry process.

In analyzing the data I used Stella Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory for successful cross-cultural communication, Henri Tajfel's social identity theory, and Claude Steele's, stereotype threat theory to better understand the themes emergent in the data. My discussions with the collaborators ultimately reflected five themes: negotiating identity, importance of social networks, lack of trust of authority, materialism, and objectification of women.

Negotiating Identity ("Acting White"/ "Acting Lawful" vs. Being Seen as a Threat)

The collaborators negotiated their identities (gender, race, criminal past, age, etc.) in a variety of ways. Though Greg is white, he was providing his barber services to a majority black clientele. People would come into the "barbershop" and ask each other, "But can he do black hair?" Regardless of whether or not he could cut "black" hair everyone would get their hair cut by him because he was the only barber there. When cutting people's hair he used slang and language popular in both black and prison culture to emphasize his credibility with these customers. He talked about mutual acquaintances with the clients who "got a nickel" (an additional five years on their sentence) or got "knocked off" (sent to prison for another crime).

Greg, Bobby, and Jamie, being non-black, had to negotiate their racial identities at the Center, where the clientele is predominantly black. Often times, especially through the images created by mainstream rap, criminality is associated with "blackness" (Rose, 2006; Rios, 2011; Perry, 2008; Elkouby, 2013; Cummings, 2012). Like Greg trying to legitimize his presence by utilizing terminology the clients would attribute to only a genuine member of their culture, Bobby and Jamie also had to prove their legitimacy. Bobby's attire showed that he was trying to adopt physical elements of mainstream hip-hop culture, like wearing loose-fitting clothes. Jamie verbalized the difficulty of negotiating his identity at home (trying to be a good father, son, and husband), while seeking employment, and at the Center. These men were "cultural straddlers" (Rios, 2011). In a space where authenticity is crucial in order to get the respect of the other clients, the clients find it necessary to negotiate their identity in order to get the respect of their peers.

Meanwhile, the men also tried to demonstrate their authenticity by emphasizing their masculinity. They talked "tough" about their past crimes and their prison sentences, comparing and contrasting stories in order to gauge each other's masculinity. Bobby told me about how he knew a lot of the guys in the Center from his time prison. At times it also seemed as if they were embracing the competiveness associated with stereotypical masculinity in order to test one another on how their reentry process. Tony made sure to emphasize that, although he was experiencing homelessness, he did have a job. Ultimately, this need to demonstrate their masculinity might be detrimental to their reentry process. Greg mentioned that he was beginning to get in trouble at his halfway house for getting into arguments with the younger "punks" who thought they had control in their community. His need to assert his dominance may lead to him being kicked out of the halfway house program, breaking his probation, and returning to jail. With peers, it is important for the

men to display their masculinity to one another in order to feel some sense of power and dominance. Yet if they become too volatile in trying to assert their masculinity they might be ineffective in having a successful reentry.

However, there is an understanding that to reenter successfully into society and avoid recidivism, it is important to find legitimate social networks. To be taken seriously by employers and social service providers, the clients knew they had to adopt characteristics of the dominant culture and rid themselves of the characteristics that would make them seem "authentic" to their formerly incarcerated peers. Jamie was working on job applications when I talked to him and he mentioned he was not checking the box that asked if he had been convicted on a felony. In his opinion, by checking the box, the employers would automatically dismiss his application, but if he failed to mention it on the application he could mention it if he got called in for an interview. Though recently employed at a local fast food restaurant, Tony told me of several job interviews he got because he was overdressed for the interviews, but he recognized that reasoning might have been just an excuse and that the reason why he did not get the position was because of his criminal record. Aisha, Greg, and Bobby all mentioned the difficulty being seen as a valuable member of society or a good mother because of her criminal past.

Importance of social networks

For people going through the reentry process it is important to reconsider their social networks. Formerly incarcerated people are stuck in a liminal space in which they have to choose to return to their pre-incarceration networks and risk recidivism or rid themselves of the life they knew in order to have a successful reentry. Mainstream rap disseminates two messages about social networks: be loyal and be an individual (Perry, 2008). Hip-hop in general encourages tenderness between male friends that is often not encouraged in the

dominant culture, but mainstream rap includes an additional element that encourages people to be unwaveringly loyal to their communities regardless of their negative impact (Kitwana, 2002). However, mainstream rap, with its emphasis on rivalries and individual success, also encourages people to find triumph on their own (Perry, 2004). When navigating reentry and identity through a hip-hop context it is hard to decide how to approach these social networks.

For Bobby, he emphasized how his recent reentry goal was to start fresh, meaning avoiding the friends he had pre-incarceration. While experiencing homelessness, Tony had to go through a similar decision in regards to his social networks. Although, he did not mention any gang affiliations of his own, he did mention that some of his close friends were in gangs. When he needed a place to go after incarceration, they opened their doors, but they were not understanding of the changes he wanted to make. He did not think that having a consistent shower was worth risking his reentry, so he sacrificed those networks and became homeless in order to better himself. Greg knew that in order to reenter successfully he would need to distance himself from people who were not willing to make the necessary changes in order to move forward from their criminal past. That is why he was getting into constant arguments with the "punks" at the halfway house because he did not see them as willing to make the effort to change their life, so he needed to distance himself completely.

Successful reentry requires a stable social network that will allow the formerly incarcerated person to make meaningful changes in their lives (Kenemore, 2014). However, in order to gain this new social network the person needs to rid themselves of their old social networks. Though it may be difficult, especially since it is going against some of the messages about loyalty depicted through mainstream rap, a secure social network is crucial to the reentry process.

Lack of Trust in Authority

Communities that have been disproportionately affected by incarceration have a long history of social and systemic oppression, so there is little desire or need for formerly incarcerated people to trust post-incarceration authorities they encounter including social service providers and their probation officers (Kenmore, 2014). Though these authorities may be attempting to help, the formerly incarcerated people usually have limited positive experiences with authority figures of any sort. The lack of trust in authority is also emphasized in hip-hop (Quinn, 2003; Perry, 2008; McMann, 2012; Stoute, 2011). Most often the messages are against police authority, but most often they are against authority that typically are representatives of the larger system of oppression.

At the Center this lack of trust of authority manifested itself in a variety of ways. One nuanced example was the people who asked if Greg could do black hair. Their apprehension could have been solely because of Greg's whiteness, but it could have also have been a result of the likelihood that a "free hair cut" would have most likely forgotten to consider the cosmetic needs of black people. Also, Jamie was hesitant to take advantage of the free health screenings at the Center. He did not know what the screening would entail or who would have access to it, so those uncertainties made him apprehensive to utilize the service.

Beyond the Center the collaborators verbalized a lack of trust of authority figures in the larger dominant cultures such as corporations and politicians. Tony talked about his plan to steal free food from the fast food restaurant where he recently was hired, in order to get back at "corporate America." Greg talked extensively about his lack of trust for politicians. He told me about he voted for President Obama in 2008 expecting there would be significant changes, but Greg thought he had fallen victim to partisan politics. He said he

expected more from President Obama, but he was acting like every other politician by making promises he was not able to keep. Corporations and politicians epitomized the unequal distribution of power in society that has led to the disproportionate incarceration of people in their communities. They also symbolized the entities that make it increasingly difficult for people to reenter society successfully because of politicians' criminalization of low-income communities and communities of color and corporations being so invested in mass incarceration through the privatization of prisons.

Communities affected by incarceration have a history of social powerlessness that makes it difficult for them to trust the authority figures they meet post-incarceration. This lack of trust is also affirmed in popular and political forms of rap, especially authorities involved in the criminal justice system in any way. If formerly incarcerated people are not able to overcome this lack of trust, they might not be able to reenter into their communities successfully because they will be unable to utilize the tools they need to do so.

Entrepreneurial Mentality/Materialism

One of the biggest critiques of mainstream rap is that it encourages materialism and overconsumption (Rose, 2008). However, many advocates of hip-hop claim this emphasis on material goods inspires an entrepreneurial mindset and empowers traditionally marginalized communities to feel a sense of self-confidence (Stoute, 2011; Perry, 2008). Material goods and money are equated to power (Perry, 2008). Regardless of the positive or negative ramifications of materialism as manifested through mainstream rap, the manifestation of this message is one of the most prominent aspects of mainstream rap in the dominant culture. Both the materialistic and the entrepreneurial mindsets were apparent in the collaborators.

In the barbershop there were a lot of subtle and not so subtle conversations fueled by materialism. One of the more subtle examples occurred during my conversation with Bobby. He stopped me mid-conversation to tell me that I need to get a new pair of shoes (granted my shoes were pretty worn out). He told me my shoes made me look "poor." Even though he had been out of prison for less than a week and we were having a conversation at a place where he was seeking social support, the fact that my shoes made such an impression on him showed how the materialistic mindset was so pervasive. Another not-so-subtle example of materialism was Tony. Tony kept on talking about his need to look good regardless of his living situation, having a fresh haircut every week, how he just spent money on a brush instead of "swisher" cigars earlier in the week, and how his pink polo got him his new job. Tony made it clear that his physical appearance, despite his status as a person experiencing homelessness or a formerly incarcerated person, was the most important way he communicated his credibility to society. Materialism, though sometimes subtle and sometimes apparent, influenced how the collaborators perceived and wanted to be perceived by the world.

Entrepreneurship was also a prominent theme in the discussions. Both Greg and Tony talked about wanting to create work for themselves, especially because it is so hard for formerly incarcerated people to penetrate the "traditional" labor force. Greg talked about always wanting to open his hair salon or barbershop in order to have the freedom to do the work he wanted to do without having to answer to a higher authority. Tony talked longingly of wanting to return to being a pimp for the money, but knew if he wanted to avoid future prison time he could not return to that profession. Although these propositions are not necessarily groundbreaking entrepreneurial innovations, they speak to the mentality that in order to succeed people need to make the future for themselves.

Objectification of Women

Finally, probably the most troubling theme to emerge from my conversations involved the objectification of women. Another one of the major complaints of mainstream rap is how women are objectified in the lyrics and in music videos (Rose, 2008; Perry, 2008; Rios, 2011). Mainstream rap depicts women simply as "hos" (Rose, 2008). There have been some attempts to justify the depictions of women in mainstream rap such as the fact that communities that hip-hop is supposed to represent are maternal and, unlike the dominant patriarchal structure of society, men do not have a lot of power (Rose, 2006; Perry, 2008; Rios, 2011). Nonetheless, the objectification of women was obvious in the conversations and observations at the Center. The adoption of a mainstream rap elements into their self-conception and their stories has potential for trouble for the identity negotiation of both formerly incarcerated men and women.

I first noticed this objectification when I observing the Center before my conversations. Aisha was working the front desk on that day. She was minding her own business and going about her work. Some of the men kept harassing her and making comments about how they liked "women who talked back" because it meant they were good in bed. The men were assuming she fit into the stereotype of the "ho" as depicted by mainstream rap. Although, she did not acknowledge the men's comments, she did talk about the dichotomy in the black community between viewing women as merely "hos" or maternal. She said besides dealing with the stigma of incarceration she thought the perception that she was just a "ho" held her back from being taken seriously by potential employers.

One of the men making crude comments about Aisha was Tony. Tony had a lot of other problematic things to say about women as objects. For one, he talked about the

importance of cutting women off completely during his reentry process because he feels he might be tempted to "beat" one. He said more specifically, "I can do bad all by myself [be fine by myself] then you come around and piss me off, then I'm gonna put my hands on you and go to jail again." He also said that women were extremely shallow and attributed his recent employment to his boss being attracted to him. Women did not have the potential to think logically or have any substantial value to him.

Discussion

I found that the images of criminality created by mainstream rap do make significant appearances in the identity stories of formerly incarcerated people going through the reentry process. At the onset of this project I thought the images would impact people's reentry process as they attempted to negotiate their identities with the larger society. However, the adoption of these images and themes into the stories of formerly incarcerated people and their impact on their self-perception has more of an impact on their success then the adoption of these images by social service providers, parole officers, law enforcement, or future employers. While the images created by mainstream rap do affect how authority figures and people in the dominant culture perceive people of color and formerly incarcerated people, these images have a more damaging impact on the reentry process if formerly incarcerated people do not critically think about how they have impacted their past decisions and their future goals.

Since my interviews were limited to formerly incarcerated people, I found that the images of criminality and deviance created through mainstream rap impacted how how formerly incarcerated people talked about their experiences. In different situations the collaborators demonstrated how they negotiated their identities, in line with Ting-Toomey's theory, the second theorem in particular, in order to make sense of who to trust and to

portray themselves as genuine to their peers. There were instances in which the collaborators fell victim to stereotype threat, whether it was associated with their criminal background like Jamie, their cognitive disabilities like Bobby, their gender like Aisha, or their race like Greg. The collaborators did succumb to some of the stereotypes associated with hip-hop culture and mainstream rap, but they made it clear which ones they were choosing to ascribe to. Most prominent was how social identity theory helped explain my collaborators' self-concepts in relation to their different avowed and ascribed social groups.

Firstly, the collaborators demonstrated their need to prove their authenticity to one another. Men emphasized their masculinity and objectified women in order to prove their toughness. They also understood how people in the larger community, especially employers, viewed past criminal records. For example, Jamie avoided mentioning his criminal past on his job applications in the hopes that would lead to more interviews in which he could fully explain his situation. Finally, formerly incarcerated people had to negotiate their past identity and their intended future self with their family, friends, and communities. Formerly incarcerated people have to constantly negotiate their identities with their peers, with employers, and with community members.

Additionally, hip-hop does affect how formerly incarcerated people perceive themselves, how they perceive other people perceiving them, and how the perceive authority. They often perceived themselves as people willing to making sacrifice in order to create a better life for themselves whether that meant creating new social networks, experiencing homelessness, or lying to get a new job. Yet, they also perceived themselves as needing to remain authentic in order to get respect. It was also clear they thought the larger society held substantial stereotypes against them due to their criminal past. Also hip-hop, history, and incarceration also affected their lack of trust for authority figures. Finally, there

was not a lot of conversation about their perceptions of crime but in talking to Tony it seemed there was a perception that crime was unavoidable and a result of their social situation.

Ultimately these perceptions of themselves and society could have a detrimental effect on their reentry process. If formerly incarcerated people think that maintaining their authenticity is more important than their reentry, then they will fall into their troublesome habits again. Also, when contemplating their social networks if a formerly incarcerated person chooses to maintain their old social networks instead of embracing new networks could impede their potential for progress. Finally, if formerly incarcerated people fail to trust authorities who are attempting to aid them in their reentry, then they will not find success in their efforts and fail to establish lasting social networks with people who have some sort of social legitimacy.

Though my sources of information about hip-hop's impact on the reentry process there were still some meaningful insights emerged. For one, the images associated with hip-hop and mainstream rap were important for informing how they negotiated their identities with the people around them in order to affirm their authenticity to their peers, while making the necessary changes to their lives. Also, the influence of hip-hop and mainstream rap impacted how the collaborators talked about the authority figures attempting to help aid them in their reentry and the significance of their social networks. Ultimately these perceptions can have a negative impact on their reentry process if they think that heeding these messages and their associated social merit are more important than their recovery and reentry.

Future Research

Though I got great insights from my collaborators, there is room here for further research. It would be interesting to interview the people who have a lot of influence on a person's reentry process to analyze their perceptions and the connections to images created and sustained through mainstream manifestations of hip-hop culture. For example, future research could look at the perceptions of employers, social service providers, community leaders, family members, friends, and people who have managed to have successful reentry experiences. It is important to understand how hip-hop and mainstream rap informs their self-conception as they go through their reentry process, but it is also important to understand if those stereotypes influence how authority figures perceive formerly incarcerated people and if those stereotypes manifest themselves in any sort of discriminatory action.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that hip-hop has come a long way since its humble beginnings in the Bronx. Hip-hop has found mainstream success and penetrated the popular culture, however it has been contorted into a form of mainstream rap that has been created by entertainment corporations in order to promote images of criminality. The images of criminality depict lawbreakers as inherently bad and incapable of redeeming themselves; meanwhile these images of criminality are associated with communities of color and low-income communities. These images and their associated stereotypes when adopted by the dominant culture and formerly incarcerated people can have detrimental effects on their reentry efforts as they negotiate their identities with internally, communally, socially, and institutionally.

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Appendix 1: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study I'm doing. I am Tadeu Velloso, a student at the University of Portland. I'm studying how former prisoners in Portland deal with some of the meaner messages society gives men who used to be in jail. I'd like to include your stories in my study because you've been incarcerated, but you aren't anymore.

If you decide to participate I'll talk to you just this one time. I'll ask you some questions about how you deal with some of the messages you hear while you try getting back into life outside of prison. We'll talk for thirty minutes to an hour at the Reentry Transition Center. I'll record what we say so I can be sure I've reported accurately what you told me. Those audiotapes will be saved under fake names (not yours) in a secure location, and I will destroy them as soon as I write up my study's report.

You don't have to participate in this study. Deciding not to participate wouldn't harm your relationship with the Reentry Transition Center or with the University of Portland. If you do decide to participate, you still could stop participating at any time without any punishment.

I hope this study will show more about troubles that formerly incarcerated men face once they rejoin society. I don't know whether you personally will receive any benefits from this research. I really would like to include your stories in my study, so I appreciate you thinking about that.

You can contact me, Tadeu Velloso, (925) 323-5099, velloso14@up.edu or my study's research advisor, Dr. Jeff Kerssen-Griep, (503)943-7166, kerssen@up.edu. if you have questions about the study. You can contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board (IRB@up.edu) if you have a question about your rights as a research participant. You can have a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature here means that you understand what I'm asking you to do here, that you agree to participate by talking with me, that you know you can end your participation at any time without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that your legal rights are protected here.

Signature

____

Date ________________________________

Appendix 2: IRB Approval

Memorandum

To: Tadeu Velloso

From: Chad O'Lynn, IRB Chair

Date: February 27, 2014

RE: IRB Approval of Project

Dear Tadeu Velloso:

On behalf of the University of Portland's federally registered Institutional Review Board (IRB00006544), I have reviewed your research proposal, titled "How Hip Hop Culture Stereotypes Affect Formerly Incarcerated During Re-entry." I conclude that the project satisfies all IRB-related issues involving human subjects research under the "Expedited" classification. A printout of this email should serve as written authorization from IRB to proceed with your research.

The expiration date for this approval is February 27, 2015. If the study is expected to go beyond that date, you must submit a Continued Review Form (located on the IRB website) for continuing review. I recommend that this form be submitted to the IRB at least 30 days prior to the expiration date.

Please note that you are required to abide by all requirements as outlined by the IRB Committee.

I have forwarded this email, along with your Request for Review and its documentation, to the IRB Committee files for final disposition. Thank you, and good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Chad O'Lynn

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