

Abstract

Fitzpatrick, James. What's Beef: Discourse Practices of Battling in Hip Hop Language. (Under the direction of Walter A. Wolfram, William C. Friday Distinguished Professor)

Over the past quarter century, hip hop has become a mainstream cultural force in the United States and worldwide. In particular, the language of hip hop culture is amenable to study from many different theoretical angles and diverse fields. This study explores some discourse-level features of hip hop language and the sociological phenomena which have given rise to these features. My analysis focuses specifically on “battling,” a highly competitive subtype of hip hop discourse in which participants engage in “freestyling” – the creation of extemporaneous, rhymed discourse for the purpose of bolstering their own social standing or attacking that of their opponents.

An analysis of battling provides many insights into the social and ideological underpinnings of hip hop culture. I examine the lyrics of several battle songs to demonstrate the prevalence of sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic language in hip hop songs. In hip hop culture, social capital is largely linked to the extent to which a speaker espouses heterosexual masculine values. I argue that while sexist and homophobic language retards hip hop's ability to be fully accepted into mainstream culture, it is indicative of a larger social trend – namely, that African Americans, who constitute the large majority of users of hip hop language, have been denied access to traditional markers of social status, such as higher education and financial prosperity. Like many vernacular language varieties, hip hop language has been dismissed as “slang” or “bad English.” However, it is an extremely significant identity marker for its practitioners, and despite certain features which may seem sexist or homophobic, hip hop language as a whole brings to light some larger sociological

problems such as racism, and as such, hip hop culture has an enormous potential as a catalyst for positive social change.

**What's Beef:
Discourse Practices of Battling in Hip Hop Language**

by
James Fitzpatrick

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

English

Raleigh

2005

Approved By:

Agnes Bolonyai

David Herman

Walt Wolfram

Biography

James Fitzpatrick was born in Boston, MA, on February 15, 1981. He received a dual B.A. in linguistics and computer science from Duke University, where he attended a greater percentage of basketball games than classes. At the time of this writing, he is still smiling over the 2004 World Series victory of the Boston Red Sox and is looking forward to basking in the sun in Santa Barbara.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the help and support of a lot of people, both directly and indirectly. First and foremost, thanks to my mom, dad, sister, and extended family for all their help and support over the years. Thanks also to Lauren for putting up with my relentless linguistic nerdity while I put this project and others together.

On the professional end, we'll start at Duke. Thanks to Ron Butters for lunchtime discussions and to Liliana Paredes for everything from research help to job placement assistance. Miles y miles de gracias. H. Samy Alim was responsible for getting me going on this project in the first place, and for invaluable comments on early drafts. Ryan Rowe, in addition to being a great hip hop scholar, was also the main critical sounding board for many of my arguments in this paper. Additionally, he's all too willing to talk about basketball when it's time for a study break, and even when it isn't. David Herman has been my role model in the field of discourse analysis since I met him; someday, my work might approach his in terms of insight and quality. Agnes Bolonyai is just a joy to talk to day in and day out, and the level of interest she shows in other people's work is something I'll take with me wherever I go. Thanks to the North Carolina Language and Life Project crew for all their help and support over time, and for teaching me what it means to do work in sociolinguistics and have fun at the same time.

Finally, thanks to Walt Wolfram for just being a legend and never running out of ways to help me and all of the rest of us.

“Speech is my hammer, bang the world into shape.” ~ Mos Def

Table of Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Overview	1
1.2. Data	5
1.2.1. Definition of Terms	5
1.2.2. Texts	7
1.2.3. Anatomy of a Battle	8
2. The Sociolinguistic Construction of the Hip Hop Persona	12
2.1. HHNL and AAE	12
2.2. The Code of the Street	17
2.2.1. The Commodification of Respect	17
2.2.2. Authenticity	20
2.3. The Social Economy of the Hip Hop Community	21
3. Pragmatic and Contextual Factors in Battling	28
3.1. Face	28
3.2. Politeness	30
3.3. Participation Frameworks	32
3.4. Case Study: Back Across the 8 Mile	34
3.5. Case Study: The Takeover	40
4. Homosexuality and Heterosexism in Battling	47
4.1. Masculinity and Heterosexist Ideologies in Hip Hop Language	47
4.2. Case Study: Takeover Redux	54
4.3. Case Study: Ether	56
5. Discussion	62
6. References	68
7. Appendix	72

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

One of the most intriguing linguistic aspects of contemporary hip hop culture is *battling*, a highly competitive and creative style of discourse whose aim is the verbal domination and embarrassment of one's opponent through a combination of creative rap lyrics and effective delivery. Rapper Jay-Z (2001b) has called battling "the truest essence of hip hop," alluding to its central role in hip hop culture. Alim (forthcoming: 19) refers to the *cipher*, the street-corner arena where many battles take place, as "the hyperactivated, communal Hip Hop lyrical testing and stomping grounds of verbal mastery." The fascinating discourse practices of battling, along with the enormous corpus of hip hop texts available for study, makes an analysis of battling and the linguistic devices used therein virtually necessary. Further, battling is a useful starting point for an analysis of hip hop discourse in general, as many of the themes used in battling resurface elsewhere in hip hop culture. An analysis of hip hop discourse may in turn be applied to other research projects in sociolinguistics and anthropology.

Hip hop's entrance into mainstream culture is most often traced to the 1979 release of the Sugar Hill Gang's hit record "Rapper's Delight"; today, a quarter-century later, hip hop is a multi-billion dollar annual industry in the United States, encompassing record sales, videos and DVDs, concert tickets, fashion, and other areas. However, the seeds of hip hop culture were planted well before the Sugar Hill Gang ever hit mainstream airwaves. Indeed, rapping was only developed after break dancing, graffiti, and other "B-boy" activities were entrenched in the social circles of the inner city (see Fricke & Ahearn 2002 for a more comprehensive discussion of the evolution of hip hop culture). In turn, battling followed

after the development of rapping (*MCing* or *rhyming*). Battling itself has also gained popular recognition as a result of growing interest in hip hop as a whole. Films such as Kevin Fitzgerald's *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* (2002), and magazines such as *Smack* are dedicated to bringing viewers and listeners the best street battles. However, even despite this growing interest in establishing a people's history of hip hop, there are still considerable gaps in the public understanding of the art form.

Like many nonstandard language varieties, hip hop language is viewed with a certain amount of circumspection by the general public. With this in mind, my purposes in conducting this study are twofold. First, I will describe some of the common linguistic elements of contemporary hip hop music and culture. Second, and more importantly, I explore the social context surrounding hip hop language. Hip hop, along with other elements of popular culture, has been used as a scapegoat for many tragic incidents in recent history. While it is true that hip hop music makes use of violent and sexist imagery, an examination of the context underlying these images is crucial in order to understand the complexities of hip hop language, as well as the intersection of language and other social behaviors.

These themes are further explored in Chapter 2 of this paper, where I will first discuss the origins of some of the discourse phenomena which occur in battling by turning to sociological and anthropological explanations of the value systems underscoring hip hop culture. In particular, I draw heavily on Marcyliena Morgan's (2002) notion of African American English as a subordinated language variety and Elijah Anderson's (1999) idea of "the code of the street" as the foundation of an alternative status-based social economy which grew as a response to the traditional social economy of middle-class America. Hip hop culture has subverted mainstream society, undermining the values upon which it is

predicated, such as financial and educational status and middle-class values. Thus, while money, education, and other elements combine to constitute a person's social identity, hip hop culture weighs these factors differently than middle-class culture in determining an individual's social representation. For example, hip hop culture places a high social value on street smarts; more traditional modes of education, such as a university degree, are neither necessary nor sufficient to constitute "education" in the hip hop community. Perhaps this is the reason why highly creative, spontaneous rhyming is so valued in battle contexts – it embodies a more vernacular, or "street" intellectuality, as opposed to written rhymes, which are more carefully measured in their language, although they are not always more effective as a result. Mos Def, a Brooklyn-based *MC* (rapper), touches upon this idea in his song "Close Edge," (2004) claiming that other MCs "all talk fast, but they all think slow."

By the same token, because of the overwhelmingly poor conditions so often encountered in the inner city, an extremely high value is placed on enhancing one's upward social mobility by making enough money to overcome the poverty trap. New York MC Jay-Z pointedly addresses this fact in his blockbuster hit "99 Problems" (2003):

Rap critics say I'm money, cash, hoes
I'm from the hood, stupid, what type of facts are those?
If you grew up with holes in your *zapatots* [shoes]
You'd celebrate the minute you was havin dough.

Here, Jay-Z disputes the popular assumption that hip hop culture is both highly sexist and overly materialistic, contending that any perceived materialism in hip hop is merely a by-product of the excruciating poverty he and other MCs faced while growing up in the inner city.

Jay's lyrics in "99 Problems" are one instance of *flipping the script*, a process by which oppressed groups appropriate the devices dominant groups use to keep them down.

The term appears to refer to “script” in the sense of standard rhetoric, which is then subverted, but in the case of language it becomes an ambiguous term, with “script” carrying connotations of language and its role as a tool of oppression. In addition to being concerned with global ideologies and standardized thought processes, such as the perpetuation of racism through language and standard rhetoric, social identity in hip hop is in large part a function of more localized actions, such as sexual activity, displays of masculine behavior, and rhyming skills, which all commonly occur in hip hop lyrics. I will examine the socioeconomic and cultural factors which spurred the formation of this parallel social economy, and discuss how these themes manifest themselves in the lyrics of battle songs.

Chapter 3 is devoted to an investigation of the sociopragmatic dimensions of battle discourse. In particular, I discuss Goffman’s (1967, 1981) idea of face, and how battling defies conventional assumptions about how discourse and interaction function. This chapter will also further delve into the topic of how language is used to manipulate status in the hip hop social economy. Finally, in Chapter 4, I explore the function of sexist and heterosexist ideologies in hip hop, before analyzing two texts for this type of language. Specifically, I will treat instances of anti-gay and misogynistic language in rap lyrics, as these two types of language are highly prevalent in modern hip hop.

The main analytical methods for this study are drawn from the field of discourse analysis, specifically critical discourse analysis, as set forth in the work of Norman Fairclough (1995). Critical discourse analysis encourages active questioning of the ideologies underlying discourse. Further, I have used existing literature from fields such as linguistics, anthropology, and gender studies to create the theoretical foundation for the ideas to be presented here. From a linguistic perspective, many of the structural features of hip hop

language are well-documented. Instead, I will focus my analysis more on the functions of certain discursive devices in context. Hip hop is fast becoming a major cultural movement both in the United States and worldwide, and an understanding of its discourse practices bears implications across the social sciences and elsewhere.

1.2. *Data*

1.2.1. *Definition of Terms*

The data for this project have been collected from a wide variety of multimedia hip hop texts: albums, videos, films, interviews with industry figures, and interviews with artists, to name but a few. These data are not intended to be representative of the enormous variety of expression to be found in a quarter century of hip hop music and culture. However, as illustrative examples of the points I seek to make, they function well. Before examining the major texts analyzed in this study, it is first necessary to define some terms. In this paper, I use *battle* as a somewhat generic cover term for several subtypes of discourse in hip hop language, although, properly speaking, a battle is a verbal contest which takes place in the context of a cipher.

Typically, a battle is a real-time event in which participants square off one-on-one in a verbal contest. The principal linguistic technique which makes up the core of battling is called *freestyling*; it involves making up rhymes *off the dome* (i.e., extemporaneously) to insult one's opponent. Because it is impossible to know in advance who one's opponent will be in a battle, it is vital for MCs to be able to think on their feet, since something as simple as an opponent's choice of clothing may provide material out of which battle rhymes can be constructed. Moreover, MCs must be able to generate rhymes quickly, as silence in the cipher is most often perceived as a lack of skill. Creativity, technical proficiency, and

cutthroat instincts are prized possessions in the battle. In formalized settings, such as battling competitions at a club, each participant might be given a limited amount of time; thus, participants must strike quickly and cannot wait around for inspiration. The battle lasts until the crowd drowns out the inferior participant with boos and catcalls, at which point the loser leaves and the winner stays to take on the next challenger.

A *beef*, on the other hand, is a “conflict, squabble, a problem” (Smitherman 2000: 65). In contrast to a battle, a beef is a long-standing disagreement between individuals or groups. The different sides in a beef may use battling as a way to defame the other side, although this is not necessary. However, the long-standing beef between rappers Jay-Z and Nas has provided some particularly relevant examples of battle-type discourse, even though the two artists eschew face-to-face battling in favor of using their lyrics on albums to attack one another. To the extent that an MC’s song lyrics can be used as a conduit for his messages in a battle or in a beef, I have chosen to treat the two as functionally identical for the purposes of this paper.

Additionally, it is important to note that although the texts used in this paper are taken exclusively from male rap artists, this is not representative of the entire body of hip hop music available. The role of women in hip hop has expanded considerably since its inception, and now there are many female artists who can compete with and even surpass their male counterparts’ rhyming skills. It is also important to note the growing populations of queer hip hoppers, whose rejection of the dominant social paradigm of heterosexuality affects any generalizations which might be made about hip hop discourse. In future revisions of this study, I intend to include texts by more diverse artists. This paper is intended to

explore some fundamental questions regarding battling in particular and hip hop language in general, and is not intended to be comprehensive by itself.

1.2.2. *Texts*

The ongoing beef between New York rappers Jay-Z and Nas has been a massive public spectacle in the hip hop community since New York radio station Hot 97's Summer Jam 2001 concert, although the two began their relationship as friends. However, Jay's disagreement with the rapper Prodigy from the group Mobb Deep led to the development of a beef between Nas and Mobb Deep and Jay-Z and his crew, the Roc-A-Fella Family. At Summer Jam 2001, Jay took the feud to the next level by introducing the song "Takeover" into his live repertoire. Since the debut of "Takeover", the two artists have traded shots on formal recordings, in freestyles, and elsewhere. Indeed, it is difficult to find a hip hop *head* (fan) who has not formed some sort of opinion on the matter – some heads attempt to downplay the feud and urge others to concentrate on hip hop's potential as a positive force rather than acknowledging or promoting in-fighting within the hip hop community. Other fans find themselves squarely backing one artist or the other, while still others prefer to actively disregard the matter.

Although it is not a battle track in that it does not occur in real time, the purpose of "Takeover" is essentially the same as battle verses which occur in a cipher. Similarly, Nas' response, a song called "Ether," functions almost identically to any battle rhyme that would occur in a cipher. As a result, I have taken the lyrics of these two songs as the primary texts for analysis in this study. Indeed, the fact that these two tracks were not the product of real-time battles is an advantage when analyzing them. In each, the artist has presumably edited and carefully chosen his words and images. The resulting precision of expression makes

these songs ideal as texts for discourse analysis, as we may surmise that each artist has made a conscious choice to use the particular linguistic devices and images he selects for his lyrics. Thus, these texts might be taken as especially indicative of the thought process underlying the discourse practices of hip hop language. The third major text analyzed herein is taken from the 2001 film *8 Mile*. This film, which stars the Detroit MC Eminem, was perhaps the first major motion picture to feature battling as a central plot device rather than treat it from a documentary standpoint, and it did a lot to expose the mainstream public to battling. The battle I analyze in this paper is taken from the film's last scene. Full transcripts of these three texts are included in the Appendix.

1.2.3. Anatomy of a Battle

Before beginning my analysis, I present the following complete transcript of a battle between Eyedea and Shells, taken from the finals of the 2000 Blaze Battle tournament. This tournament, which was televised on HBO in early 2001, featured 14 MCs squaring off in timed battles with each other until only one was left standing. While no single text could ever encapsulate the huge linguistic and discursive variety of battling, this text exemplifies some common linguistic devices used in battling, and will hopefully raise questions which will in turn segue into a more detailed analysis of battle discourse. For now, it will suffice to note that Shells stumbles through his second verse, false-starting several lines, unable to come up with a satisfactory retort to the verbal blows that Eyedea has landed. The crowd immediately turns on Shells, antagonizing him with boos and jeers, and Eyedea is ultimately declared the winner.

Eyedea: Aiiyo this cat can't stand me
 Nobody wanna hear me
 He'll only win this battle cause this whole crowd's his family
 But yo your shirt says record breaker

What that mean yo?
You're the only cat that ever took eighty losses in a row?
Is that how it goes? On the mic you can't /unclear/
How you sayin you serve it cat, you look just like Ja Rule
That's how it goes up on the mic you ain't straight buzzin
Naw, fuck Ja Rule, you're Flavor Flav's second cousin
That's how it goes, your flowin is weak
And when you do that shit you show me your corroded-ass teeth
Always spittin my lines
Thinking that he's fresher
Spittin Eyedea lines the only way you'll ever sell a record
So why's he do that?
/unclear/
You know what
You need to take your whole fuckin crew back to school black
That's how it goes
Pull up a stool, I'm the teacher
I'm about to wear your bitch ass out like it's sneakers
You MCs to me is just geekers
This cat stays close to my dick like a beeper
He ain't even comin with the cheaper
You just lost your life by Eyedea, the grim reaper
[buzzer]

Shells: Listen man, yo
Aiiyo, listen, aiiyo, aiiyo
I'mma spit hot bars
Even if this dude is borin
They got Shells batterin
Little Chuck Norris
We get it goin man
You don't really want that
And I put this burner
Right where your tongue at, yo
This dude's name girl is Butter Face
Cause everything look good, but her face
You don't really want no part of Shells
Cause I hit hard
You can call me the black Sprewell
Now wait a minute
We can get the game jumpin
He like Destiny's Child, jumpin jumpin
You don't know, I'mma let this go
And you talk about my teeth
Talk about my flow
I'm a hot skimpity cat, me mad nice

I'll be damned to lose against Vanilla Ice
Hold up
Don't try to say my lines
Cause guess what it's like 1-800-nothin but hot lines
Hold up
You gotta slow up and grow up
This dude's so ugly, I'm about to throw up
You sayin I'm wack
Cause your man's white
And guess what I'm here twenty deep and we can fight!
And I don't care if we been doin this forever
You like fake jeans, and you fake
[buzzer]

Eyedeas: Aiiyo, you straight bring the worst game
Couldn't be the one if KRS was your first name
I grab the microphone and let you know I'm mad tight
I'll let you know I coulda been your dad right?
Matter of fact, I was with your mom last night
Matter of fact, I'm the reason your little sister's half white!
/unclear/ where'd you go, I'm straight terrible!
I'll beat you so bad I'll let your fuckin parents know
Here goes the mic and I straight just, talk
I've won more battles than your bitch ass has lost
And that's a lot
You know I straight rap for props
This is just another wack cat on my jock
I grab the microphone and straight smoke a clown
I'm beatin him in his own fuckin hometown
Now how dope does that make you?
On the mic I'll break you
Even if you was a bitch with her legs open
No one'd rape you
That's how it goes
On the mic he straight bust wack
Look at this cat's 25, can't grow a mustache
What's up with that?
Your whole style is weak
You get defeated depleted
Your whole style is cheap
Yo, I grab the mic and straight disconnect your face
Yo, it's your turn, but you got second place

Shells: Listen
Listen man, listen [crowd jeers]
Check it, just listen man, listen

Aiyyo, aiyyo, aiyyo
This ain't written
I'mma spit some freestyle stuff
And you the type did deal
But he get jerked by Puff
Now hold up
You better calm down man
You know I act funny when a gun in hand
You got rhyme sayer?
You look like Buffy the mothafuckin Rhyme Slayer
And your breath smells like manure from the Himalaya
So stop it man
You don't know what, I'm goin through now
It's thirty seconds, twenty nine and you's a berg
He thought iceberg meant
Hold up and bring it back
You white like that
Why you laughing?
Look at his teeth
It got a crack
You laughin with you smirk on your face
You look gay
I'm
And you Dr. Dre
Cause go man, I'm freestylin'
Fuck y'all niggas
I got a gun, and I don't really trust y'all niggas
We could get it jumpin and you don't want that
And guess what
I'm the reason your sister's half black
So let's go
And I'mma kill your own line
Cause I'mma tell you this one more last time [buzzer sounds]

2. The Sociolinguistic Construction of the Hip Hop Persona

2.1. HHNL and AAE

Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL; see Alim 2003, 2004; Spady, Lee, and Alim 1999) is the primary means by which the members of the Hip Hop Nation (HHN) express their unique and diverse cultures. Although linguistic research on HHNL has only begun in earnest in the past decade or so, academic interest in African American English (AAE) has produced a considerable base of related research. From 1965 to 1993, sociolinguists produced five times as many publications about AAE as any other variety (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998: 169). The structural parallels between AAE and HHNL are considerable, but what is perhaps more important is the similar ideological space these two language varieties occupy in contemporary society. As a result, it is useful to contextualize HHNL in terms of sociolinguistic studies on AAE. The morphosyntactic, phonetic, and semantic features of AAE are well documented in scholarly literature, and even a cursory examination will reveal that HHNL shares many of these features, such as plural *-s* absence (e.g. *two mile* for *two miles*), deletion of certain copula forms (*You ugly* for *You are ugly*), and deletion of third person singular *-s* affixes from verbs (*He walk* for *He walks*). Rickford and Rickford (2000) discuss many of these structural similarities in more detail, while Smitherman (2000) delves into the shared lexicon of AAE and HHNL.

Studies on language variation (e.g. Labov 1967, 1972; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997; Wolfram et. al. 2002) have consistently shown a significant correlation between language behavior and social identity. This research tradition is often traced back to William Labov's (1967) sociolinguistic study on the speech of Martha's Vineyard, in which he discovered a markedly higher incidence of back-raising of the nucleus of the /aj/ diphthong

among those residents who identified strongly with native island culture. In the face of increasing tourism and a growing non-native population, the adoption of a particular language feature became a way for islanders to differentiate themselves from interlopers. Similarly, members of the Hip Hop Nation use language as a way to demonstrate their affiliation with hip hop culture, and HHNL has become a cultural marker and a considerable source of pride for its practitioners. For example, on his track “Ebonics (Criminal Slang),” the late rapper Big L (1998) proudly proclaims, “I talk with slang, and I’mma never stop speakin it.”

Preliminary sociolinguistic studies of hip hop have confirmed the status of certain linguistic features as identity markers. In his study of the North Carolina-based hip hop group Little Brother, Ryan Rowe (2004) examines the speech of group members Phonte and Big Pooh in both conversational and recorded contexts. Rowe considers three core morphosyntactic and phonetic features of AAE and HHNL in his analysis: copula absence, third person singular *-s* absence, and word-final consonant cluster reduction. His study reveals significant increases in copula absence and third person singular *-s* absence in recorded contexts, owing to what he terms a “hyper self-conscious register.” This study suggests that users of HHNL consciously modulate their speech to appeal to the notion of covert prestige and in-group acceptance which comes with the use of hip hop language. This modulation is particularly salient in a recorded environment, as recorded songs are often the only linguistic interaction hip hop artists have with their listeners. As such, it is crucial to overtly align oneself with the linguistic practices of the Hip Hop Nation.

Unfortunately, this type of linguistic alignment is rarely straightforward and unproblematic, as HHNL and AAE are both highly stigmatized varieties of American

English. Language ideologies are among the most passionately held beliefs of many Americans, as demonstrated by the spirited public discourse surrounding the Oakland Ebonics Controversy of 1996 (Wolfram 1996; McWhorter 1999). Both HHNL and AAE are often considered “slang,” “dialect,” or otherwise failing to achieve the linguistic conventions of Standard English, although the precise definition of “standard” in this case is somewhat nebulous; so-called “standard” varieties may simply lack or de-emphasize features which are widely considered to be strongly vernacular.

Indeed, the parallels between AAE and HHNL are so extensive that it may be productive to consider AAE and HHNL as embedded or derived notions rather than separate language varieties for the purposes of academic study. The two varieties are so closely related in terms of structure and social function that to treat them separately seems to be an unnecessary division. Wolfram (2003), in his discussion of the linguistic subordination or nonstandard varieties, notes that:

There is an entrenched mythology and ‘miseducation’ about dialects that pervades the understanding of this topic, particularly with respect to the relationship between socially subordinate, or ‘vernacular’ varieties, and standard varieties...Such information is not innocent folklore; it affects how we view and treat people and how they view themselves on both a formal, institutional level and an informal, personal level.

In the case of AAE and HHNL, the prevailing public opinion about the two varieties is overwhelmingly negative. Users of AAE and HHNL are ostracized from the mainstream and the widespread prestige which may be gained from using a standard dialect. African American English and its relatives, including HHNL, are used for a variety of common purposes, such as expressing in-group solidarity and rejecting mainstream values.

Wolfram’s discussion of linguistic subordination highlights some of the most important aspects of the study of non-standard dialects. Despite significant public pressure to

suppress nonstandard language, such vernacular varieties are invaluable for negotiating social identity. However, Wolfram (2003) also notes that:

language is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for ethnic group membership. [L]inguistic boundaries are permeable, constructed notions defined more adequately on the basis of sociopolitical and ideological considerations than on the basis of linguistic structures and sociolinguistic relationships.

This explanation hints at the complex and evolving relationship between language and social affiliation. This idea is illustrated in work on “dialect crossing” phenomena, such as Cutler’s (1999) work on the language of white hip hoppers. While Cutler’s subjects demonstrate a significant tendency toward linguistic alignment with AAE and HHNL norms, other social factors may be grounds for exclusion from a group. Thus, Big L’s “criminal slang,” while a primary way of displaying alignment with hip hop culture, is not the only way of doing so, nor is it sufficient to ensure in-group membership in any community.

Consequently, the sociolinguistic space of the U.S. is inhabited by many different language varieties, although the subordination of nonstandard varieties in the social hierarchy seems inevitable. Because HHNL and AAE have been similarly characterized in terms of language ideology, I have chosen to treat them as effectively the same variety for the purposes of this study, with the caveat that there are still some notable systematic differences between the two. Morgan (2002: 22) elaborates on the type of language contact situation which arises as a result of ideological judgments of language:

Contact situations that result in subjugation and marginalization often lead to diverse speech communities that share geographical space but represent different language ideologies. Depending on the relationships of the groups, the ideology of those in power can include denigrating the language and speech style of others. This is especially true for US plantation slavery where all behavior as well as speech and style of speaking were greatly regulated. Total institutions...such as plantation slavery often lead to antisocieties where people resist subjugation.

Interaction between speakers of AAE and HHNL and speakers of Standard English has resulted in a language contact situation of the type that Morgan has described above, in which speakers of the non-standard varieties rely on their language to carve out a certain measure of social agency for themselves, but the use of AAE and HHNL has always been a double-edged sword. Morgan also discusses this problem extensively in her analysis of the work of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, one of the first highly recognized African American writers, and the critical backlash surrounding his work. The duality of African Americans' social consciousness has resulted in a linguistic dilemma in which rigid adherence to the standard violates the expectations of localized speech communities, but embracing nonstandard features prohibits meaningful interaction with the standard-speaking community.

This conflict is one of the most central in any socially-informed analysis of hip hop. Speakers of both AAE and HHNL are constantly pulled in opposing directions by pressures to adhere to mainstream conceptions of “correct” English and the social marginalization in local speech communities of those who try to “talk proper.” Research has shown that the pressure of language ideology is a powerful motivating force in speakers' decisions to adopt or reject certain types of language behavior. Although the studies I have discussed here primarily cite morphosyntactic and phonetic features as markers of identity, language ideologies affect speakers' behavior at the discourse level as well. The value systems of the hip hop community are often at odds with those of mainstream society, and adherence to or rejection of those values can carry the same consequences as adoption or rejection of certain structural features. It is therefore necessary to examine the value systems of both mainstream society and the HHN in order to understand some of the discourse-level behaviors of HHNL speakers.

2.2. *The Code of the Street*

2.2.1. *The Commodification of Respect*

Elijah Anderson's (1999) work *Code of the Street* investigates the value system of inner-city communities in considerable detail. His work is applicable to hip hop because of the intimate connection between the hip hop lifestyle and the urban neighborhoods where it was developed. Anderson describes the conditions faced by many poor families on a daily basis, and the way of life which has arisen from these socioeconomic circumstances. In a world where violence, drug trafficking, and broken families abound, the norms which govern "decent" (Anderson 1999: 32) behavior do not always apply. Anderson's verbal walk down Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia shows a steady decline in standard of living from the upscale, mainly white shopping areas in the northwest corner of the city to the boarded-up windows of the southern end of the Avenue.

Central to Anderson's description is the "code of the street," a set of unwritten rules by which behavior in the inner-city community is governed. He contends that "decent" families are those who aspire to middle-class values, while the more "street"-inclined families live their lives by the code, which he outlines in some detail. Minimally, all residents of the area must have some familiarity with the code to avoid conflicts which may arise from infractions of the code's social norms. One of the central notions of the code of the street is that of respect, which Anderson describes with exceptional eloquence:

At the heart of the code is the issue of respect – loosely defined as being treated "right" or being granted one's "props" (or proper due) or the deference one deserves. However, in the troublesome public environment of the inner city, as people increasingly feel buffered by forces beyond their control, what one deserves in the way of respect becomes ever more problematic and uncertain...In the street culture, especially among young people, respect is viewed as almost an external entity, one that is hard-won but easily lost – and so must be constantly guarded. The rules of the code in fact provide a framework for negotiating respect. (1999: 33)

The commodification of respect in the hip hop community reflects the conditions encountered by many young MC's coming up in the city. Rappers such as Jay-Z and 50 Cent readily admit selling drugs to alleviate some of the excruciating poverty they encountered early in their lives. Jay and 50, along with other nationally recognized artists with similar backgrounds, take pride in having escaped the poverty trap and reached the pinnacle of financial success, which carries with it a certain measure of respect. Rather than let these success stories speak for themselves, however, many rappers fight even harder to sustain this new-found level of respect. In a fickle music industry, there is no guarantee of continued success over years or even months; thus, confrontational, in-your-face behavior becomes necessary to maintain record sales, financial stability, and consequently respect.

The primary purpose of battle discourse is to negotiate respect and social status. Its aim is the verbal domination and humiliation of one's opponents so as to decrease their status and increase one's own. The notion of status corresponds to Bourdieu's (1991) argument for the existence of a "linguistic marketplace" in which language is rarely used strictly for communicative purposes. Instead, using language becomes a way to accrue social capital or respect, which in turn gives future utterances greater credibility and provides a framework for the incremental accumulation of respect over time. However, as Anderson astutely notes, respect is hard to maintain but easy to lose. Consequently, battling takes on a fiercely competitive character, as losing means enduring a blow to one's respect and credibility, making it that much harder to negotiate future transactions in the very hostile environment of hip hop culture's linguistic marketplace. For most up-and-coming MC's, the road to linguistic capital is a long and arduous one, which starts in the street corner classroom known as the cipher – a circle where people gather to participate in battles.

The cipher provides emerging rappers with on-the-job training – a way to hone their rhyming and delivery skills in the context of a community where there may be many highly skilled rappers. It is at once a cooperative and competitive learning environment where the participants learn by practicing on each other, even if it means the embarrassment of losing. Raekwon, in an interview with Alim (forthcoming: 21), portrays the interactive learning environment of the cipher as follows:

You know, it's everybody enlightening they skills with the next person, and you know, you learn off of the best, you know what I mean? It's like training. It's like basic training. It's like, sparring, you know what I mean? So, you know, that makes a better MC, being able to know that he can express hisself amongst people that can teach him as well as he teach them. Everybody's teaching each other, you know, because they say experience the best teacher.

Using basic training as an analogy for learning how to hold one's own in the cipher, Raekwon evokes the popular myth that basic training in the military is built upon the principle of breaking the trainee's will, then building him up from the ground. Similarly, the cipher is not always a friendly classroom. A newcomer must deal with being humiliated by those of higher skill until he can learn to fend for himself. In doing so, he will learn from those around him – “sparring” in Raekwon's terms – and in turn push them to a higher level.

Because skills gained in the cipher do not translate directly into financial gain such as recording contracts, music videos, or radio play, except in very rare cases, the economy of the cipher is based upon status. In the inner-city, and consequently in the hip hop community, the sharp distinction drawn between winners and losers proposed by Anderson (1999: 37) helps to elucidate some of the motivations of cipher participants: “[L]ife in public often features an intense competition for scarce social goods in which ‘winners’ totally dominate ‘losers’ and in which losing can be a fate worse than death.” This aspect of the cipher is especially important, as the most effective battlers will improve their own status

by defaming their opponents skillfully and uniquely while simultaneously extolling their own abilities. Although status gained within one's own social circle may be the only appreciable result of battling, it is nonetheless a significant result, as one must earn respect in one's own backyard before attempting to do so on a larger scale.

2.2.2. *Authenticity*

The distribution of capital, and consequently respect, in the linguistic marketplace in the hip hop community is influenced by judgments of a particular speaker's authenticity – the extent to which he or she “keeps it real,” or abides by the code of the street. Like respect, authenticity is a commodity which must be constantly reasserted, lest the social privileges it affords be revoked. The lexicon of Hip Hop Nation Language is rife with idioms which refer to authenticity. Those who authentically participate in hip hop culture are said to *keep it real* or *keep it gangsta*, rejecting the standards of mainstream society (Smitherman 2000). Those who lack authenticity are said to be *fake*, *wack*, or *wannabes*. Authenticity must be negotiated and maintained on several fronts, both linguistic and social. Although language can be a powerful indicator of social identification, adopting a hip hop speech style is not sufficient for a person to claim membership in the hip hop community.

Cutler (1999) dissects the phenomenon of authentic participation in the hip hop community, specifically examining some of the factors which might preclude a person from participating in the hip hop community or cause an existing participant's social credibility to be revoked. For example, she notes that affluence may be one reason to deny or revoke credibility within the inner-city community. She discusses the language behavior of one of her subjects, a white teenager she calls “Mike,” noting that he adopts what he believes to be representative linguistic features of HHNL. However, Cutler notes that Mike and his friends

have based their conception of HHNL on stereotypes, and while they adopt some feature that are commonly associated with HHNL, they fail to adopt many others which are no less a part of the dialect. Mike even consciously shifts to AAE forms in conversation, as illustrated in the following utterance: “I gotta ask, I mean *aks* [æks] my mom” (Cutler 1999: 429) This type of consonant inversion is common in African American English, and the thirteen-year-old Mike appears to be actively selecting it over the more Standard English he spoke as a child. However, Wolfram’s (2003) suggestion, noted above, that language alone is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to gain or maintain a specific social affiliation holds here, and this point helps to justify Mike’s attempts to integrate himself into the hip hop community through non-linguistic actions, such as joining a gang, getting into fights, and actively seeking to involve himself in activities with which he would otherwise have little contact, given his upper middle class background. Recognizing that this background might prohibit him from being accepted in the hip hop community, he gives out his brother’s Brooklyn phone number rather than his own, which would immediately be recognized as coming from the affluent community of the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Even within the hip hop community, authenticity is an indicator of status, and there is a fine-grained hierarchy of authenticity in place, with concomitant jockeying for position.

2.3. The Social Economy of the Hip Hop Community

What is perhaps most interesting about battling as a sociolinguistic phenomenon is set of values and ideologies which seem to underscore the images of much battle discourse – namely, sexism, homophobia, and violence, among others. In her discussion of sexism in hip hop, Rose (1994: 15) offers the following observation:

Rap music and video have been wrongfully characterized as thoroughly sexist but rightfully lambasted for their sexism. I am thoroughly frustrated but not surprised by the apparent need for some rappers to craft elaborate and creative stories about the abuse and domination of young black women. Perhaps these stories serve to protect young men from the reality of female rejection; maybe and more likely, tales of sexual domination falsely relieve their **lack of self-worth and limited access to economic and social markers for heterosexual masculine power**. (my emphasis)

Although Rose does not specifically address battling in the above quotation, it is appropriate to apply her comments to battling. Echoing Anderson's claims, she addresses the historical disenfranchisement of inner-city African American males, noting that they are only afforded "limited access to economic and social markers for heterosexual masculine power," and the accompanying "lack of self-worth" they experience. This lack of self-worth is due at least in part to the exclusion of urban African Americans from participation in a social economy based on middle-class values such as financial and educational status. In response, a parallel social economy has appeared in which respect, authenticity, and ability to control the environment are prized over more conventional markers of status. That is, the code of the street is the primary factor in determining an individual's worth. The cipher functions as one manifestation of such a social economy; battling is the principal means by which status is negotiated within the context of the cipher. Participants in battles seek to dominate their opponents, using anything from the target's clothes and hair to rhyming skills to construct a verbal barrage of insults. Rapper Kurupt elaborates:

I just sit back and bust rhymes and I used to spell things on people's shirts. Like he'd have a shirt that says "Walk" on it. I'd break it down like the "W" is for this, the "A" is for that, the "L" is for this, and the "K" is for that. And they be like, "What?!"
(Alim 2004: 22)

Demographically, the hip hop community is highly masculine; most MCs, from the street corner to MTV, are male. As a result, hip hop language is highly gendered, and any study thereof must take this point into account. Status in the hip hop community is

inexorably linked to masculine norms and ideologies, and dominance is created by demonstrating that one projects masculinity more strongly than one's opponents in the battle. Cameron (1998: 47) characterizes male discourse in general as "competitive" and "hierarchically organized", and points to the trading of insults as a "foreground[ed] speech genre" in male speech. In many ways, the battle is the epitome of these characterizations. If Cameron's claims are used as a metric for judging the masculinity of a particular type of discourse, battling can clearly be qualified as highly gendered. One of the central claims of Cameron's argument is as follows:

'masculine' and 'feminine' are not what we are, nor traits that we *have*, but effects that we produce by way of particular things we *do*. 'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a "natural" kind of being.' (p. 49)

Many MCs, both when battling and otherwise, repeatedly assert their gender as heterosexual masculine behavior, whether through lexical items such as "bitch" or "faggot" or through narratives describing their sexual exploits with women. These behaviors can be prompted by the desire of rappers to construct status for themselves. Cameron (1998: 61) suggests that to perform these two language behaviors may even be the best way to assert one's own masculinity:

In [the context of] a private conversation among male friends [i]t could be argued that to gossip, either about your sexual exploits with women or about the repulsiveness of gay men...is not just one way, but the most appropriate way to display heterosexual masculinity. In another context (in public or with a larger and less close-knit group of men), the same objective might well be pursued through explicitly agonistic strategies, such as yelling abuse at women or gays in the street, or exchanging sexist and homophobic jokes.

Nelson George (2000) furthers this argument, identifying the pimp as the epitome of these ideologies, pointing to the pimp's control over women, sexual promiscuity, opulent

displays of wealth and flamboyance, and exceptional control over his environment as qualities to which participants, especially males, in the hip hop community aspire. Indeed, hip hop culture's fascination with the pimp is borne out in its language, from song titles like Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'" to Talib Kweli's (2001) quip that men are trying to "conform to the code of the pimp and the player." The prevalence of this type of imagery in hip hop seems to contribute to the growing public perception, connected to language ideology, that hip hop culture is morally unsound. However, the pimp embodies perhaps the most crucial ideal of the hip hop social economy, that of dominance. By dominating one's environment and the other people in it, it is possible to command a very high degree of respect and social capital.

Although it would be difficult to argue that sexism and violence are not common themes in hip hop lyrics, it would also be inappropriate to lay all of the blame for these attitudes on the hip hop's shoulders. Violence and sexism did not originate from hip hop; indeed, HHNL's status as a counterlanguage speaks to the dominance these ideologies have enjoyed in American society throughout our country's history. Pop culture as a whole is often a scapegoat for the so-called "moral failings" of the American people. This attitude is most easily seen in the public reaction to such disasters as the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado. After two students fatally shot thirteen of their schoolmates, observers were quick to place blame upon heavy metal artists such as Marilyn Manson, a favorite of the Columbine shooters, for planting the seeds of violence in the heads of young people. In recent years, hip hop has also come under fire for advocating messages of violence and misogyny to young people.

John McWhorter, an African American linguist at the University of California at Berkeley, has spoken out actively against hip hop's potential as a force for positive social change:

Many writers and thinkers see a kind of informed political engagement, even a revolutionary potential, in rap and hip hop. They couldn't be more wrong. By reinforcing the stereotypes that long hindered blacks, and by teaching young blacks that a thuggish adversarial stance is the properly "authentic" response to a presumptively racist society, rap retards black success. (McWhorter 2003)

McWhorter's argument essentially downplays the concept of agency in societal discourse; for many rappers, music is the only avenue to be heard in mainstream society. His argument appears to assume an egalitarian, open relationship between different races and socioeconomic groups of American society, when this is clearly not the case. Much in the same way that HHNL is a counter*language*, hip hop culture is a counter*culture*, a way for those who have not been afforded social and linguistic agency by society to manufacture it for themselves. This reality, in turn, exposes one of the fundamental contradictions of hip hop, also addressed by McWhorter (2003):

Of course, not all hip hop is belligerent or profane—entire CDs of gang-bangin', police-baiting, woman-bashing invective would get old fast to most listeners. But it's the nastiest rap that sells best, and the nastiest cuts that make a career.

Carmen Ashhurst-Watson, in an interview with Tricia Rose (1994b: 137), notes that the "primary issue in the music business is profit. So, even black record executives with a conscience are trapped by the rules of the institution." Purveyors of pop culture are bound to put out what sells or risk being shunned by consumers; in this regard, hip hop is no different than country music or sci-fi cinema. Artists who choose to veer away from what is acceptable to mainstream consumers also find themselves unable to secure major-label record contracts and garner mainstream radio and video play. Thus, Jay-Z's claim in

“H.O.V.A.” (2001a) that the music industry is “shady” and “needs to be taken over” is well taken – the industry’s circular logic of only playing and promoting what they can sell, combined with its historical exploitation of artists (Rose 1994b), makes it difficult for artists to deviate from the established paradigm of societal expectations for their discourse.

Thus, while it is difficult to argue against the presence of controversial themes in hip hop, it would be equally difficult to argue that the prevalence of such themes can be attributed to hip hop alone. Hip hop has been thrust into the mainstream as an explosively popular art form, and hip hop artists have become representatives of the communities in which they grew up. The challenge for these artists is to adapt their discourse to match the suddenly increased scope of their audiences. Despite its enormous amount of potential as a catalyst for social change, much of the discourse in hip hop is still rooted in the previously discussed status economy. Many hip hop artists become caught in the trap of using their newfound mainstream exposure to perform behaviors such as those recognized by Cameron (2000) – offering often graphic details of their sexual exploits with women, and engaging in homophobic discourse. Guaranteed the eyes and ears of millions of listeners every day, many rappers fulfill Rose’s prophecy and use the exposure to assert gender-related dominance. This pattern of behavior leads to the conclusion that hip hop has not realized its true force as a catalyst for social change. By the same token, it would be naïve not to recognize the significance of audience size in negotiating status – the ideal context for developing one’s own status or wreaking havoc on another’s is in front of as large an audience as possible. In contemporary America, the largest audience for hip hop is mainstream radio and music video play.

As we will see in the case studies in the following chapters, gendered language is not the only means by which effective battling can be achieved, although it is common. Rappers deftly manipulate contextual factors and delivery styles to make the most of their time in the spotlight and maximize the effect of their linguistic warfare. Battle participants in the cipher seek to silence their opponents in sequence until only one man is left standing. As the Kurupt quotation above demonstrates, creativity and novelty are highly valued commodities in the cipher. The most highly skilled battlers rely on many linguistic devices to assert their dominance. Metaphor and crowd involvement, for example, are as crucial to effective battling as any other factor. For the best MC's in the cipher, delivery is not merely a conduit for rhymes, it is as much a part of the game as the rhymes themselves. The case studies in the following chapters will delve into some of the most intriguing aspects of battling, both in terms of its fascinating linguistic composition and its place in the social space of the hip hop community.

3. Pragmatic and Contextual Factors in Battling

The pragmatic features of battle discourse differ considerably from those of more “typical” everyday discourses. Battling, at its core, is a highly competitive performance art whose purpose is to negotiate social. Because of its inherently competitive nature and the social consequences at stake for the loser, battle discourse discards many of the assumptions contemporary pragmatic theory makes about the relationship between interlocutors. The best battlers will not only rhyme creatively, but they will recognize and manipulate the contextual variables of the battle to their advantage. Thus, the linguistic strategies used in battling diverge considerably from those used in other types of discourse. In this section, I will examine the notions of face (Goffman 1967, 1981), politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987), and participation frameworks (Goffman 1981, Goodwin 1990), before applying these concepts to an analysis of several hip hop texts.

3.1. Face

One of the primary goals of any interaction is the management of the face of its participants. In sociolinguistic literature, the concept of face is most closely associated with the work of Erving Goffman (1967, 1981), although a considerable amount of work on face has expounded upon Goffman’s pathbreaking research. Following Goffman (1967), Brown and Levinson (1987: 322) distinguish two types of face: positive and negative. Negative face is defined as “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ [of society] that his actions be unimpeded by others.” Positive face is defined as “the want of every competent adult member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.” Further, Brown and Levinson propose a typology of face-threatening actions (FTAs), which they define as linguistic moves

which either threaten or overtly violate another interlocutor's face. FTAs often create tensions or breaks in the conversation, which may need to be repaired for successful further interaction to take place. The severity of the break is usually determined by contextual variables, such as the relationship between the participants, the topic under discussion, and the place and time at which the action occurs.

In many studies on face, the assumptions underlying the structure and goals of discourse are treated as near-universal. For instance, Brown and Levinson argue that managing face is an essential component of 'rational' discourse, and that "aspects of face [are] basic wants, which every member knows every other member desires, and which in general it is in the interests of every member to partially satisfy" (1987: 322). Similarly, Goffman (1967: 308) argues that in interaction, "a state where everyone temporarily accepts everyone else's line is established. This kind of mutual acceptance seems to be a basic structural feature of interaction, especially the interaction of face-to-face talk." It is precisely this aspect of discourse that allows battling to exist; although face wants are established in battle contexts, it is not a goal of the interaction to maintain equal face for the participants. As even a cursory examination of battle texts reveals, battles are not subject to the same pragmatic constraints that govern other types of discourse. The social assumptions underlying battling are diametrically opposed to those underlying non-battle discourses because there is no default acceptance of any participant's positive or negative face. Put another way, battle discourse may be viewed as a string of overt FTAs which are never repaired, simply because there is no need to do so. In fact, to engage in repairing behavior would be an unforgivable display of weakness, as it would mitigate the damage to the opponent's negative face.

Due to battling's integral role in negotiating social status, it is necessary to examine the connection between battle discourse and its possible effects on face and status. The dynamic of face wants in battling might best be described using the metaphor of a seesaw – that is, when one participant's face wants are being upheld, the other's are being violated. Minimally, each MC in a battle will have two primary positive face wants: first, he desires that the persona he projects will be acceptable to the audience; second, he desires that the way he portrays his opponent is accepted by the crowd. Additionally, each participant will have at least one negative face want: namely, that he be allowed to participate freely in the discourse without being interrupted or otherwise impeded. The ability to participate freely in discourse is a prerequisite for effective battling due to the verbal nature of the competition. Thus, while it is necessary to defame one's opponent in a battle, it can be even more effective to manipulate the audience in order to create a context which is maximally favorable to one's own discourse and either unfavorable or actively hostile toward the discourse of an opponent. Such a context maximizes one's own ability to articulate and advance face wants while limiting the opponent's ability to do the same.

3.2. Politeness

In their discussion of face, Brown and Levinson (1987) also work to develop a paradigm of strategies for linguistic politeness. Positive politeness and negative politeness, respectively, refer to linguistic actions which target the addressee's positive and negative face. Significantly, these types of strategies are absent from battle discourse, except when used ironically. Although Brown and Levinson discuss many different strategies for manipulating face and politeness, I will focus on acts that a speaker may use to threaten a hearer's positive face, as it is these actions which are most applicable to an analysis of

battling. Although Brown and Levinson distinguish between acts which overtly threaten a hearer's face and those which merely show indifference, both of these strategies are so common in battling that I will treat them equally. For reference, a list of some common FTAs which occur in battling and other discourse is found below:

- Expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults
- Contradictions or disagreements, challenges
- Expressions of violent (out-of-control) emotions
- Irreverence, mention of taboo topics, including those that are inappropriate in the context
- Bringing of bad news about H [the hearer], or good news (boasting) about S [the speaker]
- Raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics, e.g., politics, race, religion, women's liberation
- Blatant non-cooperation in an activity – e.g., disruptively interrupting H's talk, making non-sequiturs or showing non-attention
- Use of address terms and other status-marked identifications in initial encounters (adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987: 324-325)

Engaging in FTAs such as the ones listed above serves a twofold purpose. While it is necessary to involve the audience when negotiating face in a battle, it is not sufficient to rely on the audience's reaction to cause damage to an opponent's face. Instead, an MC must overtly direct attacks toward his opponent in a battle in an attempt to shift the balance of power in the interaction. There are many linguistic devices used to manipulate the power structure of an interaction, such as the use of stigmatized address terms or overt challenges or claims which are clearly addressed to one's opponent. As a result, the participation structure of battling is constantly in flux.

Linguistically, direct challenges are often marked by the use of second person pronouns, whereas claims about an opponent which are made to the crowd are usually accompanied by reference terms containing deictics, such as *this guy*. When combined with

the strategic use of other power-manipulating devices, such as audience involvement, these FTAs become an important tool for manipulating the balance of power in battles.

3.3. Participation Frameworks

In his discussion of footing, Goffman (1981: 129) notes that “traditional analysis of saying and what gets said seems tacitly committed to the following paradigm: Two and only two individuals are engaged together in it.” Indeed, due to its focus on the two central participants, it is easy to classify battle discourse as a simple one-on-one interaction. In reality, the participation framework of the battle is significantly more complicated. Goffman rightly problematizes the notions of “speaker” and “hearer,” as these notions presuppose an alternating turn structure in which interlocutors alternately perform the roles of speaker and hearer, doing so exclusively until it is time to switch roles. Goffman further distinguishes between the physical act of listening and the social status which comes with having a place as a ratified participant in an interaction, noting that “a ratified participant may not be listening, and someone listening may not be a ratified participant” (p. 132).

Participation frameworks in battle contexts are highly nuanced, malleable entities which the participants actively form and reform through their discourse. In order to create a favorable environment for the advancement of his face wants, an MC must be willing to manipulate the participation framework of the interaction by ratifying people who will support him and attempting to portray those who will not support him as unworthy of inclusion in the interaction. Alternatively, an MC may portray others as espousing values which are unacceptable in the social economy of the hip hop community, such as homosexuality.

Goodwin (1990) explores participant structure and audience alignment in more detail in her study of the narratives of African American children. In particular, she notes some strategies used by her subjects to create isolating contexts. One common strategy both in everyday discourse and battling is to offer a narrative as evidence of a claim made about another interlocutor. For example, one of Goodwin's subjects, Chopper, argues that another boy, Tony, is a coward, and offers the following narrative as evidence for his claim: "Lemme tell ya. Guess what. We was comin' home from practice, and, three boys came up there and asked us for money and Tony did like this [raising hands up]...I ain't got no money!" (adapted from Goodwin 1990: 245) By addressing the narrative to the group at large and not just to Tony, Chopper changes the participant structure, granting the audience status as ratified overhearers, and utilizing them to help him achieve his goal of isolating Tony and limiting his ability to defend himself. Later, the spectators prompt Chopper for details about the story, further altering their status in the participant structure from ratified overhearers to active participants. Between Chopper's narrative and the contributions of the spectators, it is almost impossible for Tony to participate in the discourse, and he is marginalized as a result. Such strategies are very common in battling, as isolating an interlocutor maximizes the damage to that interlocutor's positive and negative face.

A common tactic MCs employ to manipulate participation frameworks is the introduction of other interlocutors either as ratified hearers or otherwise positively-aligned participants. In battling, this is often accomplished by explicitly acknowledging one's *crew* (group of friends) during a verse. Although the crew cannot participate in the one-on-one discourse of the battle, they represent a group who is by default aligned with the face wants of one of the participants in the battle. The following case studies will examine some

instances of highly skilled MCs' manipulation of the contextual factors in battle environments.

3.4. Case Study: *Back Across the 8 Mile*

The film *8 Mile* (2001) stars rapper Eminem as Jimmy “Bunny Rabbit” Smith, a down-and-out rapper and factory worker who participates in battles at a local club. The film’s final scene, in which Bunny Rabbit battles Papa Doc, leader of the Free World gang, features some particularly skillful instances of contextual manipulation. From the beginning of his verse, Bunny Rabbit gets the audience on his side by appealing to their sense of hometown pride. He then goes on to claim that Papa Doc cannot come up with anything original to say about him, and instead merely rehashes criticisms that have been used against him in past battles. Finally, following the strategy of Goodwin’s (1990) subject Chopper, he offers narratives which portray Papa Doc as a fake who actually comes from an affluent background, which directly contrasts the “gangsta” persona he affects. Finally, Rabbit engages the crowd in a call-and-response before ending with a flurry of *a cappella* rhymes that prompt the crowd to drown out Papa Doc’s attempted response in a chorus of “OHHHHH!” A transcript of Bunny Rabbit’s verse is included below, as well as in the Appendix:

1 Bunny Rabbit: Now everybody from the 3-1-3
2 Put your mothafuckin hands up and follow me
3 Now everybody from the 3-1-3
4 Put your mothafuckin hands up
5 Look look
6 Now while he stands tough
7 Notice that this man did not have his hands up
8 This Free World shit’s got you gassed up
9 Now who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?
10 1, 2, 3 and to the 4
11 One Pac, two Pac, three Pac, four

12 Four Pac, three Pac, two Pac, one
13 You're Pac, he's Pac, no Pac, none
14 This guy ain't no mothafuckin MC
15 I know everything he's bout to say against me
16 I am white
17 I am a fuckin bum
18 I do live in a trailer with my mom
19 My boy Future is an Uncle Tom
20 I do got a dumb friend named Cheddar Bob
21 Who shoots himself in his leg with his own gun
22 I did get jumped
23 By all 6 of you chumps
24 And Wink did fuck my girl
25 I'm still standin here screamin fuck the Free World!
26 Don't you ever try to judge me dude
27 You don't know what the fuck I've been through
28 But I know something about you
29 You went to Cranbrook, that's a private school!
30 What's the matter dawg? You embarrassed?
31 This guy's a gangsta? His real name's Clarence
32 And Clarence lives at home with both parents
33 And Clarence parents have a real good marriage
34 This guy don't wanna battle, he's shook
35 Cause ain't no such thing as half-way crooks
36 He's scared to death
37 He's scared to look in his fuckin yearbook
38 Fuck Cranbrook!
39 Fuck a beat, I'll go a cappella
40 Fuck a Papa Doc, fuck a clock, fuck a trailer, fuck everybody
41 Fuck y'all if you doubt me
42 I'm a piece of fuckin white trash, I'll say it proudly
43 And fuck this battle, I don't wanna win, I'm outtie
44 Here, tell these people something they don't know about me

From the beginning of this verse, it is clear that Bunny Rabbit recognizes the value of having the audience in his corner. As such, he begins his verse with a common strategy in hip hop, waving his hand above his head and urging the crowd to put their hands up. He further seeks to establish a common ground with the crowd by referring to the “3-1-3,” which is the area code of the city of Detroit, where the movie takes place. This type of reference is becoming increasingly common in hip hop, as a person’s identity in the hip hop community is often closely associated with his or her hometown. Immediately, the crowd responds by dancing and mimicking Rabbit’s hand-waving gesture. Meanwhile, Papa Doc attempts to undermine Rabbit’s efforts by feigning indifference – a strong FTA in Brown and Levinson’s framework. However, Rabbit is able to capitalize on Papa Doc’s actions and use them as a jumping-off point for his attack: “Now while he stands tough / Notice that this man did not have his hands up” (lines 6-7). Papa Doc’s strategy has backfired, and he has been set apart from the crowd as the only person who is not acknowledging that he is from Detroit. As the verse progresses, Rabbit uses this premise to portray Papa Doc as a fraud, unworthy of the audience’s support.

Also noteworthy in this verse is the way in which Rabbit neutralizes Papa Doc’s crew, the Free World gang. Rabbit’s use of metaphor in lines 8 and 9 is highly creative. He equates Papa Doc with the Big Bad Wolf, a storybook character who, despite his best efforts, is unable to blow down the house of the Three Little Pigs. Rabbit’s claim in line 8 that Papa Doc is “gassed up” is a clever play on words, which bolsters his claim that both Papa and the Free World are full of hot air, and cannot be effective in a battle. Lines 10-13 of the sample also use creative language to undermine the social credibility of the

Free World. Rabbit raps “one Pac, two Pac, three Pac, four / Four Pac, three Pac, two Pac, one” as he points out the members of the Free World in turn. Ultimately, Rabbit labels his adversaries as “no Pac, none”, using this pun to show how his opponent’s rhyming skills fall far short of those of a legendary MC, the late Tupac “2Pac” Shakur. These discourse strategies set the stage for the fiery monologue which follows, in which Rabbit completely severs Papa Doc’s connection with the crowd.

In lines 14-25, Bunny Rabbit draws upon a strategy which is almost unheard of in battling. He deliberately violates his own positive face to expose Papa Doc as an inferior rapper. This is a considerable gamble on Rabbit’s part, as battle participants often guard their positive face fiercely, but it pays off. In the film’s early goings, Rabbit’s battle opponents criticize him for being the only white rapper who participates in the battles at the club. Moreover, they attack him for being poor and living at home in a trailer park with his mother – in a word, he is criticized for being “white trash.” In these lines, however, Rabbit “flips the script,” using the repeated criticisms as a basis for lodging a claim that Papa Doc cannot come up with any new material with which to insult him. The result is a considerable violation to Papa Doc’s negative face, as Rabbit has already anticipated and obviated most of Papa Doc’s response. He rehashes this strategy in line 42, claiming that he is “a piece of fucking white trash, I’ll say it proudly,” then subsequently challenging him to “tell these people something they don’t know about” him.

In line 26, Rabbit shifts from primarily addressing the audience to addressing his opponent directly; this is marked by his use of *you* to directly refer to Papa Doc, which he does in lines 26-30. The shift is also accentuated by Rabbit’s delivery in line 26, which

carries a sing-songy, mocking tone, as if to suggest that Rabbit knows something that his opponent does not. This fear is borne out, as Rabbit proceeds to introduce the most damaging part of his verse, and thus it is to his advantage to direct it toward his opponent. However, he quickly turns back to the crowd, resuming the use of deictic phrases, as in “This guy’s a gangsta?” (line 31). Throughout this section of the verse, up through line 38, Rabbit uses biographical details about Papa Doc to prove that he is not aligned with the socioeconomic values of the crowd, and is thus unworthy of their support. Rabbit is merciless as he shreds Papa Doc’s credibility, first stating that he “went to Cranbrook / That’s a private school!” Papa Doc’s suburban private high school education presumably runs counter to the experiences of the people in the crowd, who come from poor working-class Detroit families, where high levels of education are uncommon. Papa Doc’s attendance at an elite private school reveals that his family has sufficient financial resources to fund such an education. Rabbit then goes on to question how “gangsta” a person can be when he comes from a stable, two-parent home and has a name like Clarence.

By this time, the crowd is strongly aligned against Papa Doc, and Rabbit allows them to participate in the attack, using the call and response in line 35. Borrowing the hook from Mobb Deep’s track “Shook Ones,” Rabbit begins, “This guy don’t wanna battle / He’s shook / Cause ain’t no such things,” allowing the crowd to finish, “as half-way crooks.” Here, Rabbit’s positive face is extremely well-established – the crowd is so well attuned to his views and portrayals of Papa Doc that they are able to complete his sentences. Here, Rabbit has successfully portrayed Papa Doc as a fake, a phony, and a half-way crook, and the crowd has unanimously upheld his evaluation of his opponent,

thereby validating Rabbit's positive face to the fullest extent. Rabbit's last two lines in the verse serve to highlight the fact that Papa Doc will have nothing to say when his turn to battle comes; he challenges Papa Doc to "tell these people something they don't know about me."

Recalling the battle between Eyedea and Shells presented in Chapter 1, it is noteworthy that both Bunny Rabbit and Eyedea use this type of strategy to their advantage. Like Eminem and the character of Bunny Rabbit, Eyedea is in the minority among hip hoppers – that is, he is white. In battle contexts, Eyedea's whiteness is often used as fodder by his opponents. Both Rabbit and Eyedea make references to their whiteness and embrace it, thereby turning the tables on their opponents and exposing them as unoriginal. These two MCs are particularly effective in cutting their opponents off from the audience, as shown by Shells' repeated use of the discourse markers *yo* and *aiyyo* in the beginning of his verses. Additionally, Shells implores the crowd, "Listen, man," trying to refocus their attention and shift the audience's alignment so that they will be more receptive to his forthcoming verse. *Yo* and its variants, such as *aiyyo*, are very common in African American English, especially in situations with multiple interlocutors, where the attention of observers is at stake (Hilliard 2003). Here, Shells' discourse marking behavior indicates that he believes the crowd has already begun to tune him out. Indeed, the crowd is jeering and booing Shells, especially as he fumbles through his second verse. These two battles show the extreme importance of audience alignment in battling, as well as demonstrating just how quickly a battle can go downhill if one of the participants if he loses his connection with the audience.

3.5. Case Study: *The Takeover*

The track “Takeover” appears in two distinct versions in Jay-Z’s catalogue – first on his studio album *The Blueprint* (2001a) and later on the live recording of his performance on MTV’s *Unplugged* show (2001b). Jay’s lyrics on “Takeover” showcase his ability to manipulate the participation framework and power dynamic of his ongoing feud with Mobb Deep and Nas. Both the *Blueprint* and *Unplugged* versions of “Takeover” will be analyzed in this section, as Jay uses subtly different tactics in each version to manipulate the context of the battle. The track begins with the hook, or refrain¹:

- 1 R-O-C, we runnin this rap shit
- 2 Memphis Bleek, we runnin this rap shit
- 3 B-Mac, we runnin this rap shit
- 4 Freeway, we running this rap shit
- 5 O and Sparks, we runnin this rap shit
- 6 [KRS-One] Watch out, we run New York! (2001a)

The hook of the song creates a frame for the upcoming discourse in several ways. First, Jay invokes the name of his crew, the Roc-A-Fella Family – “R-O-C” as it appears in-text – which includes all the individuals mentioned in line-initial position throughout the hook. In mentioning each of the Family members by name, Jay has employed a strategy which is common in competitive discourse. He is ratifying other participants as listeners for his monologue and thus creating a set of favorable conditions for its existence. He is also manipulating the discourse context by introducing other participants who are likely to align themselves with his monologue. Therefore, in announcing his crew, Jay has created a sort of support network for himself before the main part of the

¹ A note about lyrical transcripts: Many of the lyrical transcripts in this paper have been adapted from the online archives of the Original Hip hop Lyrics Archive (OHHLA, cited in References at the end of this paper). In cases where I believed the OHHLA transcript to contain errors, I have corrected these errors in-text.

discourse begins. Additionally, the last line of the hook is not rapped; rather, it is *sampled*, or spliced in from an existing recording by another artist, in this case from KRS-One. The sample introduces KRS as another positively aligned participant in the conversation, further bolstering Jay's position that he and the Family run New York, which is also Nas' place of residence. The *Unplugged* version of the track differs from much contemporary hip hop in that it does not feature a beat constructed by a DJ; rather, there is a live band on stage with Jay-Z. The band is none other than The Roots, major players in the hip hop scene, whose mere presence adds to his credibility and provides several more discourse participants who should be perceived as aligned with Jigga.

Having announced his crew's presence, Jigga begins his verbal assault in the verse with a simultaneously metalinguistic and linguistic assertion of his dominance: "The takeover, the break's over, nigga / God MC, me, Jay-Hova". The first line announces Jay-Z's takeover of the situation, signaling that the worst is yet to come for his rivals ("the break's over"). In the second line, Jay uses his verbal skill as evidence for his claim that the time for the takeover has arrived. The pun in the second line fuses two of the names by which Jay-Z is referred to in hip hop circles: *Jay* and *Hova*. This fusion of names phonetically resembles "Jehovah", referring back to Jay's proclamation that he is the "God MC," the rapper by which all should be measured. In just a short two-line sequence, Jay-Z has shown that he is willing to battle, and has the verbal proficiency to do so with considerable skill.

Later in the first verse, Jay begins to address the participant alignment of the situation, as in the following lines:

- 1 You bringin' boys to men
- 2 How them boys gon' win?

- 3 This is grown man B-I
- 4 Get you rolled into triage, biatch. (2001a)

These lines set up the opposition between Nas' crew, the boys, and Jay-Z's crew, the men, giving the boys no chance of survival in the grown-up *B-I* (business) of the rap game. Also noteworthy is Jay's use of the lexical item *biatch*, a popular variation on *bitch* in hip hop lyrics, in line 4 of the above sample. The themes of gender and sexuality will be treated more thoroughly in Chapter 4; for now, it is sufficient to be aware that misogynistic and heterosexist language is extremely common in battling, and is integral to constructing a framework of dominance. Here, Jay's assertion that Nas' crew is made of bitches improves his ability to attack their face wants and promote his own.

Another tactic Jay-Z uses to suppress the discourse of Prodigy and Nas is to attack their credibility, which he does in the second verse of "Takeover," stating:

- 1 I don't care if you Mobb Deep, I hold triggers to crews
- 2 You little fuck, I got money stacks bigger than you
- 3 When I was pushin weight back in eighty-eight
- 4 You was a ballerina, I got the pictures I seen ya
- 5 Then you dropped "Shook Ones", switched your demeanor
- 6 Well, we don't believe you, you need more people. (2001a)

Two salient points emerge here; first, Jay states that "Shook Ones," the very same track Bunny Rabbit uses in *8 Mile* to defame Papa Doc, is a radical departure from Prodigy's past demeanor. In stating this point, Jay is implying that Prodigy is not "being real" – that is, Prodigy is affecting a persona that he cannot back up. Moreover, Jay further claims that Prodigy cannot advance this persona without creating a favorable audience alignment for doing so. In the hip hop community, this translates to having a large crew that is willing to corroborate one's position. Thus, Jay's statement that Prodigy "need[s] more people" to advance the position he offers in "Shook Ones" draws on Goodwin's

(1990) ideas of participant alignment. Lines 5 and 6 of the above sample draw on some of the more important contextual factors in any battle. By attacking an opponent's authenticity, it is possible to align the audience against him in advance, before his turn to speak has even come.

The *Unplugged* version of "Takeover" includes some pragmatic techniques that are absent from the *Blueprint* version of the track. In particular, due to censorship restrictions prohibiting the use of the word *nigga*, Jay is forced to resort to other address terms when referring to his targets. As it turns out, the restriction actually works to Jay's advantage, as it allows him to build another layer of insult into his performance by manipulating the power dynamic between himself and Nas. On the *Unplugged* version of "Takeover," Jay replaces almost all instances of the word *nigga* with *homey*, a term which carries a more consistently friendly connotation in hip hop language, as opposed to *nigga*, which can have a variety of meanings, "ranging from positive to neutral to negative" (Smitherman 2000: 210).

Jay's repeated use of the word *homey* to refer to Nas is ironic given his presumed motives in the battle. Indeed, Jay's lyrics support this idea, as shown in the excerpt below, where he seeks to create a relationship where he is Nas' mentor:

1 Homey, you ain't live it, you witnessed it from your folks' pad
2 You scribbled in your notepad, created your life
3 I showed you your first Tec on tour with Large Professor
4 Then I heard your album bout your Tec on the dresser
5 Oh yeah, I sampled your voice, you was usin it wrong
6 You made it a hot line, I made it a hot song
7 And you ain't get a coin homey you was getting plugged then
8 I know who I paid God, Searchlight Publishing (2001b)

Jay begins this portion of his attack with an attack on Nas' authenticity, claiming that Nas does not actually live a hip hop lifestyle, instead observing it from his parents' home,

then parlaying that observation into fictitious raps about his life. Jay further claims that he introduced Nas to one of the tools of the trade, the TEC-9, a semiautomatic weapon, but is later incredulous when he hears the wannabe Nas rapping about actually owning a TEC-9. The overall tone of this excerpt seems to suggest that Jay is doing Nas a favor by “plugging” his work. Interestingly, though, *plugged* replaces *fucked* in the original lyrics, creating a double entendre which implies that Nas is engaging in homosexual activity while Jay is out in the streets, leading an active, productive life. Jay’s manipulation of the power dynamic here is reminiscent of Fairclough’s (1995) notion of “synthetic personalization,” which is marked by the “democratization” of discourse in a highly asymmetric power dynamic through the removal of overt references to the subordinate party’s status. The power dynamic of the battle is precisely the type of asymmetrical discourse environment to which Fairclough refers; Jay-Z seeks to portray himself as clearly superior to Nas in all arenas, going so far as to install himself as a mentor or father figure in Nas’ life. In the above excerpt, Jay’s use of synthetic personalization through the more socially acceptable *homey* instead of *nigga* only serves to exacerbate the damage to Nas’ status by falsely democratizing the discourse.

The final point I would like to address in this pragmatic analysis of “Takeover” is the use of metaphor in Jay-Z’s delivery. Although a discussion of the metaphors used to refer to women and homosexuals is forthcoming, I would also like to treat some of the other metaphors Jigga employs in his efforts to bolster his own status. One of the main ways he chooses to do this is to extol his proficiency as a rapper. I have already addressed how the first two lines of the first verse function both directly and indirectly to

do this. I would like to conclude my analysis of this track with one more excerpt from the later part of the lyrics:

1 You said you been in this ten
2 I've been in it five – smarten up Nas
3 Four albums in ten years nigga? I can divide
4 That's one every let's say two, two of them shits was due
5 One was naaaahh, the other was "Illmatic"
6 That's a one hot album every ten year average
7 And that's so lame! Nigga switch up your flow
8 Your shit is garbage, but you try and kick knowledge?
9 You niggas gon' learn to respect the king
10 Don't be the next contestant on that Summer Jam screen (2001a)

This verse is rich with material for analysis. Jay spits some serious flames here, answering Nas' charge that he has only been in the rap game five years to Nas' ten by saying that Nas has only managed one hot album in double the time. He then proceeds to suggest that Nas change his flow, labeling it as "garbage." What is perhaps most interesting about this verse, however, is the metaphor Jay uses in line 10. His choice of the lexical item *contestant* reframes the battle as a game show in a context where he is already on stage and on the microphone, which entails that the crowd is focused on him. Using the language of games and game shows also suggests that the battle is nothing more than play for Jigga, who portrays his rhyming skills as so far superior to Nas' that Nas can be considered nothing more than an unworthy challenger on a show where Jay's position as master of ceremonies is unassailable.

Finally, the mention of the "Summer Jam screen" is a threat that Nas will become the victim of the same fate that befell Prodigy not minutes before – that he will be ridiculed in front of thousands of people at a major concert, which is perhaps the epitome of Goodwin's concept of audience alignment. Nas is by default marginalized in this situation, due to the fact that he is not present to defend himself. The context of the

record denies Nas any immediate recourse to restore his status. Thus, in many ways, the introduction of “Takeover” in a large concert setting is what contributes to its effectiveness in the battle.

4. Homosexuality and Heterosexism in Battling

4.1. Masculinity and Heterosexist Ideologies in Hip Hop Language

One of the central themes of many hip hop songs and music videos is the subjugation of women. Most of the major figures in hip hop at the time of this writing are male, and many scholars (e.g. Norman 2001) contend that one of the major ways by which MCs can establish themselves is by professing to align themselves with the thoughts and actions normally associated with heterosexual men, such as promiscuity, flamboyance, and aggression. George's (2000) identification of the pimp as primary male role model according to the values of the code of the street is corroborated by the audio and visual images in hip hop music, which often depict men in positions of power over their environments. In order for this power dynamic to exist, it requires the oppression of women, and in hip hop language, the dynamic is often reinforced by the popularity of public discourse glorifying promiscuous sexual behavior by men, while simultaneously decrying similar behavior by women.

“Ho,” the eleventh track on Atlanta-based rapper Ludacris' album *Back for the First Time* (2000) is an example of the extremes to which the pimp image has been carried in hip hop. Smitherman (2000) notes that the term *ho*, presumably derived from an AAE-based pronunciation of *whore* or a vocalization of the /l/ sound in *hole*², is typically used as a derogatory term for women. Typically, a “ho” is one of many women serving a pimp. Thus, the two terms are often linked in hip hop discourse. Additionally, popular usage has created a link between *ho* and *bitch*, a similarly derogatory term for describing women. These associations are so prevalent that they have spread outside the

² Thanks to Walt Wolfram for this suggestion.

Hip Hop Nation into other groups, such as the mostly white student groups who hold “Pimps and Hoes” theme parties at colleges and universities throughout the country. However, in recent years, *ho* has gone the way of *nigga* and been appropriated by those who it was originally used to denigrate. Smitherman (2000) states that the word can even be used as a term of endearment among close female friends. It still seems, though, that *ho* is highly derogatory in the large majority of cases, and there is perhaps no better example of this than Ludacris’ hit song. Although it is not a battle song, “Ho” illustrates many of the stereotypes which fuel the ideologies surrounding hip hop culture. The song is highly innovative in its lyrics, featuring many skilled and even humorous examples of wordplay. Indeed, the track’s overall tone could be described as lighthearted, punctuated by Ludacris’ confession near the song’s end that “most of us niggas is hoes too.” In his lyrics, Ludacris explores many of the stereotypes associated with hip hop culture, such as drug use, sexual promiscuity, and male domination. Ludacris kicks off the track as follows:

- 1 You doin ho activities
- 2 With ho tendencies
- 3 Hoes are your friends, hoes are your enemies
- 4 With ho energy to do whatcha do
- 5 Blew whatcha blew
- 6 Screw whatcha screw

The last three lines of this excerpt delineate what Ludacris labels as “ho activities / with ho tendencies” early on in the verse; namely, oral sex (line 5) and sexual intercourse (line 6). This initial characterization of women as sexual objects is in line with the dominant ideologies expressed up to this point. Ludacris goes on to claim that one “can’t turn a ho into a housewife / Hoes don’t act right,” implying that hoes are only suited to their lives on the street, rather than trying to raise a decent family. Additionally, the song references

hoes who are “on the crack pipe” and “open like hallways” (for sex). Ironically, according to Anderson’s code of the street, aspiring to so-called “decent” values is frowned upon in the hip hop value system. Thus, there is a contradiction in the behavioral expectations of the hip hop social economy; it is considered inappropriate for women to engage in overtly sexual behavior. Further, it is inappropriate to “sell out” on one’s culture and attempt to achieve a “decent” middle-class existence. It appears that there is no simple solution to the problem of what is acceptable behavior in the hip hop social economy, especially for women. For men, there appears to be more of a consensus; men are simply expected to exercise dominance over their environments. Despite Ludacris’ concession that a lot of men are hypocritical in their accusations, the spoken dialogue which makes up the final few seconds of the track serves to re-establish the power dynamic, as the woman is portrayed as being completely at the man’s beck and call, unable to break out of her subservient role as a ho:

- 1 [Woman] Mothafuckas I’m so tired of y’all niggas always talking about ho this
- 2 ho that, you tha mothafuckin ho nigga. I wasn’t no ho last night.
- 3 [Man] Ho, bring yo ass!
- 4 [Woman] OK, hold on.

Tracks like “Ho” help to perpetuate some of the dominant ideologies surrounding hip hop discourse. However, their explosive popularity suggests that they are well-received by the public; in turn, the music industry continues to promote this type of art, creating a cycle which is difficult to break, except in the case of artists or record executives who are willing to experiment. It is possible that the ideologies surrounding hip hop are indicative of ideological trends in society at large – that is, as Morgan (2002) describes above, control of discourse and the ideas surrounding to it is crucial to ensure the status quo.

“Ho” is just one example of the types of sexist themes running through hip hop. In addition to glorifying masculine ideals of promiscuity and the accrual of wealth and status by whatever means necessary, many hip hop artists use their art to attack homosexuals. This type of language has attracted significant press attention in the past few years, with artists such as Eminem and Chicago rapper Common receiving criticism from national news outlets for their allegedly homophobic, hateful lyrics. The motivation for this type of behavior is relatively clear, given the parameters of the status economy I have discussed up to this point. If an MC is found to be a homosexual, it would cripple his ability to command respect in the status economy. In battle contexts in particular, this type of discourse is very common, as the immediate implications of alleged homosexual behavior are difficult for the target to dispel within the tight time constraints of a battle.

Bay Area writer Davey D (1997), one of the nation’s most well known and respected hip hop journalists, notes that:

We must keep in mind that hip hop was initially born out of street culture.. That culture has required one to be hard.. and strong.. [sic] That runs counter to the stereotypes associated with being gay...Because street culture has routinely victimized those who are perceived as weak..or soft.. [sic] admitting to be gay could have serious and even fatal consequences.

The idea of hip hop’s being promoted as a “hard,” streetwise culture is nothing new. Norman (2001: 4), citing Robin Kelley, states, “Because the record industry markets rap as a profane, masculine street music, selling the bodies of the performers is as important as producing the music.” The constraints imposed by the music industry complicate the process of negotiating sexual identity in hip hop. As a result, Davey D’s point that openly homosexual rappers may incur serious consequences rings true. Openly queer hip hop artists are few and far between, and those that exist lag far behind mainstream artists

in album sales and overall popularity. There are some indicators that the “homo hop” movement is gaining strength, especially on the West Coast, but for the time being, hip hop is still governed almost exclusively by the heteronormative constraints discussed up to this point.

Recalling Tricia Rose’s (1994) statement that “rap music and video are wrongly labeled as thoroughly sexist but rightfully lambasted for their sexism,” it is important to note that some hip hop artists are attempting to buck the trend and alter the public perception of their sociolinguistic behavior. Black Thought, head MC of the Philadelphia hip hop group The Roots, uses the song “Pussy Galore” (2002) to comment on the societal factors which give rise to this type of behavior. A selection of the song is included as an illustrative example below:

1 Yo, my own head once said, it’s more powerful than cocaine
2 Freaks dancin’ in a line like Soul Train
3 To get your pride up, that extra push
4 Niggas lookin for the time of their life, coppin a rush
5 Yo I know sis, dawg, her name Lorraine
6 She’s a thick brick house with a chocolate frame
7 I went to school with her
8 Twelfth grade, I used to fool with her
9 She put me on with her squad, I got cool with her
10 She used to say she wanted to be a doctor
11 And couldn’t nothin stop her from getting up that cash
12 For tuition, even if she had to shake that ass
13 Fucked up, her money ain’t accumulatin that fast
14 Lorraine know it’s on the real, ‘cause sex control America
15 Turn the TV on, it’s in the open on the regular, yo
16 What the freaks in the video for?
17 Fuck a song, gimme a thong, and more pussy galore
18 You see, life is about marketing pussy galore

Thought begins by relating the story of a high school friend of his who had to strip (i.e., “shake that ass”) to pay her medical school tuition, only to find that she did not earn as

much as she thought she would. This friend, a woman named Lorraine, knows “it’s on the real” – that is, she knows the considerable power sex wields in society. In line 16, Thought’s rhetorical question seems to be directed toward many of his contemporaries – why include gratuitous women dancing in a video rather than focus on the song? “Life,” states Thought, “is about marketing pussy galore.” Or, in more familiar terms, sex sells, and is used extensively to sell hip hop.

Black Thought is not alone in the use of his art form as a force for to decry the subjugation of women through rap music. Talib Kweli’s “For Women,” from the *Train of Thought* album (2000), relates a heart-wrenching narrative about a 107-year-old woman who has endured the horrors of slavery and Reconstruction. Kweli juxtaposes this story with a more current one about a girl who is raised in the streets of Harlem and forced to work the streets as a prostitute to survive. The parallel life paths of these women paint a stark picture of the realities of the ghetto. Subsequently, the listener is invited to question whether society promotes this type of lifestyle. Black Thought and Kweli are among the MCs commonly referred to as “conscious rappers,” meaning that they use their art to address social issues such as racism and misogyny. However, even the label “conscious rapper” can be a barrier to financial success in the music industry, and many rappers actively reject this label. Returning to Mos Def’s “Close Edge” (2004), we see this explicit denial:

Stop with the nonsense
Like “he conscious”
I’m just awake, dawg
I’m doing great, dawg
I don’t play games, so I don’t play-a-hate, dawg
Get it straight or get the fuck up out my face, dawg.

Similarly, Talib Kweli rejects his status as a conscious rapper in “Good To You,” the first single of his 2002 record *Quality*: “Some people say that I’m a conscious rapper / But I’m a monster when I have to slap the shit out of a nonsense actor.” The ambiguous status of conscious rapping within the hip hop community emphasizes the unconventional value assigned to intelligence – that is, being aware of social issues is important, but it is commercially unacceptable for this to be the sole feature of an MC’s rhymes. Such an MC might be labeled a *playa-hater*, one who speaks up against the *playa* lifestyle promoted by so much modern hip hop.

On another front, queer hip hop artists, such as the Bay Area’s DeepDickollective, have confronted the heterosexual ideologies underlying hip hop on their records, during interviews, and in the press. PhatFamily.org, a website of resources for queer hip hop fans and artists, has even created “DaDisList,” an archive of anti-homosexual lyrics from hip hop songs. Although DaDisList is quite long, it is by no means comprehensive. Instead, it serves as a microcosm of the vast amounts of homophobic discourse which pervades contemporary hip hop. Davey D (1997) cautions against homophobia’s potential to divide the hip hop community, which inhibits the community’s ability to enact positive social change and gain mainstream acceptance:

Here we have a community of people who are constantly being discriminated against and like everyone else we within hip hop have to come to terms with our own prejudices and homophobia.. We can’t call foul when we’re being hit and the head [sic] and then turn around and do the same thing to some one else. We can’t get upset when society wants to persecute and malign hip hop while we’re persecuting and maligning gays.

Tim’m West, aka 25percenter, a queer rapper in San Francisco’s DeepDickollective, notes that the presence of gay male rappers is not welcome in the cipher, as it completely disrupts the discourse dynamic of battling. Heterosexual battle MCs are denied recourse

to their opponent's sexuality as material out of which to construct rhymes. As a result, the battle becomes more an exhibition of technical proficiency than a display of masculine bravado. The stakes are extremely high in this type of battle, as 25percenter describes below:

They knew who [Ampu (another member of the group) and I] were, and as soon as we walked up to the cipher, they just stopped. They didn't want us to join in. It's that discomfort of "If my skill is also bound up in the fact that I'm a hetero, and being hetero in my mind is also being better than or more talented than a gay rapper, what if a gay rapper comes up there and out-rhymes me?" First of all, I sit around a gay youth center where black sissies talk about each other in ways you don't even want to step into [*Ampu, Kalamka, and Brown break into laughter*]. I know what to say about you to make you feel bad. Gay people master the dozens, and when they get together, it's what black gays call "reading." You don't want to step in the middle of that. (Nowinski 2002)

Returning to my analysis of battle discourse, I will show through the examples below that highly heteronormative discourse, particularly that which glorifies stereotypically masculine behavior or undermines women or homosexuals, is extremely popular in battles. The examples below illustrate some of the ways in which these themes surface in battle contexts.

4.2. Case Study: *Takeover Redux*

To begin my analysis, I will return to a previously referenced section of "Takeover," repeated below:

- 1 You bringin them boys to men
- 2 How them boys gon' win?
- 3 This is grown man B-I
- 4 Get you rolled into triage, biatch

Sutton (1995), along with others, have discussed contemporary terms used to refer to women, noting the prevalence of animal metaphors and synecdoche, such as referring to women by body parts alone (e.g., using *pussy* to refer to a woman). Sutton hypothesizes

that the prevalence of animal metaphors is used to enhance male dominance, as human beings have historically exerted power over animals. The prevalence of “bitch” and its variations in hip hop is a prime example of Sutton’s ideas. By labeling Nas as a bitch, Jay-Z has simultaneously referred to him as a female and a dog, thereby exerting twofold domination over him.

Later, Jay takes advantage of gender presuppositions to portray Prodigy of Mobb Deep, who is also a target of “Takeover”, as an emasculated figure.

1 I don’t care if you Mobb Deep, I hold triggers to crews
2 You little fuck, I got money stacks bigger than you
3 When I was pushin weight back in eighty-eight
4 You was a ballerina, I got the pictures I seen ya
5 Then you dropped “Shook Ones”, switched your demeanor
6 Well, we don’t believe you, you need more people.

In the Summer Jam premier of “Takeover”, Jay-Z took advantage of the large on-stage video monitors to show the audience pictures of a young Prodigy in a dancer’s outfit. This multimedia attack, both visual and sonic in nature, is intended to portray Prodigy as a participant in an activity historically considered as associated with women. The purpose of such discourse is to create an image of Prodigy, and later Nas, as figures who are feminine, and therefore easily dominated within the paradigm of the hip hop status economy. Also, the declaration in line 6 that Prodigy lacks credibility because he “need[s] more people” reaffirms Goodwin’s (1990) notion that credibility in a social setting is often a direct function of participant alignment. Jigga continues on the theme of feminine-associated activities in his attack on Nas in a subsequent verse:

1 You’s the fag model for Karl Kani and Esco ads
2 Went from Nasty Nas to Esco's trash
3 Had a spark when you started but now you're just garbage

In addition to being a female-associated occupation, modeling also carries with it implications of homosexuality due to its connection with admiration of the male body. Jay raises the theme of homosexuality from the realm of the implied to the explicit in referring to Nas as a “fag model” in line 3 above. Jay’s rhymes here are an instantiation of Cameron’s (1998) claim that one of the most effective ways to assert one’s masculinity is to portray others as homosexual or feminine. To do so effectively marginalizes them in the status economy of hip hop culture, which is built around heterosexual male norms. Marginalized participants in a competitive discourse environment are far less likely to regain their lost status due to inability to rally the support of the audience. This is particularly true in the context of the battle, where Jay-Z has fired the first shots, and Nas is left to respond, which he does in the form of “Ether”, which is analyzed below.

4.3. Case Study: *Ether*

Nas’ “Ether,” from the album *Stillmatic* (2001), minces no words from the early goings. The intro features gunshots in a percussive cadence, with a voice repeatedly declaring, “Fuck Jay-Z,” as Nas sets up his counterattack with the following:

- 1 What’s up niggas, ayyo, I know you ain’t talking about me dog
- 2 You been on my dick nigga, you know you love my style nigga

Homosexuality is one of the primary themes that runs throughout “Ether.” The theme affords Nas a myriad of opportunities for wordplay, but here he is slightly more direct, suggesting that Jay-Z is no more than a groupie – a “dick rider” in the hip hop lexicon. “Dick riding,” as Nas uses it here, may be loosely described as a male expressing such admiration or jealousy of another male’s skill that the interest he expresses carries with it implications of a homosexual attraction; literally, the term refers to homosexual

intercourse. Nas states here that Jay is so in love with his style that he has been reduced to dick rider status. The thread of homosexuality is picked back up after the first verse:

1 Ayyo, pass me the weed, pour my ashes out on these niggas man
2 Hey, y'all faggots, y'all kneel and kiss the fuckin ring

In this excerpt, “faggots” becomes an address term, accompanied by Nas’ demands that the “faggots” kneel and kiss his ring, a gesture often reserved for the presence of royalty. The threat in line 1 is a symbolic gesture to show the insignificance of Nas’ opponents, indicating that he would not think twice before pouring ashes on them.

Nas’ considerable skill as an MC allows him to embed insults into his delivery, and much like Jigga, he spends a significant amount of time hyping his own rhyming skills, as well as dropping complex rhymes which are a direct product of those skills.

Nas’ skill at rhyming is evident in the following lengthy verse:

1 When these streets keep callin, heard it when I was sleep
2 That this Gay-Z and Cock-A-Fella Records wanted beef
3 Started cockin up my weapon, slowly loadin up this ammo
4 To explode it on a camel, and his soldiers, I can handle
5 ...
6 Dick suckin lips, whyn't you let the late, great veteran live

Again, Nas draws on homosexuality as a theme, thereby seeking to undermine the closeness of Jay-Z with the Roc-A-Fella Family. Nas employs the strategy of portraying Jay-Z and the Family as homosexuals to suggest that the audience alignment Jay has built up against him is founded on a value which would cripple a man’s standing in the status economy, which is predicated on heterosexual masculine norms. His wordplay in line 2, while not particularly original, serves its purpose, which is to reiterate the homosexuality of Jay’s entire crew. The reference to Jay’s “duck suckin lips” in line 6 is also noteworthy given the context in which it occurs. In his discussion of ritual insult among

African American teenagers, Labov (1972) notes that insults involving the target's lips take advantage of the popular stereotype that African Americans have big lips. Nas levers this stereotype further, dovetailing it with Jay's alleged homosexuality, to suggest that his adversary's stereotypically large lips would be an advantage in giving oral sex.

With this established, Nas uses some complex rhyme schemes and metaphor to drive his point home. Lines 2 and 3 feature a six-syllable rhyme, a rare poetic accomplishment in hip hop, in which Nas rhymes "Cock-A-Fella Records" with "cockin' up my weapon." The second half of this sextuple bridge rhyme (Alim 2003) introduces a metaphor of gunplay, and we see from Nas' slow, deliberate loading of his weapons in line 3 that he appears to be savoring the ritualistic aspect of loading before unleashing a verbal barrage on the unsuspecting "soldiers" of the Roc-A-Fella Family. The verse is closed with a reference to the late rapper Notorious B.I.G, bringing it back full circle to the concept of homosexuality, this time tinged with the stigma that even after death, B.I.G. is haunted by the "dick suckin lips" of dick riders such as Jay-Z.

Another example of Nas' ability to work the outside world into his rhymes to great effect is found below. While it may seem that Nas relies too heavily on homosexuality as a component of his battle rhymes, he is merely using what is an established tactic in the hip hop community. To be associated with homosexuality is one of the worst fates than can befall a rapper, as it completely decimates his status in the social economy. The last example I will treat of highly heteronormative language from "Ether" comes in the form of a history lesson about the life of John D. Rockefeller:

1 Rockefeller died of AIDS, that was the end of his chapter
2 And that's the guy y'all chose to name your company after?
3 Put it together, I rock hoes, y'all rock fellas
4 And now y'all try to take my spot, fellas?

In line 3, Nas juxtaposes his heterosexuality – *rockin'* (having sex with) hoes – with the homosexuality of Jay's crew, who both in name and, as Nas would have us believe, in deed – rock fellas. Again, the issue of homosexuality is brought up through the mention of AIDS in line 1, with all the underlying presuppositions of AIDS as a homosexual disease. Furthermore, the use of the address term "fellas" in line 4 establishes the line's tone as an incredulous one, the implication being that Nas can hardly believe such a worthless crew would attempt to overthrow his dominance of the hip hop world.

"Ether" also features some direct responses to charges leveled at Nas by Jay in "Takeover," culminating with Nas' verbal hijacking of Jay-Z's own verse, which he uses against him. I will now analyze two examples of this type of response, beginning with Nas' reply to Jigga's "ballerina" verse in "Takeover":

1 In '88 you was gettin chased through your buildin
2 Callin my crib and I ain't even give you my numbers
3 All I did was gave you a style for you to run with
4 Smilin in my face, glad to break bread with the god

Contrary to Jigga's claim that he was "pushing weight" in 1988, Nas paints a picture of a scared Jay-Z being chased through his own building, calling on Nas for help when Nas has not even acknowledged his existence with something as basic as a phone number. He goes on to claim that Jay's style is nothing but an offshoot of his own. The last line of this excerpt leaves a sycophantic Jigga happy just to break bread with Nas. Interestingly, the prevalence of God imagery in Nas' lyrics runs counter to Jay-Z's claim in "Takeover" that he is the "God MC...Jay-Hova."

Another example of a direct response to material presented in "Takeover" addresses the notion that Nas' "shit is garbage", although in this case Nas does not offer a direct example of his rhyming skill as counterevidence for this claim. Instead, he creates

an image in the listener’s mind of Jay-Z held at gunpoint, which effectively strips Jay’s rhyme of any effectiveness it may have had. Effectively, Nas invites the reader to ask the question, what good is talk if the person talking could be gunned down at any moment?

- 1 How could Nas be garbage?
- 2 Semi-autos at your cartilage
- 3 Burner at the side of your dome, come outta my throne

Finally, near the conclusion of “Ether”, Nas attempts to outdo Jay-Z on his own rhymes. The track winds up with the following parody of the hook of “Takeover”:

- 1 Ha, R-O-C get gunned up and clapped quick
- 2 J.J. Evans get gunned up and clapped quick
- 3 Your whole damn record label gunned up and clapped quick
- 4 Shaun Carter to Jay-Z, damn you on Jaz dick
- 5 So little shorty's gettin gunned up and clapped quick
- 6 How much of Biggie's rhymes is gon' come out your fat lips?
- 7 Wanted to be on every last one of my classics
- 8 You pop shit, apologize, nigga, just aks Kiss

This final verse functions as a summary of sorts for the track, resurrecting the themes of homosexuality (line 4) and military metaphors (lines 1-3, 5). Additionally, the two-syllable rhyme of “clapped quick” is repeated at the conclusion of each line, paralleling a similar structure used by Jigga in the hook of “Takeover”, as follows, with the boldfaced words in each line exhibiting matching vowel sounds, as indicated by the phonetic symbols in line 3:

- | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----|------------------|------|----------------|--------------|
| 1 | R-O-C | is | runnin | this | rap | shit |
| 2 | R-O-C | get | gunned up | and | clapped | quick |
| 3 | | | [ʌ] | | [æ] | [ɪ] |

By appropriating Jigga’s basic syllable structure and melody for his own rhymes, Nas has removed him, at least in part, from his own body of work. In doing so, he has somewhat mollified the effect of Jigga’s rhymes. In effect, Nas has proven that Jay-Z cannot even excel in his own environment, which decreases his overall effectiveness in

the battle. Much in the same way Jay-Z has marginalized Nas through his manipulation of the context in which “Takeover” was introduced, Nas has excised Jay-Z from his own rhymes in an attempt to marginalize him from his own discourse, much in the same way that Jay contends that he took Nas’ rhymes and made them from a “hot line” into a “hot song.” Both “Takeover” and “Ether” are prime example of some of the major tactics of successful battle discourse. In addition to reaffirming the necessity of a positive audience alignment to ensure the successful expression of ideas, they reveal the primary social values which factor into the construction of social identity and status in the hip hop community, as well as the intimate connection between heteronormative behavior and masculinity.

5. Discussion

Although this project is in its incipient phases, it raises some important questions about the social aspects of hip hop language, and begins to lay the foundation for some possible explanations for this type of language activity. To dismiss hip hop language as “lazy English” or any of the other labels routinely attached to nonstandard language varieties is to ignore the complex social realities and networks which serve as the backdrop for the rich language of the Hip Hop Nation. Under any circumstances, it would be incredibly difficult to deny the significant and expanding global influence of hip hop. For example, Ian Condry (2001) discusses hip hop as a carrier for the globalization of popular culture. Condry’s study of Japanese hip hop culture demonstrates the art form’s popularity and power worldwide. Presently, scholars in linguistics and other disciplines are conducting field work throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa, exploring the impact of hip hop culture.

Following Fairclough’s (1995) idea that discourse provides insight into the belief networks, social hierarchies, and interactional parameters of society, it is crucial that we recognize the potential of hip hop to expand our understanding of the many cultures vying for social and ideological space in American society. Too often, minority cultures are a convenient scapegoat for the problems of society, but cultural elements such as language are often indicative of larger social trends and ingrained ideologies, just a few of which have been the subject of discussion of the preceding chapters. As Rose (1994) states, it is right to combat ideas such as sexism and misogyny that are prevalent in hip hop, but it is wrong to identify hip hop as the point of origin of these ideologies. Instead,

hip hop can and should be used as an avenue to explore and challenge the dominant ideologies which perpetuate divisions between groups.

Battling is an especially intriguing type of discourse because its intrinsically competitive character forces some of these ideologies to the surface. However, it is also important to realize that not all hip hop discourse can be taken at face value. Despite social and financial pressures to avoid overtly conscientious behavior which might be perceived as weak or soft, many MCs are now recognized as “conscious rappers,” and most contemporary hip hop artists deal with issues of prejudice and racism, linguistic or otherwise at least somehow in their work. Still others, such as Big L, use their art form as a vehicle to celebrate the diverse language and culture which has fueled hip hop’s rise to mainstream fame. Even those rappers who are widely considered to be more conscious, such as Common, will use the discourse devices discussed throughout this paper in contexts where social status is at stake. On “Dooinit” (2000), a song written as part of a beef with Ice Cube, Common raps, “Niggas ain’t hate you / They ain’t payin you no attention / In a circle of faggots / Your name is mentioned.”

Although Common and Ice Cube were involved in a fairly well-publicized beef, this type of discourse can even occur among friends and acquaintances who operate in the same social circles. In this sense, battling is a more current incarnation of “the dozens,” as studied by Labov (1972a) and others. The dozens is most often described as the trading of ritualized insults among groups of friends, with the objective of trying to make others in the circle lose their cool. Similarly, battling might occur within social circles between people who are otherwise friends, but when people square off in the cipher, the gloves come off and anything is fair game. Since the most damaging fate that can befall

a rapper is to be associated with any value that runs counter to the code of the street, especially homosexuality, these are all acceptable insinuations to make in a battle, even if they are known to be untrue.

This being the case, it is important to treat hip hop discourse with care, especially when dealing with it from an analytical standpoint. Modern society has been all too quick to classify certain hip hop discourse as objectionable. Subsequently, this “objectionable” discourse has been taken as representative of the entire genre. As I have hopefully demonstrated above, this is not the case. Hip hop discourse arises from a highly complex set of social circumstances which must be thoughtfully considered and factored in when analyzing hip hop language in particular, and, more generally, the role of discourse-level linguistic behavior in organizing and negotiation of social groups.

Hip hop has been described many different ways by many different people, but one element many of these descriptions have in common is that it is a music of the people, born out of a culture which differs considerably from mainstream norms, and it is this divergence from mainstream culture which has established hip hop as a significant contender for ideological space in contemporary society. Hip hop music routinely deals with such subjects as hate crimes, police brutality, and even linguistic prejudice. Hip hop gives a voice to many people who have been deprived of their ability to speak. Even now, the Hip Hop Nation is expanding its borders to include people from all walks of life, and Hip Hop Nation Language continues to give a voice to those who have lacked it. 25percent of the DeepDick collective alludes to this fact in discussing the complex task his group faces when negotiating social characterizations:

We're not comfortable for black gay people; we're not a comfortable act for white gay people, white straight people, black straight people. We draw people who are

actually thinking about identity – dealing with their racism and erotophobia. You don't get to be this cool gay white guy and not called out in some regards. But there are audiences that do get committed to the ideas that we're talking about, and they are doing some soul-searching... What the D/DC is doing is not about homohop, and it's not really about gay people in hip hop. What it's really about is, we are rappers who believe, struggle, and fight for freedom inside of hip hop to the utmost degree. (Nowinski 2002)

Ultimately, this appears to be the true mission of the Hip Hop Nation – to represent disenfranchised cultures, and give a voice to those who have been silenced. Although battling has been the focus of this paper, I do not intend that it be taken as representative of hip hop discourse in general. Rather, I have used battling as a way to explore and hopefully explode some of the myths surrounding hip hop culture by elucidating the circumstances which gave rise to this type of language use. I have not undertaken this goal in an effort to provide excuses for this type of language use; the warnings of Tricia Rose and Davey D continually ring true here – oppressive language behavior, whatever its form, perpetuates divisions between groups of people, and ultimately retards successful communication and true multiculturalism. Perhaps more than anything else, language allows us unprecedented insight into the human condition, and can allow us as humans to actively question and even attempt to fix some of the problems plaguing society.

As previously mentioned, battling is but a small part of hip hop discourse, but from the standpoint of critical discourse analysis, it is perhaps the most useful. On a local level, battles and beefs are about status. When considered more globally, though, they become a microcosm for the perpetual status struggle which is seemingly endemic to human culture. Brooklyn-based MC Mos Def says this with more eloquence than I could

ever muster, and thus I will conclude with the full text of the Black Star song, “What’s Beef,” (Kweli & Mos Def 2003) which lent its name to this paper³:

Beef is not what Jay said to Nas
Beef is when the workin folks can’t find jobs
So they tryna find niggas to rob
Tryna find bigger guns so they can finish the job
Beef is when the crack babies can’t find moms
Cause they in a pine box or locked behind bars
Beef ain’t the Summer Jam for Hot 9-7
Beef is the cocaine and AIDS epidemic
Beef don’t come with a radio edit
Beef is when the judge is callin you defendant
Beef, it come with a long jail sentence
Handed down to you in a few short minutes
Beef is when your girl come through for a visit
Talkin bout “I’m pregnant
By some other nigga”
Beef is high blood pressure and bad credit
Need a loan for your home but you’re too broke to get it
And all your little kids is doin is getting bigger
You tryin not to raise them around these wild niggas
Beef is when a gold digger got your seat and a
A manicured hand out like, “Pay me nigga”
Or I’m telling your wife
Or start up some foul rumor that’ll ruin your life
Beef is when a gangsta ain’t doin it right
Another gangsta done decided what to do with his life
Beef is not what these famous niggas do on the mic
Beef is what George Bush would do in a fight
Yeah, beef isn’t what Ja said to 50
But beef is more than Irv not bein here with me
When a soldier ends his life with his own gun
Beef is tryna figure out what to tell his son
Beef is oil prices and geopolitics
Beef is Iraq the West Bank and Gaza Strip
Some beef is big and some beef is small
But what y’all call beef is not beef at all
Beef is real life happenin every day
And it’s realer than them songs that you gave to Kay Slay

³ This song was originally performed by Talib Kweli and Mos Def on the television program *Chappelle’s Show*; additionally, it has appeared on radio freestyles and mix tapes of indeterminate origin. Different performances of the song have included small lyrical variations from what is found above. I have cited the *Chappelle’s Show* performance in this paper, as its origin and publication information was the easiest to ascertain.

This has been a real nigga P-S-A
From Mos Def, Pretty Flaco, Black Dante
And the Black Star Embassy, B to the K!

References

- Alim, H. Samy (2003). "On Some Serious Next Millennium Rap Ishhh: Pharoahe Monch, Hip Hop Poetics, and the Internal Rhymes of *Internal Affairs*." *Journal of English Linguistics*, 2003, 31: 60-84.
- (2004). "Hip Hop Nation Language." In Edward Finegan and John Rickford (eds.), *Language in the USA: Themes for the 21st Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (forthcoming). "Nation Language in the African Diaspora: Language Use in Contemporary African American Expressive Culture. In Arthur Spears (ed.), *Black Language - The United States and the English-Speaking Caribbean: Education, History, Structure, and Use*.
- Anderson, Elijah (1999). *Code of the Street*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Big L (2000). *The Big Picture*. Priority Records.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson (1987). "Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage." In Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (eds.), *The Discourse Reader*, 321-335. New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1991). "Language and Symbolic Power." In Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (eds.), *The Discourse Reader*, 502-513. New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, Deborah (1998). "Performing Gender Identity". In Jennifer Coates (ed.), *Language and Gender: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Common (2000). *Like Water For Chocolate*. MCA.
- Condry, Ian (2001). "Japanese Hip hop and the Globalization of Popular Culture." In G. Gmelch and W. Zenner (eds.), *Urban Life*, 4th ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Cutler, Cecilia (1999). "Yorkville Crossing: White teens, hip hop, and African American English." *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 3(4): 428-442.
- D, Davey (1997). "Gays, Lesbians and Hip Hop Culture: Special Editorial." <http://www.daveyd.com/gaynews.html>.
- Eyedeade and Shells (2001). *Battle*.
<http://www.soundclick.com/bands/3/lyricaldaddymusic.htm/>
- Fairclough, Norman (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.

- Fitzgerald, Kevin (director) and Henry Alex Rubin (producer) (2002). *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* [Motion picture]. Organic Films.
- Fricke, Jim and Charlie Ahearn (2002). *Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project History of Hip Hop's First Decade*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- George, Nelson (1998). *Hip Hop America*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Goffman, Erving (1967). *Interaction Ritual*. New York: Pantheon.
- Goffman, Erving (1981). *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goodwin, Marjorie (1990). *He Said She Said: Talk as Social Organization Among Black Children*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.
- Hanson, Curtis (director/producer), Brian Grazer, and Jimmy Iovine (producers) (2002). *8 Mile*. Imagine Entertainment.
- Hilliard, Sarah (2003). "Functions of *Yo* in discourse." Presentation at the North Carolina State University Colloquium on Discourse Analysis, Raleigh, NC.
- Kweli, Talib (2002). *Quality*. MCA.
- Kweli, Talib and DJ Hi-Tek (2000). *Train of Thought*. Priority.
- Kweli, Talib and Mos Def (2003). "What's Beef?" In Chappelle, David et. al. (writers), & Allen, Andre et. al. (directors), Armour, Michelle et. al. (producers) [Television series episode]. *Chappelle's Show*. New York: Pilot Boy Productions.
- Kweli, Talib, Mos Def, and Q-Tip (2001). "Make It All Better." *Master Vel: The Price of Freedom*. Nodlew Music.
- Jay-Z (2001a). *The Blueprint*. Roc-A-Fella Records.
- Jay-Z (2001b). *Unplugged*. Roc-A-Fella Records.
- Jay-Z (2003). *The Black Album*. Roc-A-Fella Records.
- Labov, William (1972a). *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- (1972b). "The recent history of some dialect markers on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Mass." In L. M. Davis (ed.), *Studies in Linguistics in Honor of Raven I. McDavid Jr.* University, Ala: University of Alabama Press.

- Ludacris (2000). *Back for the First Time*. Def Jam.
- McWhorter, John (1998). *Word on the Street: Debunking the Myth of a "Pure" Standard English*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.
- (2003). "How Hip hop Holds Blacks Back." *City Journal*, Summer 2003.
http://www.city-journal.org/html/13_3_how_hip_hop.html.
- Morgan, Marcyliena (2002). *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mos Def (2004). *The New Danger*. Geffen Records.
- Nas (2001). *Stillmatic*. Ill Will/Sony.
- Norman, Doug (2001). "The Identity Politics of Queer Hip Hop."
<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/%7Enorman/papers/QueerHipHop.pdf>.
- Nowinski, Amanda (2002). "Stick *this* into your mind."
http://www.sfbg.com/36/47/cover_dickcollective.html.
- The Original Hip Hop (Rap) Lyrics Archive. <http://www.ohhla.com>.
- Rickford, John R. and Russell Rickford (2000). *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- The Roots (2002). *Phrenology*. MCA.
- Rose, Tricia (1994a). *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- (1994b). "Contracting Rap: An Interview With Carmen Ashhurst-Watson." In Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (eds.), *Microphone Fiends*, 122-144. New York: Routledge.
- Rowe, Ryan (2004). "Towards a Performance Continuum: Situating the Hip Hop Register Within the Range of Self-Conscious Speech Styles." Presentation at the NWAV 33 Conference, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Smitherman, Geneva (2000). *Black Talk*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Spady, James, Charles Lee, and H. Samy Alim (1999). *Street Conscious Rap*. Philadelphia: Black History Museum/Umum Loh Publishers.

- Sutton, Laurel A (1995). "Bitches and Skankly Hobags: The Place of Women in Contemporary Slang." In Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz (eds.), *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. New York: Routledge.
- Wolfram, Walt (1996). Language Ideology and Dialect: Understanding the Ebonics Controversy." *Journal of English Linguistics* 26: 108-121.
- (2003). "Linguistic Subordination and Ethnolinguistic Identity: The Construction of African American Vernacular English."
<http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/cies/WolframPaper.htm>."
- Wolfram, Walt and Natalie Schilling-Estes (1998). *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Wolfram, Walt et. al. (2002). *Fine in the World: Lumbee Language in Time and Place*. Raleigh: North Carolina State University Humanities Extension.

Appendix

Full Text of Jay-Z's "Takeover", from the album *The Blueprint* (2001)

Woo!

R-O-C, we runnin' this rap shit
Memphis Bleek, we runnin' this rap shit
B-Mac, we runnin' this rap shit
Freeway, we run this rap shit
O and Sparks, we runnin' this rap shit
Chris and Nique, we runnin' this rap shit

The takeover, the break's over, nigga
God MC, me, Jay-Hova
Hey little soldier, you ain't ready for war
R-O-C too strong for y'all
It's like bringin' a knife to a gunfight, pen to a test
Your chest in the line of fire with your thin-ass vest
You bringin' them boys to men, how them boys gon' win?
This is grown-man B-I, get you rolled into triage, biatch
Your reach ain't long enough, dunny
Your peeps ain't strong enough, fucker
Roc-A-Fella is the army, better yet the navy
Niggas'll kidnap your babies, spit at your ladies
We bring knife to fistfight, kill your drama, unh
We kill you motherfuckin' ants with a sledgehammer
Don't let me do it to you, dunny, 'cause I'll overdo it
So you won't confuse it with just rap music.

R-O-C, we runnin' this rap shit
M-Easy, we runnin' this rap shit
Your Broad Street Bully, we runnin' this rap shit
You're zipped up in plastic, when it happens, that's it
Freeway, we runnin' this rap shit
O and Sparks, we runnin' this rap shit
Chris and Nique, we runnin' this rap shit
[KRS-One] Watch out, we run New York!

I don't care if you Mobb Deep, I hold triggers to crews
You little fuck, I got money stacks bigger than you
When I was pushin' weight, back in '88
You was a ballerina, I got your pictures, I seen ya
Then you dropped *Shook Ones*, switched your demeanor
Well, we don't believe you, you need more people
Roc-A-Fella, students of the game, we passed the class
'Cause nobody can read you dudes like we do

Don't let 'em gas you like Jigga is ass and won't clap you
Trust me on this one, I'll detach you
Mind from spirit, body from soul
They'll have to hold a mass, put your body in a hole
No, you're not on my level, get your brakes tweaked
I sold what your whole album sold in my first week
You guys don't want it with Hov'
Ask Nas, he don't want it with Hov', nooo!

R-O-C, we runnin' this rap shit
B-Siegel, we runnin' this rap shit
M-Easy, we runnin' this rap shit
You're zipped up in plastic, when it happens, that's it
O and Sparks, we runnin' this rap shit
Freeway, we runnin' this rap shit
Chris and Nique, we runnin' this rap shit
[KRS-One] Watch out, we run New York!

I know you missin' Nas the FAME!
But along with celebrity comes 'bout
Seventy shots to your frame, nigga
You a LAME!
You's the fag model for Karl Kani and Esco ads
Went from Nasty Nas to Esco's trash
Had a spark when you started
But now you're just garbage
Fell from top ten to not mentioned at all
To your bodyguard's "Oochie Wally" verse better than yours
Matter of fact, you had the worst flow in the whole fuckin' song
But I know, the sun don't shine, the sun don't shine
That's why your LAME career's come to an end
It's only so long fake thugs can pretend
Nigga, you ain't live it, you witnessed it from your folks' pad
You scribbled in your notepad, and created your life
I showed you first Tec on tour with Large Professor
Then I heard your album 'bout your Tec on the dressers
Oh yeah, I sampled your voice, you was usin' it wrong
You made it a hot line, I made it a hot song.
And you ain't get a coin, nigga, you was getting' fucked then
I know who I paid, God, Searchlight Publishing
Use your BRAIN
You said you been in this ten, I been in it five
Smarten up Nas
Four albums in ten years, nigga?
I can divide
That's one every let's say two

Two of them shits was due.
One was naaaah, the other was *Illmatic*
That's a one hot album every ten year average
And that's so LAME
Nigga switch up your flow
Your shit is garbage, but you try and kick knowledge?
You niggas gonna learn to respect to the king
Don't be the next contestant on that Summer Jam screen
Because you know who did you know what with you know who
Let's just keep that between me and you for now, nigga

R-O-C, we runnin' this rap shit
M-Easy, we runnin' this rap shit
Your Broad Street Bully, we runnin' this rap shit
You're zipped up in plastic, when it happens, that's it
Freeway, we runnin' this rap shit
O and Sparks, we runnin' this rap shit
Chris and Nique, we runnin' this rap shit
[KRS-One] Watch out, we run New York!

A wise man told me don't argue with fools
'Cause people from a distance can't tell who is who
So stop with that childish shit nigger, I'm grown
Please leave it alone, don't throw rocks at the throne
Do not bark up that tree, that tree will fall on you
I don't know why your advisors ain't forewarn you
Please, not Jay, he's not for play
I don't slack a minute, all that thug rappin' and gimmicks
I will end it, all that yappin' be finished
You are not deep, you made your bed, now sleep
Don't make me expose you to them folks that don't know you
Nigga, I know you well, all the /unclear/
Twinkletoes, you're breakin' my heart
Can't fuck wit me, go play somewhere, I'm busy
And all you other cats throwin' shots at Jigga
You only get half a bar – fuck y'all niggas

Full Text of Nas' "Ether", from the album *Stillmatic* (2001)

[gunshots]

[repeated background sample] Fuck Jay-Z

What's up niggas?

Aiyyo I know you ain't been talkin bout me dawg. You? What?

You been on my dick nigga, you love my style, nigga

[I] Fuck with your soul like ether

[will] Teach you the king, you know you

[not] "God's Son" across the belly

[lose] I prove you lost already

Brace yourself for the main event

Y'all impatiently waiting, it's like a AIDS test, what's the results?

Not positive. Who's the best? Pac, Nas, and BIG

Ain't no best, east, west, north, south, flossed out, greedy

I embrace y'all with napalm

Blowed up, no guts, left chest, face gone

How can Nas be garbage?

Semiautos at your cartilage

Burner at the side of your dome

Come outta my throne

I got this locked since nine-one

I am the truest

Name a rapper that I ain't influenced

Gave y'all chapters, but now I keep my eyes on the Judas

With Hawaiian Sophie fame, kept my name in his music, check it

[I] Fuck with your soul like ether

[will] Teach you the king, you know you

[not] "God's Son" across the belly

[lose] I prove you lost already

Aiyyo, pass me the weed

Pour my ashes out on these niggas, man

Aiyyo, you faggots, y'all kneel and kiss the motherfuckin' ring

[I] Fuck with your soul like ether

[will] Teach you the king, you know you

[not] "God's Son" across the belly

[lose] I prove you lost already

I been fucked over, left for dead, dissed and forgotten

Luck ran out, they hoped that I'd be gone, stiff, and rotten

Y'all just piss on me, shit on me, spit on my grave
Talk about me, laugh behind my back, but in my face
Y'all some well wishin', friendly actin', envy havin' snakes
With yo' hands out for my money, man, how much can I take?
When these streets keep callin', heard it when I was sleep
That this Gay-Z and Cock-A-Fella Records wanted beef
Started cockin' up my weapon, slowly loadin' up this ammo
To explode it on a camel and his soliders I can handle
This for dolo, and his manuscript just sounds stupid
When KRS already made a album called *Blueprint*
First Biggie's your man, then you got the nerve to say
That you better than BIG, dick suckin' lips
Won't you let the late, great veteran live?

[I]
[will]
[not] "God's Son" across the belly
[lose] I prove you lost already

The king is back
Where my crown at?
Ill Will rest in peace, let's do it niggas

[I] Fuck with your soul like ether
[will] Teach you the king, you know you
[not] "God's Son" across the belly
[lose] I prove you lost already

Y'all niggas deal with emotions like bitches
What's sad is I love you 'cause you're my brother
You traded your soul riches
My child, I've watched you grow up to be famous
And now I smile like a proud dad
Watchin' his only son that made it
You seem to be only concerned with dissin' women
Were you abused as a child?
Scared to smile, they called you ugly?
Well, life is harsh, hug me, don't reject me
Or make records to disrespect me, blatant or indirectly
In '88, you was gettin' chased through your building
Callin' my crib and I ain't even give you my numbers
All I did was give you a style for you to run with
Smilin' in my face, glad to break bread with the god
Wearin' Jaz chains, no Tecs, no cash, no cars
No jail bars, Jigga, no pies, no cakes
Just Hawaiian shirts hanging with Little Chase

You a fan, a phony, a fake, a pussy, a Stan
I still whip your ass, you 36 in a karate class?
You Tae-Bo ho, you tryna work it out
You tryna get brolic? Ask me if I'm tryna kick knowledge?
Nah, I'm tryna kick the shit you need to learn though
That ether, that shit that make your soul burn slow

Is he Dame Diddy, Dame Daddy, or Dame Dummy?
Oh, I get it you Biggie and he's Puffy
Rockefeller died of AIDS, that was the end of his chapter
And that's the guy y'all chose to name your company after?
Put it together, I rock hoes, y'all rock fellas
And now y'all tryna take my spot fellas?
Philly's hot rock fellas, put you in a dry spot fellas
In a pine box with nine shots from my glock, fellas
Foxy got you hot cause you kept your face in her puss
What you think, you gettin' girls now because of your looks?
Negro please, you no mustache havin',
With whiskers like a rat, compared to Beans you wack
And your man stabbed Un and made you take the blame
You ass went from Jaz to hangin' with Kane, to Irv, to BIG
And Eminem murdered you on your own shit
You a dick riding faggot, you love the attention
Queens niggas run you niggas, ask Russell Simmons

Ha, R-O-C get gunned up and clapped quick
J.J. Evans get gunned up and clapped quick
Your whole damn record label gunned up and clapped quick
Shawn Carter to Jay-Z, damn you on Jaz dick
So little shorties gettin' gunned up and clapped quick
How much of Biggie's rhymes is gon' come out your fat lips, nigga?
Wanted to be on every last one of my classics
You pop shit, apologize, nigga, just ask Kiss

Full Text of Eminem vs. Papa Doc, Final Battle, from the film *8 Mile* (2001)

Now everybody from the 3-1-3
Put your motherfuckin hands up and follow me
Everybody from the 3-1-3
Put your motherfuckin hands up
Look, look
Now while he stands tough
Notice that this man did not have his hands up.
This Free World's got you gassed up
Now who's afraid of the big bad wolf?
One, two, three and to the four
One pac, two pac, three pac, four
Four pac, three pac, two pac, one
You're pac, he's pac, no pac, none.
This guy ain't no motherfuckin MC
I know everything he's 'bout to say against me
I am white, I am a fuckin bum.
I do live in a trailer with my mom.
My boy Future is an uncle Tom
I do got a dumb friend named Cheddar Bob
Who shoots himself in his leg with his own gun
I did get jumped
By all six of you chumps
And Wink did fuck my girl
I'm still standin' here screaming fuck the free world!
Don't ever try to judge me, dude
You don't know what the fuck I been through
But I know something about you
You went to Cranbrook, that's a private school!
What's the matter dog, you embarrassed?
This guy's a gangster? His real name's Clarence!
And Clarence lives at home with both parents
And Clarence parents have a real good marriage
This guy don't want to battle, he's shook
Cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks.
He's scared to death, he's scared to look
At his fuckin' yearbook. Fuck Cranbrook!
Fuck a beat, I'll go a cappella
Fuck a Papa Doc
Fuck a clock
Fuck a trailer
Fuck everybody
Fuck y'all if you doubt me
I'm a piece of fuckin white trash
I'll say it proudly

Fuck this battle, I don't wanna win, I'm outtie
Here, tell these people something they don't know about me.