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The Symbolic Consumption of Subcultures:

An Ethnographic Study of the Australian Hip Hop Culture

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the symbolic consumption practices of a subculture of consumption. The aim of this research was to use a grounded approach to examine the intersection between individuals' consumer identity projects and their participation and identification within a marketplace culture. The emergent theory is grounded in data collected from a four-year ethnography of the Australian Hip Hop culture. The methods used to triangulate the data comprised of prolonged participant observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant netnography and a progressive reading of the literature. Analysis of the data revealed a glocalised, countercultural male enclave where members overcame race and claimed authenticity. Two types of subcultural capital emerged from the data as being determinants of status within the subculture of consumption: an individual's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. These determinants contrast with the more commonplace assertion that subcultural status is determined by an individual's level of subcultural commitment. As such, this study advances our understanding of status conferral within marketplace cultures, and provides a valuable insight to marketing researchers and practitioners. In addition, the structure of the Australian Hip Hop culture was more fluid, contested and negotiated than those presented in previous studies, and as such, an alternative framework for assessing the structure of consumption-oriented subcultures is proposed. Finally, the findings of this study advance our understanding of the evolving nature of symbolic consumption within a consumption-oriented subculture. In doing so, this study contributes to the body of knowledge that examines subcultural production, sacred consumption, and the expression of authenticity, masculinity and countercultural values as individuals develop their consumer identity projects.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Patrick Cowling. You were proud of all my achievements and this would be no exception. Memories of our youth will live on forever.

Finally, I would like to thank my key informant Nixon and all members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. Whilst this is a marketing thesis, it is also a thesis about you, and the culture you love and respect.

Peace.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Arthur, Damien and Pascale Quester (2006) "Defining Authenticity: An Ethnographic Study of Australian Hip Hop," special session abstract in the proceedings for *Borderless Consumption: Asia Pacific Advances in Consumer Research,* Vol. 7, ed. Margaret Craig Lees, Gary Gregory and Teresa Davis, Sydney, Australia, 111-112.

Arthur, Damien (2006), "Media Consumption in the Australian Hip Hop Culture," abstract in the proceedings for Youth Media and Culture an International Symposium, Melbourne, Australia, 6.

Arthur, Damien (2004), "The Diffusion of Style: A Qualitative Investigation of Australian Hip Hop Culture," in the proceedings for *ANZMAC*, ed. Jim Wiley and Peter Thirkell, Wellington, New Zealand, CD-Rom.

Note: Pseudonyms used to identify some of the informants vary between articles and this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Subcultures of consumption are ubiquitous in modern society. Not only do they provide individuals with fulfilling leisure and non-work activities, many individuals incorporate their subcultural membership into their self-definition (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This study examines the nature of symbolic consumption within a subculture of consumption. Specifically, within the context of the Australian Hip Hop culture, the relationship between an individual's consumption practices and position within the subcultural status hierarchy is uncovered. This introductory chapter begins by providing background to the research. The significance of this research study is then discussed. An introduction to the grounded approach to theory generation and ethnographic methodology follows. This chapter concludes with a definition of key terms and an outline of the thesis.

1.2 Background of the Research

The past twenty years of consumer research have produced a number of studies addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption (for example Belk and Costa 1998; Kates 2002; Kozinets 2002a; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This research is unified in its attempt to address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings, and as such, has been defined as 'consumer culture theory' (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Of the four streams of consumer culture theory that were identified by Arnould and Thompson (2005), consumer identity projects and marketplace cultures are central to the theoretical underpinnings, and findings, of this research

project. Consumer identity projects deal with the ways in which individuals use consumption to develop and express their self-identity (e.g. Ahuvia 2005; Belk and Costa 1998; Fournier 1998; Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990; Holt 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Much of this research is reviewed in section 2.2 and suggests that consumers often purchase brands or products that communicate their self-identity to others. The marketplace culture stream of consumer culture theory examines the ways in which consumers develop unique subcultural groups in which members experience feelings of social solidarity through their pursuit of common consumption interests (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Much of this research is discussed in section 2.3 and suggests that a distinctive structure and status hierarchy exists within these subcultural groups (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Fox, 1987).

The aim of this research is to examine the intersection between individuals' consumer identity projects and their participation and identification within a marketplace culture. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to gain theoretical insights from an analysis of data obtained from an ethnographic investigation examining the role of brands within a subculture of consumption. As this study adopts a grounded approach, a research problem will not be explicitly stated from the onset. Rather than attempting to confirm or explore specific research questions, the grounded approach will allow new theories to emerge out of the slow inductive analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 1998; Lofland 1995).

1.3   Significance of the Research

The theoretical insights gained from the analysis make a number of significant contributions to the body of knowledge. First, the findings enhance our understanding

of the structure of a subculture of consumption. Specifically, a more fluid, contested and negotiated framework for assessing the structure of a subculture of consumption is proposed. As such, the research findings presented herein contribute to the body of knowledge that examines structure within marketplace cultures (e.g. Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

Second, the findings presented in this thesis uncover the determinants of status conferral within the Australian Hip Hop culture. These determinants contrast with the more commonplace assertion that subcultural status is determined by an individual's level of commitment (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). As such, in regards to status conferral, the findings of this study challenge the orthodoxy and advance the work of Thornton (1995a; 1995b) and Kates (2002). By shedding new light on the conferral of subcultural status, the findings presented herein fill a gap in the literature.

In addition, this study advances our understanding of the evolving nature of symbolic consumption within a consumption-oriented subculture. Specifically, the findings enhance our understanding of the relationship between an individual's self-concept and the symbolism within their consumption. In doing so, this study contributes to the body of knowledge that examines the expression of countercultural values (e.g. Willis 1978; Hebdige 1979; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), authenticity (e.g. Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh, Peters, and Shelton 2006), and masculinity (e.g. Holt and Thompson 2004; Sherry et al. 2001), and consumption of the sacred (e.g. Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) within consumer identity projects.

Finally, this study advances our understanding of the Australian Hip Hop culture, a rapidly growing consumption-oriented youth subculture. With the exception of an honours thesis (Masters 2002), the last in-depth investigation of the Australian Hip Hop culture was undertaken between August 1992 and October 1994 (Maxwell 2003). As such, a detailed examination of this rapidly growing youth subculture was long overdue. In addition, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Hip Hop outside of the USA (see for example the extraordinary range of studies presented in Mitchell's (2001) book 'Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop outside the USA').

1.4   Methodology

The Australian Hip Hop culture was chosen as the case to examine the nature of symbolic consumption within a consumption-oriented subculture as it is firmly rooted in the consumer based objects of music, clothes and symbols. Hip Hop culture revolves around four key activities: rapping, graffiti art, breakdancing and DJing, and originated in the South Bronx area of New York City during the early 1970s (Dyson 2004; Rose 1994). Since its inception, Hip Hop has become more than just a culture, it is also a profitable commodity, with hip hop music, fashion, and entertainment projected and consumed throughout the world. As most Australian youth have little to no direct interaction with US Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop in Australia was constructed circa 1983 almost entirely through an active social engagement with various forms of media which provided them with an understanding of the ideological constructs (Maxwell 2003). Over the past two decades, Hip Hop culture in Australia has embraced a number of distinguishing features that differentiates it from the US Hip Hop culture, while celebrating its place within the global Hip Hop community (Pollard 2003). Such culture creation came about through the fusion of local

conditions with the globally broadcast culture in a process known as 'glocalisation' (Masters 2001; Maxwell 2003; Robertson 1995). The creation of a glocalised Hip Hop culture has allowed the predominantly privileged and white members of the Australian Hip Hop culture to claim subcultural authenticity, despite their participation in what is often perceived as a subculture for the underprivileged and black.

As the aim of this study is to examine the intersection between individuals' consumer identity projects and their participation and identification within a marketplace culture, this study adopts an interpretive theoretical perspective. That is, as the main goal of interpretive research is to understand the construction of meaning within a social phenomenon (Silverman 2006), an interpretive theoretical perspective was deemed necessary to achieve the research objective. Given the research aim, a grounded approach to theory generation was utilised. This methodology is situated within the interpretive paradigm and is used to generate new theories that uncover what is occurring within social phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). An ethnography was chosen to examine the case as this approach can yield better insights into the way people interact with brands than more modernist approaches (Goulding 2003), and is particularly effective when little is known about a targeted group (Mariampolski 2006). Four methods of ethnographic research: prolonged participant observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and non-participant netnography were combined with a progressive review of the literature.

The ethnographic research took place over a four-year period. This extended presence and participation in the field allowed the researcher to 'learn the language' of those under investigation, and to experience life as one of the subjects (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). Furthermore, the researcher was able to undergo a process of socialisation where his standing in the subcultural hierarchy increased over time. During this period, the researcher kept field notes of his observations and informal conversations. In addition, the researcher kept a personal diary of the process, which was a useful record of his cognitive and emotional experience, and allowed him to conduct personal introspection (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000).

During the course of the study, 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken with individuals who had an active interest in the Australian Hip Hop culture. The researcher utilised guided introspection to obtain the necessary data. As he had obtained membership status himself, a good rapport with the informants was established, and hence the information was of quality (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000). This technique has been found to be particularly useful when cultural categories are under investigation (McCracken 1988b; Wells 1993). Furthermore, netnographic research of a web forum regularly visited by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture www.ozhiphop.com was conducted using the methods prescribed by Kozinets (2002b).

1.5   Definitions

Throughout this thesis, social groups that are focused around certain activities, values and material artefacts that are significantly distinct from the larger culture to which they belong will be referred to as 'subcultures'. The term subculture will be used as

opposed to the term 'sub-culture' as the former has become convention within the consumer culture theory literature (e.g. Arnould and Thompson 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). To avoid repetition, the terms 'subculture of consumption' and 'consumption-oriented subculture' will be used interchangeably and will refer specifically to a collective of individuals who identify with certain products, brands or consumption activities and through these products, brands or activities, forge feelings of social solidarity.

Throughout this thesis the term 'Hip Hop' will be used consistently to refer to the cultural entity under investigation. The individual words will be capitalised, separated and un-hyphenated as was convention in Maxwell's (2003) ethnography of the Australian Hip Hop culture. In contrast, 'hip hop' without capitalisations will be used to refer specifically to the variety of music associated with the culture. It seemed counterproductive to consistently refer to the music as 'rap', when in reality it is also referred to as hip hop, and not all music associated with the Hip Hop culture involves rapping.

1.6   Outline of the Thesis

The structured approach for presenting theses recommended by Perry (1998) was utilised as a starting point for the organisation of this thesis. Specifically, the information presented herein follows the broad five-section structure suggested by Perry, being an introduction, a literature review, a methodology, analysis of data, and conclusions and implications. However, as acknowledged by Perry (1998), a strict adherence to the intricacies of the suggested structure was not appropriate due to the grounded approach. Furthermore, while five of the chapters presented in this thesis

correspond precisely with one of the five sections recommended, Chapter 4 provides a rich description of the culture under investigation. This provision of context provides the reader with an understanding of the actual lived experiences of the subcultural participants and the researcher during the ethnography, a necessary requirement to clearly comprehend the findings presented in chapter 5.

The first chapter of this thesis has provided background to the research and outlined the significance of the study. A brief summary of the methodology has been provided, along with key definitions. As a background to the theory that underpins this thesis, Chapter 2 reviews two separate streams of consumer research, first outlining how individuals can represent the self via consumption, and second, how they can represent culture, and their place within it, via consumption. In dealing with the former, an examination of the symbolic nature of consumption is undertaken, followed by a critique of the body of empirical research that has tested the self-concept/product-image congruence theory. The notion of situational self-concept is examined, and then this section concludes with a discussion of two recent developments in self-identity and consumption literature: consumer identity projects and the extended self. The second half of this chapter begins with a brief examination of the nature of the relationship between culture and consumption. Next, the counterculture literature, specifically the Birmingham studies are summarised and critiqued. This is followed by a discussion of the relatively new concept of subculture of consumption. Chapter 2 concludes with an examination of the structure of consumption-oriented subcultures and the influence of subcultural capital on an individual's place within them.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology utilised to examine the consumption practices within the Australian Hip Hop Culture. First, a discussion of the relevance of the case under analysis is undertaken. A justification of the suitability of the ethnographic method for an examination of symbolic consumption practices follows. The grounded approach is then discussed, followed by an acknowledgement of the reflexive approach to data gathering and analysis that was utilised to inform the interpretations. Next, a discussion of how the evidence was triangulated to ensure validity is provided, and is followed by a discussion of the methods utilised to triangulate the data: prolonged participant observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant netnography and a progressive reading of the literature. Finally, the methods used to code, analyse and interpret the data are discussed, and a discussion of the relevant ethical considerations is provided.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description and thematic analysis of the subculture under investigation. As previously stated, the aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with the context necessary to understand the actual lived experiences of the subcultural participants and the researcher during the ethnography. This chapter begins by discussing Hip Hop's origins and its arrival in Australia, followed by an examination of Australian Hip Hop as a glocal subculture that has differentiated itself from the parent culture and developed into its own distinct entity. The next section describes Australian Hip Hop as a counterculture that provides space for members to develop and express their self-concepts alongside other members with similar interests, and to position their unique values, attitudes and opinions against the dominant and mass culture, and in relation to other youth subcultural groups. The next section analyses how the predominantly white members of the Australian Hip Hop

culture overcome their race and claim Hip Hop authenticity via proficient knowledge of, and respect toward, the culture, and truthful representation of their identity. The final section demonstrates that the Australian Hip Hop culture is a gender salient male enclave where members enact a rebel model of masculinity.

The findings of the analysis of consumption practices within the Australian Hip Hop culture are presented in chapter 5. This chapter begins with an analysis of status conferral within the subculture of consumption. Specifically, the relationship between one's position in the subcultural hierarchy and one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital is discussed. An analysis of the symbolic consumption of interested non-members follows. Specifically, their use of objectified subcultural capital to gain access to the community is examined. The next section examines the symbolic consumption of peripheral members who were found to use objectified subcultural capital to assert their membership, yet were required to participate in symbolic production to further enhance their standing in the status hierarchy. The consumption of a homologous style by soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture is then examined, and representations of their chosen element and geographic locale are analysed. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the varied symbolic consumption behaviour of hard-core members.

Chapter 6 begins with a discussion of the contributions this study has made to the academic literature. The practical implications are then discussed. The limitations of this study are highlighted, and directions for future research are proposed. This thesis concludes by highlighting the significance of the research project.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

2.1 Introduction

Studies of the concept of symbolic consumption and its ability to represent culture are a recent trend of marketing research. The research has stemmed from a wide range of academic fields: from marketing and consumer research to sociology and anthropology. Many marketing and consumer research studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of self-concept and its influence on purchasing behaviour (e.g. Belk 1988; Leigh and Gabel 1992; Onkvisit 1987; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983). Self-concept is relevant to the study of symbolic consumption because the image that a person has about him or herself can, in a variety of circumstances, dictate his or her purchasing patterns. That is, consumers often purchase brands or products that communicate the image and values they wish to express (Belk 1988; Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Grubb and Hupp 1968; Onkvisit 1987; Rosenberg 1979; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983). The image and values expressed depend not only on the material quality of the product, but also on its symbolic function. The cultural meaning conveyed by signs is relevant to the fields of anthropology, sociology and consumer research. In particular, subcultural theorists have contributed to our understanding of symbolic consumption by examining the cultural meaning individuals assign to products within societies (e.g. Arvidsson 2001; Clarke 1975b; Clarke et al. 1975; Hebdige 1975, 1979; Maffesoli 1996; McCracken 1986, 1988a; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Straw 1991; Thornton 1995a; Willis 1978).

As a background to the theory that underpins this thesis, this chapter reviews two separate streams of consumer research, first outlining how individuals can represent the self via consumption, and second, how they can represent culture, and their place within it, via consumption. In dealing with the former, this section begins with a brief examination of the symbolic nature of consumption. This is followed by a critique of the body of empirical research that has tested the self-concept/product-image congruence theory. The situational self-concept is then put forth as a better alternative to the proliferation of alternative selves. Finally, this section concludes with a discussion of two recent developments in self-identity and consumption literature: consumer identity projects and the extended self. The second half of this chapter begins with a brief examination of the nature of the relationship between culture and consumption. Next, the counterculture literature, specifically the Birmingham studies are summarised and critiqued. This is followed by a discussion of the relatively new concept of a subculture of consumption. The chapter concludes with an examination of the structure of consumption-oriented subcultures and the influence of subcultural capital on one's place within them.

2.2   Representing the Self via Consumption

2.2.1   The Symbolic Nature of Consumption

A lot of emphasis in marketing research has historically been placed on the functional utility of products. However, when purchasing and consuming products, people do not only consider the functional attributes but also the symbolic qualities the product may be able to communicate (Belk 1988; De Chernatony and McDonald 1992; Goffman 1959; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Mason 1981; McCracken 1988a; Onkvisit 1987; Ross 1971; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983). The notion that products and brands

act as cultural signs that allow individuals to interpret their surroundings and communicate meaningfully to others is a significant one for consumer research (Hall 1997; Solomon 1983).

Holbrook (1982, p.134) suggests that, "all products - no matter how mundane - may carry a symbolic meaning". The symbolic meaning that a product conveys is based on a multitude of factors, not just the physical characteristics of the product itself. These include, but are not limited to, the brand name, packaging, promotion, price, store-location, how the product was acquired, where the product was consumed, and other associations, such as spokespersons and stereotypes of the generalised or typical user (Fournier 1998; McCracken 1989; Sirgy 1982). Based on an assessment of these factors, individuals are able to interpret what is being communicated. For a product or brand to act as a sign and be encoded with meaning, the sign must be meaningfully interpreted or decoded by the receiver. If the receiver does not share the same cultural meaning for the commodity, the sign will be misinterpreted or ignored (Hall 1997).

For some products, for example a wedding ring, the symbolic meaning is especially rich, and often shared in interpretation. For other products, such as those received as gifts, the meaning derived may be less clear and/or diverse (Fournier 1998). Even a product as common place as a necktie, could be interpreted in a number of ways; from being a marker of distinction and a sign of success, to a symbol of oppression pulled tight like a noose around the neck. Similarly, a Muslim woman's hijab could be interpreted as an expression of her religion or as a symbol of oppression depending on who makes the interpretation. As such, it is important to note that the meaning that one person derives from the consumption of a certain product may be different from

that of another (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). Hence, the meaning of consumption is very much dependent on the individual making the interpretation. As our understanding of the meanings of signs and symbols is generally learnt through the process of socialisation (Bertilsson 2007), and according to Belk, Bahn and Mayer (1982) almost fully developed by the sixth grade, shared interpretations are culturally bound (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Hence, common symbol systems exist in cultural groups, allowing members to assume that their interpretation of reality is reasonably consistent with the interpretation made by other cultural members.

2.2.2 Self-Concept/Product-Image Congruence Theory

While interpretations of the meaning of symbolic consumption can inform the receiver about the values and personality of a brand, they are also often used to provide an insight into the identity of the consumer. For example, a shared interpretation of an individual who owns a BMW may be that that person is successful or has a high standing in society. In contrast, a shared interpretation of a minivan driver may be that that person is family-oriented. Furthermore, not only does symbolic consumption provide an external party with a symbol to decipher the consumer's identity, consumption also gives consumers an opportunity to develop and communicate their own self-concepts (Arvidsson 2001; Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). Hence, the consumption of many products can be seen as an outward expression of an individual's self-concept. As consumers develop and express their self-concepts through consumption, they tend to select brands, products and stores accordingly. This is known in the marketing literature as the self-concept/product-image congruence theory (Belk 1988; Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Grubb and Hupp 1968; Onkvisit 1987; Rosenberg 1979; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983). That is, if

the symbolic meaning attached to the brand, product and store matches the individual's self-concept, then he or she is more likely to select it.

There is much confusion on the precise conceptualisation of self-concept in the consumer behaviour literature. However, most researchers seem to agree that the term self-concept denotes the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to oneself as an object" (Rosenberg 1979, p7). The confusion arises when researchers consider how the thoughts and feelings toward oneself are actually evaluated. The first and simplest of these evaluations is known as an assessment of one's 'actual self-concept' which is the image one has of oneself. Empirical research has supported the relationship between actual self-concept/product-image congruity and consumer behaviour on numerous occasions (Birdwell 1968; Landon 1974; O'Brien, Tapia, and Brown 1977; Ross 1971) (see Sirgy 1982 for a full review). These studies found that products and brands are more likely to be consumed if individuals believe the product or brand image to be similar to their own. This theory suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain consistency and hence behave in a manner that is consistent with oneself (Sirgy 1982). However, the results of two early studies conducted by Green, Maheshwari and Rao (1969) and Hughes and Naert (1970) failed to validate this hypothesis. These conflicting results can be explained by the fact that individuals are also often motivated by self-esteem and tend to seek experiences that enhance self-concept (Sirgy 1982). With this in mind the notion of an 'ideal self-concept' has been investigated.

The ideal self-concept is the image of oneself one would like to have. Empirical research has generally supported the relationship between ideal self-concept/product-

image congruity and consumer behaviour (Dolich 1969; Landon 1974; Hong and Zinkhan 1995). That is, many products are only consumed if they enhance the image that consumers have of themselves (Landon 1974; O'Brien et al. 1977; Ross 1971). However, research findings differ in regards to whether actual self-concept or ideal self-concept is a better predictor of consumer behaviour (Dolich 1969; Ross 1971; Landon 1974; Hong and Zinkhan 1995). Therefore, these results suggest that the variation of self-concept with the greater influence on consumer behaviour depends on the product categories and situations investigated. This finding also supports Jones' (1973) assertion that while in most cases individuals' consistency and self-esteem motives are harmonious, and hence both actual and ideal selves are effective predictors of consumption, under some conditions they may conflict, forcing individuals into a compromise (Jones 1973). However, studies of the ideal-self concept should be treated with some caution due to an operational problem which has arisen from the measurement of an ideal-self. Specifically, respondents have not identified which ideal-self they are reporting; how they would like to see themselves today, tomorrow, or in five years time? (Dolich 1969; Ross 1971; Landon 1974)

An additional problem with both the actual and ideal self is that they fail to consider the inherently social nature of human beings. Hence, it has been suggested that when individuals evaluate their own self-concept, they do so from the perspective of how another person would see them (Solomon 1983). This theory stems from Cooley's (1902) notion of the 'looking-glass self', and suggests that the self is defined largely though social interaction. Therefore, one's self-concept is essentially an estimate, which may or may not be accurate, of another's evaluation of oneself. Based on this premise, researchers have developed the notion of the social self-concept. That is, the

image that individuals perceive they present to others. The relationship between social self-concept/product-image congruity and consumer behaviour has only been supported on a few occasions in the academic literature (Sirgy 1982; Sirgy and Su 2000). However, this research also suffers from operational issues. Specifically, respondents have not been asked through whose eyes the individual is imagining the assessment of oneself. For example, an individual may perceive their boss to have a very different interpretation of their self-concept than a close friend or family member.

Finally, researchers have incorporated the notion of upward social mobility into the concept of the social-self and have hence developed the 'ideal social-self'. That is, the image of oneself one would like others to perceive. This theory suggests that individuals are social creatures who live in a hierarchical society in which consumption is one possible way to increase status. Empirical research has reported inconclusive findings between ideal social self-concept/product-image congruity and consumer behaviour (Sirgy 1982; Sirgy and Su 2000). Again, these results should be treated with some caution as they have failed to specifically ask respondents about a specific ideal self, and through whose eyes the respondent is making the assessment. It is particularly important in this case as you may wish to project a very different ideal self to your boss, than say, a potential lover.

This variety of possible self-concepts and the inconsistent findings in regards to their ability to predict behaviour has motivated researchers to investigate some variables for a possible moderating influence. The most often studied of these is the conspicuousness of the product. Most studies have hypothesised that when

conspicuous products are consumed there will be a more congruent match between the ideal and social selves and the product or brand image than for actual self concept. In such instances, the ideal and social selves tend to be more predictive of consumption than the actual self-concept for highly visible and expressive products. Despite the intuitive merit of this proposition, the results have been somewhat mixed. For example, this relationship was not supported by Dolich (1969) and Ross (1971), but was later supported by Hughes (1976) who criticised the poor research design of the previous studies.

Poor research design may also explain the inconsistent and conflicting results of many self-concept/product image studies. Specifically, the nature of the survey instrument utilised raises some concerns. All of the studies reviewed have asked the respondents to self-report their self-identities on a number of semantic differential scales. However, no consensual method has been used to select the bipolar adjectives utilised. Some studies have used generic adjectives that have been sourced from personality inventories, resulting in the use of abstract terms such as 'rugged' or 'friendly' that have not always been relevant to the consumption situation under investigation (e.g. Bellenger, Steinberg, and Stanton 1976, and Grubb and Hupp 1968). Other studies have used attributes closely related to the products being tested (e.g. Heath and Scott 1998 and Birdwell 1968) which seems to be the most logical approach and is recommended by Sirgy (1983). With the exception of Hughes and Naert (1970), all studies reviewed have also assumed equal weighting for all the attributes investigated. However, as different attributes can carry different importance weightings for different individuals, this approach lacks validity (Reed 2002). In fact, of all the studies reviewed, only Bellenger's (1976) study provided any evidence of

the validity and reliability of the image adjectives investigated. Moreover, all the studies reviewed have failed to address the self-disclosure problems that arise when intimate topics that one may be hesitant to discuss, such as self-concept, are investigated. Finally, researchers have also failed to control for social desirability bias despite the fact that it is likely to influence how one would report their self-concept.

2.2.3   Situational Self-Concept and Consumption

In an attempt to overcome some of the problems associated with the proliferation of self-concepts, some investigators (e.g. Schenk and Holman 1980; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983) have argued for the consideration of a situational self-concept. While most work on self-concept and brand or product choice assumes that the consumer's actual and/or ideal self is stable, the situational self-concept adopts a more dynamic approach (Solomon 1983). This perspective suggests that individuals are able to enact multiple selves depending on the situation, what Markus and Kunda (1986) describe as the 'malleable' self. Hence, situational self-concept/product-image congruence theory suggests that individuals match their self-image to the expectations of a social group whose opinions are of importance to them at that particular point in time, and select the products accordingly. This theory was supported in an empirical investigation of mundane consumption by Kleine, Kleine and Kernan (1993), who also found the relationship to be moderated by the individual's assessment of the importance of the identity being enacted. Further empirical support was provided by Aaker (1999) who found situational self-congruity to be a greater predictor amongst high self-monitoring individuals.

The situational self-concept stems from the work of Goffman (1959), who suggests that individuals present themselves in the guise of a character to other individuals to control the interpretation these other individuals assign. Using the analogy of theatre, Goffman (1959) describes individuals as 'role-taking actors', where the role chosen is a function of the cues inherent to a given situation. This perspective lies very much in the symbolic interactionist paradigm, where humans are seen as pragmatic actors who continually adjust their behaviour to the actions of other actors which they are able to interpret symbolically (Leigh and Gabel 1992). This process is aided by our ability to think about ourselves as symbolic objects and to imaginatively rehearse alternative lines before we act. Of the many different roles that an individual may play, some will be well scripted, while others will require improvisation, perhaps due to a lack of familiarity with the role. Solomon (1983) proposes that role behaviour is facilitated or inhibited by the presence or absence of products and brands that have shared symbolic meaning associated with a particular role. That is, individuals rely upon the social information inherent in products and brands as symbols to shape their self-image and to maximise the quality of their performance.

When playing a situational role, an individual will determine the quality of their performance by imagining it from the perspective of another individual playing a role and evaluating the appropriateness and quality of the symbolism communicated, much of which is expressed through consumption. In addition to imagining the performance from the perspective of the role of some actual other present, the individual may also evaluate their performance from the role of a generalised other, such as the imagined aggregate views of a reference group or a subculture. This reflexive evaluation, from the perspective of either an actual or aggregate other, is incorporated into one's self-

concept (Solomon 1983). As such, while the common interpretation of the self-concept/product-image congruence theory is unidirectional (we choose products that match our self-identity), consumption also impacts on self-definition through the process of reflexive evaluation (Solomon 1983). This situation is likely to occur when the image of a product or brand is strongly established and the consumer's self-concept is not articulately formed within a specific frame of reference (De Chernatony and McDonald 1992; Solomon 1983). Furthermore, when consumers are limited in choice, perhaps due to time, financial restrictions or geographical location, they are likely to consume products and brands which lack the desired symbolic properties to enhance role performance. This will have a negative impact on their evaluation of their role performance which will in turn have an impact on their perceptions of their own self-concept.

The use of symbolic consumption to define the self is especially important when we play a new or unfamiliar role. Symbolic self-completion theory suggests that when individuals lack the confidence to successfully perform a role, they are more likely to acquire and display symbols associated with the role as a means of compensation (Wicklund and Gullwitzer 1982). This is likely to occur when an individual is undergoing a role transition (Mehta and Belk 1991; Schouten 1991), such as the one that occurs after graduation. However, as the individual's knowledge of the unfamiliar role is low, stereotypical associations of the role tend to be relied upon. In this scenario, if an observer is familiar with the role, they are likely to recognise the newcomer's lack of knowledge and lower their opinion of their ability to successfully perform the role. In contrast, if an individual's familiarity with the role is high, an individual will already know the appropriate way to behave and will not be required

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to rely on consumption to assert his or her place in the social system. In this case, the individual may well use products and brands to communicate, rather than to establish his or her social placement.

The advantage of the situational self-concept is that it replaces the proliferating concepts of actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social self-concept, and ideal social self-concept, while acknowledging that consumers have multiple selves that may be enacted depending on the social surroundings and situation (Onkvisit 1987; Sirgy 1982). As such, it explains the diversified and sometimes fragmented self-identities that have been developed and reported (Ahuvia 2005; Arnould and Thompson 2005). To illustrate, take the example of Jed. Jed is an accountant and at work he sees himself, and believes others see him as being competent yet reserved. In his work environment, there is a strong match between this self-concept and the organisational culture of the firm. As such, during office hours, Jed normally wears a dark suit and a conservative tie, which he feels is indicative of his self-image. However on weekends, Jed likes to shrug off the stereotypical image of an accountant and projects an image of a fashionable and outgoing young man, especially when he is in the company of his friends. As such, when Jed is with his friends he consumes products that are expressive of his situational self-concept such as alcohol, entertainment and contemporary men's fashion. Hence, Jed's self-concept and consumption are influenced by the situation and accompanying reference group.

2.2.4   Consumer Identity Projects and the Extended Self

Since the development of the situational self-concept there have been two major advances in the way consumer researchers have theorised self-identity and its

relationship with consumption. The first advance is to view a consumer's sense of identity as structured in terms of a narrative (Ahuvia 2005; Belk and Costa 1998; Fournier 1998; Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990; Holt 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). This means that in addition to seeing one's identity as a list of attributes, consumers link these attributes to memories of key episodes in their lives, which are in turn strung together to form a story. As these stories involve malleable selves that shift depending on the situation and accompanying reference group, this narrative view is consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective that sees identity as a kind of performance in which consumers use products and brands to communicate symbolically.

While this concept has much theoretical value, it further weakens the findings of previous self-concept/product-image studies that have utilised semantic differential scales anchored by attribute adjectives. As such, recent research investigating consumer identity projects has been interpretive in nature, with many scholars conducting ethnographies (for example Kates 2002; Kozinets 2001, 2002a; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The findings of these studies suggest that consumer identity projects allow individuals to undergo a continuous process of developing and constructing intricate identities through the use of narratives while maintaining a sense of the past (Belk 1990; Kates 2002; Kozinets 2001, 2002a; Murray 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

The second major development in the self-identity and consumption literature was Belk's (1998) assertion that our possessions are not only capable of expressing and contributing to our identities, but can also become an extension of self. The notion of

the extended self suggests that our identities can transcend the immediate confines of our bodies and incorporate objects from our physical environment (Belk 1988). That is, when one has a passionate familiarity with a possession, and a strong emotional attachment to it, our association with it moves beyond ownership and we will regard it as part, or as an extension, of ourselves (Belk 1989). According to Belk, an individual's self-concept consists of both a core self and an extended self. One's core self is likely to consist of the body, internal processes, ideas and experiences, whereas the extended self lies slightly beyond and is likely to consist of the possessions one cares passionately about, as well as persons and places to which one feels attached.

Belk's (1988) notion of the extended self was thoroughly criticised by Cohen (1989) who argued that the concept was poorly defined from both theoretical and operational perspectives. Specifically, Cohen suggests that the extended self should be theoretically formalised such that one knows when an object is important but removed from the self, and when an object is a part of the extended self. This formalisation would also make the concept more empirically useful from a quantitative perspective (Cohen 1989). However, in rebut Belk (1989) argues that rigid definitions such as 'the inner-self composes of the mind, and the extended self is anything regarded as me' or 'the extended self consists of those objects which we would be uncertain of our identities without' are not suitable, as they fail to recognise the malleable nature of self-concept (Belk 1989, p.129). While there is much merit in considering the malleable nature of self-concept, it seems unlikely that individuals would be able to turn their deep 'emotional attachments' (Belk 1989, p.130) for possessions on and off completely depending on the situation. Hence, the extended self may be better perceived as a high degree of 'identification' with possessions, persons and places

(Ahuvia 2005, p.180). This conceptualisation fits comfortably within the symbolic interactionist paradigm as individuals can vary in their level of identification depending on the situation. In addition, Ahuvia (2005) suggests possessions, persons and places that are a part of the extended self should be seen to lie on a continuum ranging from those that are very close to the core-self, through to those one mildly identifies with. Such an approach overcomes many of the inherent weaknesses within Belk's (1988) conceptualisation of the extended self. It also allows for the various groups that one is affiliated with to move further away from one's core self as they become larger, more impersonal and less relevant to the individual, which may also be influenced by the situation (Ahuvia 2005). Items that reflect these group identities may also be a part of the extended self to the extent that the individual identifies with the group and is enacting a group identity at that point in time.

This section has highlighted that consumer goods have a significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value. This significance rests largely with their ability to carry and communicate symbolic meaning. As such, consumers tend to consume products and brands that communicate meanings aligned with their situational self-concept and contribute to their identities. Next, this chapter examines how symbols acquire their meaning in a cultural context. Cultural symbols are vital to the interpretation of social reality as they allow us to assign meaning to the world.

2.3 Representing Culture via Consumption

2.3.1 Culture and Consumption

Culture is a notoriously ambiguous concept to define. This thesis adopts Clarke, Hall Jefferson and Roberts' (1975, p.10) definition of culture as the "level at which social

groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give expressive form to their social and material life experience". The expression of one's social and material life experience is an important part of this process as it allows us to develop and communicate our knowledge and attitudes toward life (Geertz 1973). Products play a significant role in our material life experience, and hence manifest culture as symbols which allow us to assign meaning to the world, communicate with others and express our identities. However, for shared interpretations of these cultural symbols to exist, individuals must understand the shared meanings inherent within a common symbol system.

As highlighted in the previous section, our identities are in part made through our consumption of goods, and this consumption allows us to develop and express our identities. A part of our identities that is commonly expressed through consumption is our membership to a particular culture (Mackay 1997). Hence, just as the consumption of goods can distinguish one individual from another and express an individual self-concept, it can also indicate that one is a member of a particular culture and express a group-identity (Belk 1988). Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts (1975) suggest that through the symbolic consumption of goods, individuals express a unity with cultural values, which helps define the public identity of the culture as distinct. The earlier example of the wearing of a hijab by a woman as an outward expression of her Muslim faith and belief in Muslim values illustrates this point. Empirical evidence in a series of interviews conducted by Lamont and Molnar (2001) found that African Americans use consumption to define themselves and to express a distinct and positive collective identity. Whereas these examples focus on cultures of religion and race, a culture can be broadly defined as any social group which has developed distinctive patterns. As such, many other types of social groups do exist and they

express and substantiate their existence through symbolic consumption. Examples of the type of symbolic consumption capable of expressing a group identity include clothing, hair style, tattooing, ear piercing, the type of music, sport or entertainment one enjoys, and the ownership and use of certain types of cars and motorcycles (Arthur 2006a; Belk 1988; Hebdige 1975, 1979; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Willis 1978).

Social groups which are focused around specific activities, values and material artefacts that are significantly distinct from the larger culture to which they belong are known as subcultures (Clarke et al. 1975). Subcultures are ubiquitous in our modern society and numerous subcultures have been investigated including punk (Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979; Muggleton 2000; Willis 1978), mod (Hebdige 1975), rave (Brookman 2001; Goulding and Shankar 2004; Goulding, Shankar, and Elliott 2002), goth (Goulding et al. 2003), Hip Hop (Bennett 1999a; Condry 2001; Maxwell 2003; Rose 1994), mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), Mac enthusiasts (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), skydivers (Celsi et al. 1993), runners (Chalmers and Arthur 2008), trekkies (Kozinets 2001), gays (Kates 2001, 2002), motorbike boys (Willis 1978) and new bikers (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). While it is often assumed that subcultures are inherently oppositional, the prefix 'sub' implies that a subculture is a subset of society, or a culture within a culture, not a subversive nor subordinate culture as it is often conceived (Thornton 1997a). Subversive subcultures which are characterised by a systematic opposition to the normative ideals of the dominant culture are coined countercultures and were the focus of many early subculture studies, as discussed in the following section.

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2.3.2 Counterculture and Consumption

Countercultural theory emerged in the 1970's, largely from the researchers at Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies who investigated the punk (Hebdige 1979), mod (Hebdige 1975), motorbike boy (Willis 1978), ted (Jefferson 1975), skinhead (Clarke 1975a), and hippy (Willis 1975, 1978) cultures. These countercultures were envisaged as winning space for the disenfranchised and disaffected, locating them in relation to the working class and firmly in opposition to the dominant and mass cultures (Gelder 1997b). These studies found that members of countercultures consumed distinctive, yet uniform styles that broke away from traditional class-based identities, while opposing the dominant and mass cultures which they found to be politically manipulated and undifferentiated (e.g. Clarke 1975a; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978). In doing so, counterculture members consumed in a manner which strictly adhered to the rules of the counterculture and expressed their allegiance to the countercultural values and attitudes (Arvidsson 2001; Clarke 1975b). As such, contrary to the common misconception that countercultures are random, arbitrary and lawless forms, their consumption patterns are characterised by an extreme orderliness.

The expression of cultural values through the consumption of a style that closely parallels the ideology of that culture has been termed 'homology' (Willis 1978), and was the focus of many of the early counterculture studies. Hence, just as researchers have investigated the congruence between the values and attitudes an individual holds and the image of the products and brands they consume, the symbolic fit between the values and attitudes of a group and the consumption they engage in to express them has also been investigated. These studies have found that the material goods

consumed by the counterculture are homologous with the concerns, activities, group structure and collective self-image of the group. For example, the motorbike boys of Willis' (1978) study did not dress with the functional requirements of riding a motorcycle in mind. Instead, Willis found their dress to be a formidable expression of identity which was powerfully developed around many of the central values of that culture. For instance, the motor-bike boys knew that helmets were advisable, but they did not wear them as such consumption would have inhibited the experience and prevented the expression of the tough, masculine image of the biker and the values of liberation and freedom. Similarly, a homologous relationship was found between the hippy values of freedom, a return to nature, and an affinity with underprivileged groups and their bare feet, long unwashed hair, and inappropriate clothing (Willis 1978). Hebdige (1979) found that within the punk culture the trashy cut-up clothes, the spiky hair, the pogo, the amphetamines, the spitting and vomiting, and the frantically driven music expressed nothing other than the central cultural value of anarchy. Whereas, the boots, braces and cropped hair consumed by the skinheads were appropriate because they communicated the cultural values of hardness and masculinity (Clarke 1975). Similarly, homologous relationships were found between the values of the ted and mod cultures and their members' consumption habits (Hebdige 1975; Jefferson 1975).

The findings of these early studies suggest that countercultures are able to manifest a tangible identity with material goods through homologous consumption and, hence, establish a sense of security that the culture is real and will, at least in the short-term, continue to exist (Willis 1978). With their cultural identity safely stored within these material items, the counterculture members can then learn from, and develop, cultural

values, attitudes and tastes in relation to a widening circle of material goods. Thus, the counterculture can then absorb new products and modes of consumption, and select or change the originals, so that the members can continue to recognise the group's identity in the meanings of these particular symbolic objects. The new products and modes of consumption chosen are dependent on their ability to express the group's values (Clarke 1975b).

The Birmingham researchers found that the objects used by countercultures to assemble a homologous style must already exist and contain meaning within the dominant culture, such that when the products are adopted and adapted by the counterculture a transformation of meaning takes place (Clarke et al. 1975). This creative construction of an ensemble of objects to carry new meanings has become known as bricolage (Hebdige 1979; Muggleton 2000). Bricolage was seen by the Birmingham researchers as a form of resistance to the order through symbolic communication (Hebdige 1979). For example, in reference to the punks of Hebdige's (1979) study, the safety pin underwent a transformation from a legitimate functional tool used by the masses to a symbol of lawlessness. Similarly, within the mod subculture "the scooter, a formerly ultra-respectable means of transport was appropriated and converted into a weapon and a symbol of solidarity" (Hebdige 1975, p.93). This analysis was based largely on Gramsci's (1971) conception of hegemony, a concept that has been used to describe the dominance of one group over another whereby the subordinate group consents to, and negotiates, their subordination. Using this approach, the Birmingham researchers viewed countercultures as counter-hegemonic responses in that subordination was acknowledged but also opposed. The attempted solution by countercultural members was to express their resistance

symbolically through bricolage, which was also evidenced in a recent study of the gay community, a counterculture which opposes the dominant orthodoxy, where members rework fashion, images and materials from popular culture in a gay social context (Kates 2002).

Although our understanding of cultural studies owes much to the work conducted at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, these studies do have several weaknesses. First, with the exception of Willis' (1978) ethnography, the researchers have provided only a semiotic reading of the subcultures they have investigated, and, as such, there is some doubt about whether the counterculture members actually lived and experienced their lives in the manner in which they were described. As Hebdige (1975; 1979), Jefferson (1975), and Clarke (1975a) did not actively engage with those under investigation or consider the countercultures as complicated, contradictory and ambiguous arrangement of everyday life, the values they state their actions supposedly represent may not have actually coincided with the lived experiences of members (Cohen 1980; Gelder 1997a; Muggleton 2000). This lack of concern shown toward the individual actor and the lack of consideration toward the complexities of subcultural life are not merely regrettable oversights of the research, but direct consequences of the methodological approach.

Due to this methodological limitation, it is quite likely that by positioning consumer choices as political acts and explaining such consumption in terms of their opposition to the dominant culture, the Birmingham theorists have over-politicised youthful leisure (Cohen 1980; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995a). First, very little evidence presented by the subcultural participants indicated that they perceived their

consumption as symbols of resistance. While it is possible that they did, and more recent research has shown that consumers do (Murray 2002), it is perhaps more likely that their resistance was less pronounced than described, as was found in a study by Thornton (1995b), whose ravers described their activities to be in "vague opposition" to the mainstream (p.201). Second, the Birmingham conceptualisation of subcultures as counter-hegemonic responses carries the assumption that all counterculture members are of the same class location, which can be easily empirically contradicted (Muggleton 2000). Finally, it appears that the methodological limitations within the Birmingham studies have allowed the authors to romanticise their research and reinforce their own personal biases which have tended to agree with anti-mass discourse. For example, Willis (1978, p.5) states that "for all the shit, there is freedom in the market, on the streets, in the pubs and in the dance halls". Subjective statements like this are abundant throughout their research and indicate a bias in the reported findings.

The second major weakness of the Birmingham studies was their treatment of subcultures as static and rigid entities in which members' identities were coherent and fixed (Bennett 1999b; Clarke 1981). Such an analysis is inconsistent with the findings of later subcultural studies which suggest that membership is more fluid, organic, and in many cases arbitrary (Bennett 1999b; Thornton 1995a). A more dynamic approach to the formation of subcultures that accounts for the performance and mobility of members is Maffesoli's (1996) neo-tribe. Maffesoli suggests that a neo-tribe is a group of loosely organised individuals, who through consumption express a shared state of mind in a fluid manner that reflects the constantly shifting identities of post-modern consumers. These tribes have developed as a result of the postmodern

fragmentation of the world where recreational consumption has come to replace production as the major source of meaning in our lives (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Jannson 2002). Evidence of this neo-tribal conceptualisation of subculture can be found in Thornton's (1995a; 1995b) and Goulding, Shankar and Elliot's (2002) studies of rave culture in which members would come together for brief periods of time, and then disperse to live out their other more ordinary lives. This approach also supports the malleable self hypothesis previously discussed in which individuals can perform any one of a multitude of subcultural identities depending on the situation (Markus and Kunda 1986; Solomon 1983). Furthermore, it supports the growing amount of evidence that suggests that subcultures can exist as geographically diverse entities that are linked mainly by mass mediation and the internet (Masters 2001; Maxwell 2003; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

The third major weakness of the Birmingham studies was their one-sided view of the relationship between commerce and the countercultures they investigated. The uniform analysis of these researchers was to view commerce as incorporating countercultures back into the mass culture, homogenising and effectively dismantling them. Their analysis found that businesses looked to countercultural consumption for stylistic innovations, which were tweaked in a manner such that they were stripped of their unwholesome connotations and made available as a mass culture commodity (Clarke 1975b; Hebdige 1979). Once the countercultural style was consumed by the general public it became void of its original symbolic meaning, which in most circumstances had a fatal corrupting influence on the subculture itself (Gottdiener 1985). For example, punk clothing and insignia could be bought by mail order from July of 1977, and in the September of that year Cosmopolitan ran a review made up

entirely of variations of the punk theme, which Hebdige (1979) suggests inevitably lead to the demise of the culture. Subsequent studies have supported this notion with Schouten and McAlexander (1995) revealing that as the popularity of the Harley Davidson grew, the biker subculture lost some of its distinctiveness and mystique. While it is possible that such a relationship between commerce and countercultures exists, the Birmingham authors have failed to acknowledge that business also plays an integral role in the development and growth of countercultures and countercultural identity. After all, countercultures also communicate through material goods, even if the meanings attached to those products are often purposefully distorted. As such, in entertainment, fashion and music, the entrepreneurship of some countercultural members has seen the development of radio shows, magazines, fashion and record labels which has made a major contribution to the identity, tangibility and size of these cultures (Clarke et al. 1975; Thornton 1995a).

As countercultures continue to develop, mature, and decline in contemporary society, it is important that future investigations of such entities avoid the methodological and theoretical limitations of the Birmingham researchers. In particular, it is important that future researchers of countercultures use more appropriate methodologies to ensure that cultural members actually live and experience their lives in the manner they describe. Furthermore, researchers must take a balanced view of the role of commerce and consider the fluid nature of these social groups. Since the Birmingham publications, research investigating the relationship between subcultures and consumption has moved away from a focus on the counterculture and toward the subculture of consumption, which has overcome many of the major limitations found in these earlier studies.

2.3.3   Subcultures of Consumption

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) defined the subculture of consumption as a collective of individuals who identify with certain products, brands or consumption activities and through these products, brands or activities, forge feelings of social solidarity. Through the pursuit of their common consumption interests, these individuals create distinctive, yet fragmented, and sometimes transient consumption subcultures that fit firmly within what Arnould and Thompson (2005, p873) define as 'the marketplace culture stream' of 'consumer culture theory'. The subculture of consumption was envisaged as an analytic category through which to better understand consumers and the manner in which they organise their lives and identities. In the commercial milieu in which we live, products, brands, and consumption activities serve as a basis for much of our interaction and social cohesion. As these consumption subcultures are self-selected, readily acknowledged and more easily identifiable than many other analytic categories, they serve as a basis to further enhance our understanding of the relationship between consumption and identity (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

The majority of consumer research investigating subcultures of consumption has overcome all three of the major limitations of the Birmingham studies. First, most of the research has adopted a case study approach utilising the ethnographic method (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Chalmers 2006; Kates 2002; Kozinets 2002a). As such, one has a much greater sense of confidence that the data collected and analysed in these studies are indicative of the lived experiences of the members of the subculture. Second, consumer researchers investigating subcultures of

consumption have adopted a neo-tribal perspective whereby subcultures are constantly evolving and the boundaries engulfing the community are relatively permeable. Finally, subculture of consumption research has looked beyond the corrupting influence of commerce on the subcultures they are investigating and examined the multiplicity of relationships between subcultures and commerce.

While the term 'subculture of consumption' has become widely established in the academic discourse, various alternatives do exist. Researchers investigating consumption-oriented social affiliations have termed them brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), consumption worlds (Holt 1995), localised interpretive communities (Thompson and Haytko 1997), cultures of consumption (Kozinets 2001), and consumer microcultures (Sirsi, Ward, and Reingen 1996). While minor theoretical distinctions between these terms exist, the differences in conceptualisation primarily lie in which facet is under investigation (Thompson and Troester 2002). As such, for the purpose of this thesis, consumption-oriented social affiliations will be referred to as 'subcultures of consumption,' and where it enhances discussion a distinction will be made between those which are: 1) brand focused, such as the Harley Davidson (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and Apple (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) communities, and non-brand focused, such as the skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993) and the running subcultures (Chalmers 2006); 2) relatively permanent, such as the gay community (Kates 2002), or temporary, such as the mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), and Burning Man attendees (Kozinets 2002a); and 3) countercultural, such as the natural health (Thompson and Troester 2002), and the rave subcultures (Goulding and Saren 2006), and those which are apolitical, such as the white-water rafters (Arnould and Price 1993).

Subculture of consumption studies have investigated a wide range of topics such as the role of risk in skydiving subculture (Celsi et al. 1993), the legitimisation of brands within the gay community (Kates 2004), the consumption of fantasy at mountain man rendezvous (Belk and Costa 1998), the manner in which commitment is enacted by extreme sports participants (Quester, Beverland, and Farrelly 2005), and the fictitious utopian reality that is experienced by fans of Star Trek (Kozinets 2001). Many of these studies, particularly the non-brand focused ones have supported the earlier Birmingham findings and described a homologous relationship between the consumption of members of the subculture and the values of the group. For example, Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) ethnography of new bikers found that the core values of the subculture were based around personal freedom, patriotism and machismo, and were visually expressed though the consumption of long hair, bushy beards, loud powerful bikes, the American flag, the bald eagle, tattoos and black leather. In contrast, a study by Kates (2002) found that in the gay community no single homologous style exists. Instead, Kates found consumption to be characterised by a multitude of shifting, malleable meanings open to multiple interpretations and considerable debate. Within this subculture of consumption, individuals pushed against the symbolic boundaries by ironically reworking images, things and people from popular culture in a form of bricolage to construct their distinctive gay identities. Hence, unlike the consumers presented in previous studies, these subcultural members did not sacrifice creative self-expression in order to communicate their belonging to a group, they accomplished both simultaneously.

2.3.4   The Structure of a Subculture of Consumption

While research investigating subcultures of consumption has provided us with a diverse range of unique theoretical contributions, they have tended to converge on one key characteristic, specifically, the structure of the subculture. Subcultures of consumption are comprised of individuals who vary in their level of identification and commitment; with some members being very closely tied to the group and others being only peripherally related (Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979; Irwin 1973; Kates 2002; Quester et al. 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The internal structure of the punk subculture was explicitly detailed by Fox (1987), and was later echoed by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Fox (1987) described social stratification within the punk subculture to be hierarchical in nature. As illustrated in Figure 1, a series of concentric circles was used to illustrate each position in the hierarchy. Fox found that one's position in the status hierarchy was based on one's level of demonstrated commitment to the subcultural ideology. This finding was supported by Celsi et al. (1993) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Those participants most heavily committed to the subculture are located within the most inner-concentric circle and hence are known as the hard-core members.

For hard-core members of relatively permanent subcultures of consumption, devotion and commitment to the cultural ideology has been found to be a full time and enduring process that can represent a major dimension in their lives and conceptualisation of self (Klein 1986; Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979; Irwin 1973; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). As such, Irwin (1973) suggests that hard-core members must be relatively uncommitted to other cultural groups, and have the freedom and spare time to devote themselves wholly to the subcultural cause. Whilst the hard-core

members have been found to be the fewest in numbers of the three groups, they are also the most influential and have been found to function as arbiters of meaning and opinion leaders (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). In addition, these members tend to know more about the 'backstage' activities and the history of the subculture (Quester et al. 2005), generally know more about the brand or consumption activity (Thornton 1995a), are typically interested in the functionality of the objects associated with the activity (Donnelly and Young 1988; Quester et al. 2005), and are better able to reconcile contradictions within the subculture through the utilisation of their broader knowledge base (Donnelly and Young 1988).

Figure 1: The Structure of a Subculture of Consumption
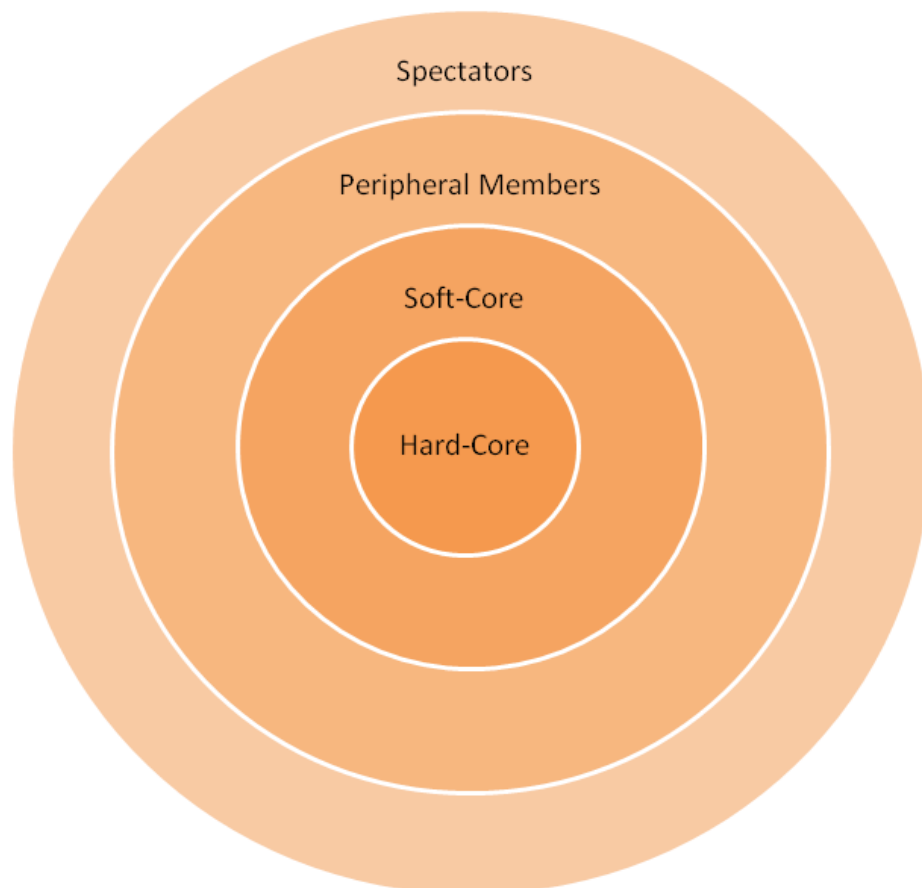
Within Fox's (1987) framework, the next concentric circle consists of 'soft-core' members whose commitment to the subculture is less complete and whose roles are subordinate to, and dictated by, the hard-core members. While these individuals were less dedicated to the subculture, their degree of involvement with the subculture was high, though not necessarily enduring. As such, while they outnumbered the hard-core members, they were less respected and did not occupy the same social status or command the same level of influence (Fox 1987). Similar results were found within Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study of brand-focused bikers. In this study, soft-core bikers were found to identify with and conform to the subcultural values. Furthermore, soft-core members have been found to be more interested in the symbolic qualities of the products, brands and activities consumed, than their functional attributes, as they rely on such consumption to communicate their self and group identity to others (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

Fox (1987) described the third circle of subcultural enthusiasts as 'preppie punks', however, as illustrated in Figure 1, these subcultural enthusiasts will be referred to by the more widely usable term 'peripheral members'. Fox found that these individuals make up an even larger proportion of the subculture of consumption. While peripheral members frequent the subcultural site(s) and consume subcultural products, hard and soft-core members have been found to chastise peripheral members for their lack of ideological commitment (Fox 1987; Maxwell 2003; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Fox suggests that peripheral members are only interested in the subculture for the novelty it provides and because it is deemed fashionable. Hence, peripheral members have been described as envisaging the subculture as a passing fad, or a bit of

light relief from the monotonous but none the less paramount realities of school, home and work (Hebdige 1979; Irwin 1973). As such, peripheral members treat such subcultural experiences as identity play, with consumption being based on stereotypes of a 'typical member' (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and quickly abandoned in situations where they would receive sanctions. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) found that peripheral members experience feelings of uncertainty due to their low position in the hierarchy and berating by soft and hard-core members, and as such, found that peripheral members attempt to increase their knowledge of the cultural values through vicarious learning.

Fox (1987) described the outer circle of subcultural enthusiasts as 'spectators'. However, as depicted in Figure 1, throughout this thesis these enthusiasts will be labelled 'interested non-members' as they are distinct as a subcultural category because they are not truly members of the group. Fox found that these non-members had an interest in the punk scene and made up the largest part of the crowd when a punk event occurred, however were not committed to the subcultural values, nor did they revere the actions of hard-core members, unlike the peripheral and soft-core members. Subsequent studies of subcultures of consumption have ignored the consumption habits of interested non-members despite Fox's findings that they are the largest group interested in the subcultural activity. As such, future studies of subcultures of consumption should also analyse the consumption patterns of non-members with an interest in the culture.

Whilst Fox's (1987) description of the structure of a subculture of consumption should be commended for providing us with identifiable and empirically testable

categories that have been consistently validated, the depiction of these categories as a series of concentric circles should be reconsidered. As the social stratification within subcultures is hierarchical in nature (Celsi et al. 1993; Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979; Irwin 1973; Kates 2002; Quester et al. 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), a more accurate illustration of the structure would be to present the four categories as a pyramid, as depicted in Figure 2. This depiction not only implies the existence of a status hierarchy, but also continues to communicate the increasing size of the categories as one advances down the hierarchy; that being the primary advantage of the previous model.

Figure 2: Status within a Subculture of Consumption
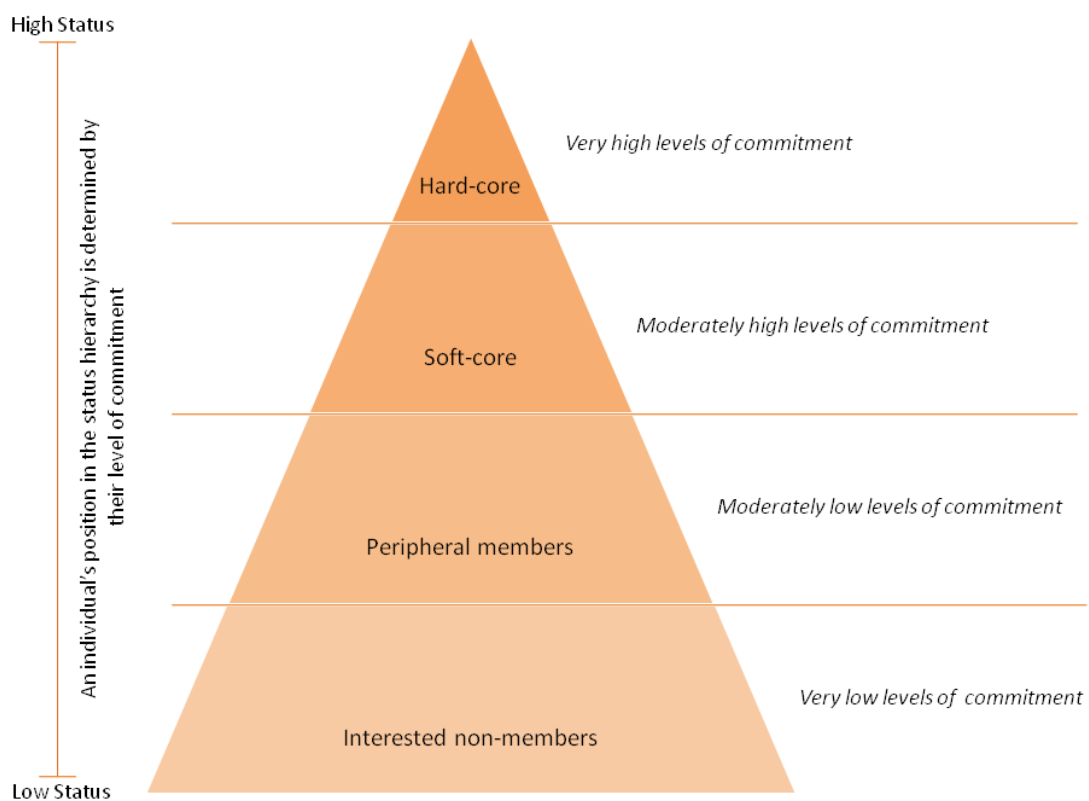
Whilst the framework for viewing the structure of a subculture of consumption as consisting of hard-core, soft-core and peripheral members has received much

academic support (e.g. Chalmers and Arthur 2008; Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), Kates (2002) suggests that such a categorisation imposes a fixed, rigid structure that may not resemble the reality of the neo-tribal consumer. In contrast, Kates suggests that the structure of a subculture of consumption is objectively based upon the uncontested criterion of one's level of commitment to the group. However, in reality the structure is likely to be more fluid, contested and negotiated. While Kates makes a valid argument, such categorisations have provided us with an identifiable and empirically testable organising framework that has been consistently validated and makes it possible to compare across and learn from previous studies. As such, Figure 2 has been enhanced via the inclusion of a status continuum that has been transposed alongside the status hierarchy. As one's commitment to the subculture is a fluid, contested and negotiated concept, one's position on the status continuum and subsequent categorisation within the status hierarchy is amenable to change. While this inclusion overcomes the issues associated with the fluid, contested and negotiated nature of one's commitment, Thornton (1995a; 1995b) argues that commitment to the group, correlates to, but is not causal of, one's position within the subcultural hierarchy. This, she argues, is based on one's accumulated subcultural capital.

2.3.5 Subcultural Capital

In her study of club cultures, Thornton (1995a) coined the term subcultural capital to describe the knowledge, experience and skills that bestow status within a subculture. Her work is guided by that of Pierre Bourdieu, and specifically his book 'Distinction' (1984), in which he first used the term 'cultural capital' to describe the knowledge acquired through our upbringing and education which confers status within society.

Bourdieu conceptualised the structure of society as dictated by the consumption of markers of distinction which affirm one's taste. While Thornton has been credited for taking the concept out of the realm of the 'high class' consumption (Bennett 1999b; Kates 2002), a closer reading of Bourdieu (1984) reveals that he did not mean for the term to be so narrowly defined. In fact, throughout his work, he argues that in all fields, including subcultures, a system of differences exists where social differences are made explicit through expressive consumption.

Expanding on the concept in a later article, Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital can present itself in three fundamental forms: as cultural capital, economic capital and social capital. Cultural capital, the knowledge one has acquired that is expressed through one's taste, can be found in three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital is the knowledge, skills and expertise that exist within an individual and which is acquired through the process of education, both formal and informal. This may be expressed through the understanding of the cultural values, rituals and traditions. For example, within high-class culture, good manners and an appreciation and understanding of fine art and wine are examples of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). In contrast, amongst Thornton's (1995a) ravers, subcultural capital was embodied in the form of being 'in the know,' understanding and using current slang and performing the latest dance styles. The accumulation of such embodied cultural capital presupposes a personal cost of time and other sacrifices, as it cannot be transmitted easily or instantaneously (Bourdieu 1986). However, it can be acquired over time, and the accumulation can be expediated if one has freedom from other commitments, which can be facilitated with economic capital.

Once one has acquired embodied cultural capital, it may be objectified through the consumption of symbolic goods that infer such knowledge. For example, in the high class culture, the display of books and paintings in the family home constitute objectified cultural capital. In Thornton's (1995a) rave culture, subcultural capital was objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and carefully assembled record collections. Hence, knowledge of the symbolic properties of goods and consumption styles is an example of embodied cultural capital, whereas the ownership of these symbolic goods is an example of objectified cultural capital. While economic capital may facilitate this process, knowing what products to consume and the manner in which to consume them to increase one's standing in society requires the accumulation of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Institutionalised cultural capital is expressed in the form of qualifications which are presumed to guarantee cultural capital, such as formally recognised education (Bourdieu 1986). Once again, economic capital can facilitate this process but does not guarantee it.

As stated above, one's economic capital, that is, one's command over economic resources, often provides access to the time and resources required to acquire embodied cultural capital and the means to acquire objectified cultural capital. Hence, while economic capital can provide access, it is the objectified and cultural capital that is enabled, that creates the status bestowed. This argument was empirically validated in a study investigating the social structure of German writers which found that relative to cultural and social capital, economic capital played a lesser role in the construction of the social hierarchy (Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo 1995).

Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the value that is created through the use and influence of social networks. The value created is dependent on how much cultural and economic capital is created upon mobilising one's social network. Hence, those with many and/or powerful connections have an abundance of social capital and an elevated status within society. While Thornton (1995a) never included social capital in her definition of subcultural capital, it stands to reason that within the Rave subculture, knowing the DJ, or someone on the door who can get you into a club for free, would increase your social capital, and your standing in the social hierarchy.

Thornton (1995a) argues that a primary difference between her concept of subcultural capital and Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital is the role of the media. She argues that media plays an important role in the definition and circulation of subcultural capital, whereas this is not the case when one investigates cultural capital. However, as Thornton provides no evidence to the contrary, and there is an abundance of anecdotal evidence in the opposing direction (e.g. the broadsheet advertisements and reviews of operas, plays and art exhibitions), the distinction between the terms appears to be more a function of the characteristics of the group, than a distinction between concepts. Similarly, Thornton's suggestion that subcultural capital is not as class bound as cultural capital also appears to be a characteristic of the group and not a distinction between the concepts. As subcultures have been found to transcend class boundaries (Belk and Costa 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and a levelling effect and a sense of communitas has been reported on numerous occasions (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Chalmers and Arthur 2008), one would expect to find such a result. As such, despite the alternative focus of investigation, Thornton's (1995a) notion of subcultural capital seems to mirror

Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital in almost every way. Nevertheless, as the term subcultural capital has become entrenched in the literature, the term will be used throughout this thesis.

As stated in section 2.3.4, Thornton's (1995a) argument is that the structure of a subculture is in effect determined by the accumulated subcultural capital of the participants. Hence, DJ's, club organisers, fashion designers, music and style journalists and various record industry professionals who were extremely high in subcultural capital were awarded hard-core membership status and gained a lot of prestige for their role in defining the culture. Similar results were found in an early study of the surfing subculture which described a structure that was originally based entirely on the basis of surfing skill, which is presumably related to subcultural capital (Irwin 1973). In their study of mountain men, Belk and Costa (1988) found that knowledge of rituals, historic plays, dance performances and marker goods were necessary to enhance one's participation in the community. These examples appear to be indicative of embodied subcultural capital.

In contrast, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) found that within-group status was conferred upon members as a result of their commitment to the subculture's ideology and consumption values. However, this may have been a misinterpretation as commitment and subcultural capital appear to be frequently correlated. For example, their reading of the seniority, participation, leadership in group activities, and riding experience could have just as easily been interpreted as the informal education necessary to acquire much embodied subcultural capital. Similarly, the visible indicators of commitment described in the study (tattoos, motorcycle customisation,

club-specific clothing, and sew-on patches), could easily have been interpreted as objectified subcultural capital.

Commitment to the culture was not correlated with one's level of subcultural capital for the gay consumers of Kates' (2002) study. Instead, for these men, the accumulation of subcultural capital increased their ability to determine whether an individual is gay, what Kates describes as a 'gaydar'. Those with little subcultural capital were forced to rely on stereotypes, and hence occupied a lower position in the status hierarchy. In contrast, for the motorbike boys of Willis' (1978) study, membership status was accorded on the basis of one's commitment to the subculture rather than on one's skills with a motorbike. While it cannot be said with confidence that one's competence with a motorbike is a skill that enhances subcultural capital, it is likely to be the case for this particular group. Nevertheless, as Willis goes on to state that status was also correlated with an understanding of the 'real cultural meaning of the motorbike,' perhaps the motorbike boys enhanced their subcultural capital through the accumulation of deeper and more 'spiritual' knowledge than more technical skills.

2.4   Summary

This chapter has provided a background of the theoretical concepts that underpin this thesis. It was presented in two parts, the first of which described the manner in which an individual communicates self-concept through consumption, and the second described the manner in which consumption can communicate cultural membership and how that may influence subcultural structure. Beginning with the former, this chapter briefly examined the symbolic nature of consumption and summarised and

critiqued the self-concept/product-image congruency theory. This was followed by an examination of the situational self-concept as an alternative, and the discussion of consumer identity projects and the notion of the extended self. The latter half of this chapter began with a brief examination of the relationship between culture and consumption. This was followed by a review of counterculture research. The more recent concept of subcultures of consumption was then introduced and their structure was highlighted. The chapter concluded with an examination of subcultural capital and its relationship to an individual's place within the subcultural hierarchy.

This review has uncovered a number of gaps in the literature. However, as this study adopts a grounded approach, the purpose of the thesis was not to explicitly explore these areas, but rather to allow new theories to emerge out of the data analysis. Nevertheless, to guide the reader it is prudent to acknowledge that the emergent findings presented in Chapter 5 fill a number of these gaps. Specifically, the emergent findings detail the structure of a subculture of consumption and examine the self-expressive nature of consumption as individuals advance up the subcultural hierarchy. In the following chapter, the grounded ethnographic method that was used to collect and analyse the data presented in the remainder of this thesis is outlined.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology utilised to examine the consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop Culture. First, a discussion of the relevance of the case under analysis is undertaken. This is followed by a discussion of the suitability of the ethnographic method for an examination of the consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture. The grounded approach of looking systematically at the ethnographic data with the aim of generating theory is then discussed, followed by an acknowledgement of the reflexive approach to data gathering and analysis that was utilised to inform the interpretations. Next, a brief discussion of how the evidence was triangulated to ensure validity is provided. This is followed by a discussion of the methods utilised to triangulate the data: prolonged participant observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant netnography and a progressive reading of the literature. Finally, the methods used to code, analyse and interpret the data are discussed, and a discussion of the relevant ethical considerations is provided.

3.2   The Australian Hip Hop Culture as a Case Study

The case investigated in the current study is the Australian Hip Hop Culture. The Australian Hip Hop Culture is a justifiable unit of analysis for a research investigation examining consumer practices as it is a culture firmly rooted in the consumer based objects of music, clothes and symbols. The Hip Hop culture revolves around four key activities: rapping, graffiti art, breakdancing and DJing. It originated in the South Bronx area of New York City during the early 1970s, and articulated the values and

attitudes of the urban inner-city youth (Rose 1994). During the 1980s, Hip Hop became more than just a culture, but also a profitable commodity, with hip hop music, fashion, and entertainment projected and consumed throughout the world. Hip Hop in the 2000s, is the most pervasive youth culture throughout the world, and has been cited in the press as the fastest growing youth subculture in Australia (Pollard 2003). In 2004, Forbes estimated the Hip Hop industry to be generating US$10 billion annually, with hip hop music sales alone accounting for US$1 billion (Watson 2004). While no national survey has ever been conducted on hip hop sales by race, it has been estimated and is often cited that 70 percent of US consumers are white (Kitwana 2005; Whalen 1994). Hence, the primary consumers of the various performances of black masculinity and the, at times, almost pornographic images of African American women found in mainstream hip hop are young white men (Neal 2004a). As such, an investigation of the predominantly 'white' Australian Hip Hop culture is justified. Furthermore, an interest in Hip Hop has been found to shape brand awareness and preference as well as how and why brands are consumed (Blair 1993; Morris 2002), further validating its selection as subculture of consumption for examination.

Furthermore, conspicuous consumption is relevant to subculture under investigation, youth predominantly aged between 16 and 24, as this demographic has been found to be competent at interpreting the symbols communicated through consumption, use consumption to develop and express their self-concepts (Piacentini and Mailer 2004), are the most heavily influenced by subcultural style and were reported to have spent A$7 billion on fashion and accessories in Australia in 2005 (Lifelounge 2005, 2006). Without the financial commitments of adulthood such as a mortgage or rent (according to Lifelounge (2006), 67.5% of Australia's 16-24 year olds still live with

their parents), young adults are free to spend on symbolic consumer goods such as clothes, music and alcohol. Furthermore, as the majority of Hip Hop enthusiasts are still in their identity formation years, and as possessions have been found to help adolescents manage and form their identities (Belk 1988), an investigation into symbolic consumption practices of a youth subcultural group is justified.

The examination of a subculture of consumption that is organised around music is also justified as most youth subcultures revolve around music and much of youth identity is intrinsically tied up with music (Blair 1993; Thornton 1995a). Young adults spend more on, and listen to more, recorded music than anyone else (Thornton 1995a). Australia's 16-24 year olds spent a reported A$1.3 billion on recorded music in 2005 (Lifelounge 2006). While the fraction of that which was spent on hip hop music is not available, Lifelounge (2006) did report that 48.9% of 16-24 year olds regularly listen to hip hop, again emphasising the appropriateness of this subculture as a unit of analysis.

Finally, in a predominantly young male subculture, the researcher's gender and age benefited the data collection such that those under investigation felt more comfortable and hence revealed more of their true behaviour than they would have if the researcher was female or older. Hence, because of the researcher's age (23 at the start of the ethnographic process) and gender, the case under analysis was particularly well suited to the researcher. In addition, as the researcher slowly aged out of the peer group under investigation, increments of analytical distance were acquired with each passing year. Such an advantage may not have been achieved had an alternative subculture of consumption been investigated.

3.3   The Ethnographic Method

To investigate the consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture, ethnographic methods were used. Ethnography is a research process in which the investigator attempts to provide generic propositional answers through the meaningful interpretation of human experience in a social setting (Lofland 1995). Hence, ethnography is particularly well suited to the development of meaning-based models where an emphasis is placed on the cultural meanings and values within a subculture (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). To develop such models, the ethnographer must look beyond the surface answers and shallow observations and probe for deeper meanings by examining and experiencing the feelings and emotions behind people's behaviour (Mariampolski 2006). This was achieved through a naturalistic inquiry where the researcher observed and interacted with the members of the culture in their natural setting (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). By immersing himself deep into the phenomenon, by participating with and living amongst the observed, the ethnographer was able to perceive reality from the viewpoint of an insider rather than as someone external to it. Hence, an extended presence in the field and deep familiarity with the data enabled the researcher to understand the symbolism and shared meanings existent within the culture through the eyes of an insider, an advantage Yin (1994) describes as 'invaluable'. As the researcher examined how the meanings of consumer goods emerged through social interactions, this research is located in the social constructionist tradition of symbolic interactionism (Agafonoff 2006; Blumer 1969).

This symbolic interactionism perspective was used to develop propositional analysis via induction conducted over the course of the research to interpret the data in a

manner that was true to the lived reality of the subcultural participants, yet conceptually and theoretically elaborated (Lofland 1995; Mariampolski 2006). Hence, the criterion of validity utilised throughout the research was a degree of 'fit' between the propositional answers and social scientific explanations provided and the subjective reality of the subjects under investigation (Muggleton 2000). The term 'fit' refers to how closely the developed concepts match with the incidents they are representing (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In addition, the explanations presented of the consumption patterns of the Australian Hip Hop culture were required to be adequate in relation to both meaning and causality. That is, having ascertained a subjective motivation for an action, and the belief systems that influenced the behaviour, the researcher demonstrated 'causal significance' through triangulating evidence that suggested that the same behaviour would re-occur under identical circumstances (Muggleton 2000). The naturalistic enquiry aided this process as the researcher was able to contextualise the data by placing the observations into a larger perspective and hence develop explanations that truly represented the meanings behind the observed consumption (Fetterman 1989; Mariampolski 2006).

In addition, ethnographic research methods were chosen to investigate the case under investigation as these techniques have been found to yield deep insights into the way people interact with brands (Mariampolski 2006). Comparatively, more modernist approaches are less able to tap into the rich symbolic details of human experience and social interactions that is necessary to develop generic propositional answers (Goulding 2003). For example, focus groups tend to place informants in artificial environments, with people they don't know or trust, and are facilitated by individuals they don't know or trust and who have very little knowledge about the culture under

investigation. On the other hand, ethnographic research is grounded in the informants' own environment, conducted amongst people they trust, and researched by an investigator who comes to understand the world as they do.

Furthermore, because consumer behaviour is generally poorly recalled, and because self-disclosure can be idealised, obscured and corrupted by interpersonal influence, observation provides a more effective way to discover and validate consumption patterns (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). Furthermore, quantitative techniques to measure such abstract concepts as product-image and self-concept are demonstrably lacking. As previously stated in section 2.2.2, the common approach of having respondents rate themselves and products on a number of semantic differential scales, where the bipolar adjectives used were developed from a list of general adjectives obtained from personality inventories (such as 'rugged' versus 'delicate' and 'aggressive' versus 'defensive') (see for example Birdwell 1968; Grubb and Hupp 1968; Heath and Scott 1998; Ross 1971) doesn't begin to capture the complexity of how consumers see themselves and/or objects, nor the complex manner in which meanings attributed to the self and objects are developed and conceptualised. Furthermore, as self-concept is situation-specific (Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983), an ethnographic approach to an examination of symbolic consumption provides more than a static perspective.

3.4   The Grounded Approach and Reflexivity

The ethnographer used his absorption into the Australian Hip Hop culture to generate theory in an approach similar to what Glaser and Strauss (1967) labelled 'grounded theory'. That is, instead of attempting to confirm pre-existing hypotheses and validate

established theories, new theories emerged out of the slow inductive analysis of the data throughout the course of the research (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 1998; Lofland 1995). Furthermore, in the tradition of grounded theory the researcher stayed in the field, collecting and analysing data, until no further evidence arose (Goulding 1998).

So that theory generation is authentic and not restricted from the beginning, some ethnographers argue that the researcher should put all pre-existing theories out of their mind and let propositions arise from the ethnographic data (Humphreys 1970; Thornton 1997b). While theoretically advantageous, such postponement of theory is practically impossible to achieve because no researcher can escape their socialisation, education, and frames of reference (Willis 1976). Furthermore, the complexity of the social world means that totally unbiased, objective accounts of phenomena are impossible. That is, the decision to choose a particular topic, the decision to focus on particular aspects of a topic and the logic and method of enquiry employed are all inevitably grounded in the subjective values of the researcher (Davies 1999; Muggleton 2000). In addition, as ethnographic research requires the researcher to live in the community for an extended period of time, the researcher's presence and personal life can significantly influence the data collected. As such, Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) called for greater reflexivity in consumer research. Reflexivity involves looking back on oneself in a process of self-reference so as to recognise the influence of prior theory on the emerging discovery and examine how the products of the research were affected by the researcher and the process of conducting research (Davies 1999; Venkatesh 2002). An open acknowledgement of such influence is an attempt to qualify the research. Hence, the researcher would like to 'come clean' in

regards to what his motivations were for choosing the case under investigation as it impacted on his attitudes towards the phenomenon observed, and how his personal background may have influenced the data collection, interpretation and analysis, by making what Willis (1976) describes as a 'theoretical confession'. Without such a confession it is impossible to reflect and determine how one's interpretations have been shaped by this particular view.

While the suitability of the subculture of consumption to an examination of the consumption practices was imperative, the choice of an ethnographic investigation of the Australian Hip Hop culture was heavily influenced by the following reasons. First, and most importantly, the researcher was determined to choose a topic that he would remain interested in over a three-to-four year period. As a member of the young adult community who had always been keenly interested in music, the study of a music-based youth subculture seemed to satisfy this criterion. In addition, as the researcher had previously completed a quantitative research project for his Honours degree, he wanted to gain some experience conducting qualitative research throughout his PhD. Hence, the selection of the research topic and the methods used to investigate it were influenced by the subjective values of the researcher. Furthermore, the Australian Hip Hop culture was chosen as the focus of the study as the researcher found it peculiar that a recent acquaintance and neighbour, Nixon, a 21-year-old white Australian male from an upper-middle class background would feel so passionate about a style of music, and the culture that surrounded it. What interested the researcher most about the culture at the time was a belief that Hip Hop was an African American phenomenon. To discover that young white men were rapping with Australian accents, breakdancing in Adelaide clubs, writing graffiti on the Adelaide Metro, and

claiming that these practices signified Hip Hop was astounding. The researcher's understanding of why and how this occurred increased dramatically throughout the period of field research. However, an understanding of the researcher's initial and evolving position is necessary in order to reflect and ascertain how this perspective may have influenced the data collection, analysis and interpretation.

In addition, the researcher's personal background and the way he lived during the period of the ethnographic research may have also influenced the data collection, analysis and interpretation. As such, the following key details should be acknowledged. First, the researcher began the ethnographic process in June 2002, at the age of 23 as a well-travelled and liberal-minded honours graduate. Upon analysis, his relatively young age and open mind influenced his receptiveness, analysis and interpretation of what is essentially (as discussed in Chapter 4), a rebellious youth counterculture. Furthermore, as his level of education was considerably higher than the standard subcultural member, it is likely that his interpretation of events was framed differently than those of other members. In addition, it must be acknowledged that the researcher is a white Australian. This recognition is imperative as Hip Hop is often characterised as an African American culture and is certainly grounded in an African American tradition. Hence, for one to participate in the culture as a non-African American clearly impacts on interpretations of the values of the culture and the experiences within.

As an ethnographer becomes deeply socialised into the culture, there is the additional risk of identifying so closely with one's subjects that one inadvertently skews one's description and analysis of the world being portrayed. This process of over-

identifying with, and becoming an uncritical supporter of the culture under investigation, has been called 'going native' (Monti 1992; Thornton 1997b). To overcome the dangers of 'going native', while yet obtaining the full appreciation of the subculture that can only come from a deep immersion in the community, the researcher undertook several precautions. First, the researcher maintained both an involvement with, and a detachment from, the culture in question in a process of stepping in and stepping out of the society (Davies 1999; Fetterman 1989). Just as important as sustaining contact with the Hip Hop culture was maintaining contact with the academic world. Furthermore, the data collection method utilised was designed to provide the researcher with an insider's perspective while maintaining a scientific frame of mind. This was achieved through the recording of field notes from an etic perspective, that is, from an external, objective view, while the researcher's personal diary and informant's narratives detailed the consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture from an emic perspective, that is, from an insider's point of view. Comparison of the data sources provided the researcher with an understanding of why members of the group consume what they do, but also with an objective reality to critically examine his own ethnographic process and hence prevent the possibility of a self absorbed researcher losing sight of a culturally different other (Davies 1999).

A final safeguard was put in place to minimise the effect of the researcher on the case under investigation while maximising the depth of information that was obtained. Alternative approaches to ethnographic methods were utilised for the 'actual' ethnography and the 'virtual' netnography to maximise the potential advantages and minimise the potential biases of both approaches. Hence, during the 'actual'

ethnography, the researcher was an active participant in the culture who acted as a member, not as a researcher, so as not to unnaturally alter the flow of the interaction and hence produce potentially misleading or invalid data (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Mariampolski 2006). However, the researcher's presence in the community under investigation could have significantly influenced the data collected. That is, as the ethnographer interacted with the informants in the field, and as this interaction formed the basis of subsequent theorising, the ethnographer helped create and is a part of the observations that became data (Davies 1999). In order to counter this problem, a 'virtual' netnography was undertaken that utilised non-participant observation. The advantage of conducting such an approach on the Internet is that the researcher can remain inconspicuous and hence reduce reactivity. Therefore, this uniquely unobtrusive method provided data that was free from researcher bias.

3.5   Triangulation of Ethnographic Evidence

Throughout the research investigation, the researcher examined the data from a holistic perspective. That is, the extended presence in the field allowed the ethnographer to obtain many kinds of data that together could create a complete picture of the symbolic consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture (Fetterman 1989; Mariampolski 2006). This approach of utilising different sources of evidence to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources by double and triple checking is known as triangulation (Mariampolski 2006; Yin 1994). Triangulation is an imperative procedure to ensure ethnographic validity as it tests one source of evidence against another and tears away alternative explanation to substantiate the theoretical insights (Fetterman 1989).

This study of the consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture triangulated four methods of ethnographic research: prolonged participant observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and non-participant netnography. That is, the researcher explored the symbolic consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture by comparing the social world observed as ethnographer with the experiences felt as a member. In addition, these data were compared against the social worlds of the informants that were portrayed in the in-depth interviews and online at www.ozhiphop.com. During the analysis, which was conducted throughout the course of the research project, alternative sources of evidence validated particular data and grounded theoretical insights emerged. Literature that was relevant to these emergent theories was sourced and the theories were compared in a final process of contextualising the findings. Hence, this reflexive methodological approach enabled a five-way interrogation of the case under investigation, which provided a richer representation, and more valid account of the complex phenomenon observed. Throughout the next section, the four methods of ethnographic research utilised are discussed in detail.

3.6   Prolonged Participant Observation

Participant observation is a technique of collecting data by immersing oneself in the everyday lives of those under investigation (Denzin 1979; Lofland 1995). By penetrating their social circle and subjecting himself to the life circumstances of the subcultural participants, the researcher became in tune with their position and could sense what it was that the observed were responding to. In addition, such deep familiarity through participation in the culture enabled more open and meaningful discussions with the informants, provided access to cultural events that a non-

participant would not have been provided access to, and allowed a deeper level of analysis to be conducted across all types of data collected.

The participant observation began with an introduction to the culture through a key informant: Nixon. Nixon also aided the researcher by suggesting sources for further evidence and often initiating access to such sources. While grateful for Nixon's help, the researcher was cautious not to become overly dependent on him as such reliance could influence data collection (Yin 1994). The initial introduction to the culture involved observing members of the subculture at local Hip Hop shows. In the beginning I was only aware of these shows through my association with Nixon, however I soon learned to use the correct media sources (street press, dedicated radio programs, and online via www.ozhiphop.com) to obtain this information directly. To begin with, I spent time acclimatizing myself to the subculture. I felt that it was important to feel comfortable with the members and to understand their values before asking them questions regarding their consumption practices. I learned to take part in their everyday discussions on hip hop music, graffiti, and mischievous behaviour. As suggested by Fetterman (1989), I did not argue with the members, although I did participate in masculine banter, nor did I pass moral judgements upon them when their opinions differed from mine. As such, I was able to develop a strong rapport with the individuals under investigation. This rapport induced relaxation, honest behaviour, deeper and more accurate descriptions, and increased the likelihood of introductions to other subcultural members (Agafonoff 2006; Mariampolski 2006). Reminiscent of Whyte's (1943) seminal ethnography, much of the richest data were obtained through the process of 'hanging out'. While not a particularly 'active' research process, I found that it facilitated my acceptance within the group and

allowed me to observe the subcultural participants' everyday behaviour. In this way, I obtained many insights into their consumption practices prior to asking any specific questions. I did not abandon questioning altogether, I did so in many informal conversations when the moment seemed appropriate and my relationship with the participant was particularly strong. The data gained from these informal conversations were compared to my observations to ensure their validity.

Throughout the participant observation, the primary data collection method was field notes. These were written records of the social activity written up as soon as possible after the event. As many of the events were actually attended at night, the field notes were predominantly recorded in a Word document the morning after. However, when the nature of the occasion permitted, such as hanging out and playing records, or recording in the studio, hand-written field notes were immediately recorded in a spiral notebook and imported into the Word document at a later date. Each of the field notes was dated and provided a description of the event and the location, along with an account of the individuals involved, their actions, and possible motivations for behaviour. In addition, the symbolic world in which the event took place was well documented, including the brands and products that were conspicuously consumed. These field notes became a valuable part of the data under investigation as even from an etic perspective they recorded changes in what the researcher saw as significant as the interpretations developed. In the course of the four-year ethnographic period, 136 field notes were made comprising of 155 double spaced A4 pages, and an example of which can be found in Appendix D (p.304).

In addition to the field notes, 305 photographs were taken during some 24 Hip Hop related events. These visual data were useful in developing interpretations of events, establishing human-object interactions, and complementing the researcher's field note documentation. In particular, they reinforced the researcher's field notes by providing further evidence of the brands and products that were conspicuously consumed. In addition, eight events were videotaped yielding over 120 minutes of film. While the researcher approached the video recordings with the expectation of obtaining an abundance of illuminating data that could be analysed for not only verbal, but visual clues of representations and interpretations, the results produced did not meet the researcher's expectations. Whenever the video camera came into view the subcultural participants played up to the camera: rapping, creating music, and doing tricks. As such, the data recorded were not naturalistic, and hence the disruption caused by the video camera invalidated the data obtained. Hence, for the most part, the data used to analyse the prolonged participant observation were contained primarily in the field notes.

Becoming a member of a subculture generally means entering at the bottom of the status hierarchy and undergoing a process of socialisation. Hence, the nature of the ethnographic process was evolving which allowed the researcher to experience and interact with different elements of the subculture as an insider. As the researcher became more familiar with the Australian Hip Hop culture, he began to interact and participate with members of the group other than Nixon. As experienced by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and Belk and Costa (1998), this socialisation process brought about a transformation in the researcher, from an outsider to the group to an accepted member, which entailed a deepening commitment to the values and attitudes

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of the culture, including adopting the cultural jargon and rituals. This provided the researcher with the ability to conduct a deeper level of analysis when examining the data. The process of transformation occurred gradually throughout the research process. However, there were periods of accelerated tutoring, most frequently when Nixon was unemployed and still living next door to the researcher with his parents, clearly preferring the freedom and company that the researcher provided than his home environment.

Acculturation was achieved through the attainment of knowledge about the subculture. This knowledge was gradually acquired through studies of scholarly and popular literature, Internet forums, and through information learned in the process of data collection. Data collection methods worthy of mentioning in this section include shopping for Hip Hop related goods, listening to music homologous with the culture, examining cover art and lyric sheets, and visiting hip hop music, graffiti, and breakdance websites. In addition the researcher learned quite a deal about Hip Hop through attending an Australian Hip Hop conference. This conference provided the researcher with the opportunity to meet fellow academics researching Hip Hop and reinforced the researcher's confidence that an investigation into the phenomenon was justified. Furthermore, it should be noted that during the second year of the ethnography the researcher co-hosted a student radio show called 'The Hip Hop Remedy' and on three occasions 'hung out' in a record studio while local hip hop artists recorded.

Although people can be described as participants in Hip Hop culture in a variety of ways, soft and hard-core members are generally practitioners of one of its four forms

of expression – rapping, DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti writing (Masters 2001). In common Hip Hop discourse, the notion that these four elements constitute Hip Hop culture is widely known and regarded as the 'four element theory'. As it was deemed beneficial to the research that the ethnographer moved along the membership continuum, it became imperative that he learnt one of these practices. As the researcher had ethical (and legal) concerns with participating in graffiti, was not agile enough to perform the dancing equivalent of gymnastics, and felt that rapping about marketing and symbolic consumption would probably not delight the crowd, he turned his hand to turntablism. This became possible through the assistance of Nixon, who was always willing to bring his turntables around to the researcher's house, where he could turn up the volume without receiving complaints from his parents. After 21 months of the ethnographic process, the researcher had enough money saved to purchase two turntables and a mixer of his own, an acquisition necessary to become a DJ. Throughout the remainder of the ethnography the researcher continued to play and improved his skills considerably. Despite gaining membership of the Australian Hip Hop culture, it is important to note that the researcher was working in a cultural space in which everyone else was at leisure and, unlike other subcultural participants, tried to maintain an analytical frame of mind while in the cultural milieu. As such, while every effort was made to experience life as a Hip Hop member, a complete immersion was neither possible nor desirable.

3.7   Researcher Introspection

Throughout the ethnographic process the researcher kept a personal diary written from an emic perspective. That is, the diary portrayed the researcher engaged in relation with, rather than objectifying, the persons studied. This process was a useful

record of the researcher's cognitive and emotional experience, and allowed him to conduct personal introspection (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). By understanding the transformation of the self-concept more completely and by developing an understanding of how insiders' view the world, it was expected that data analysis and interpretations would be richer (Shankar 2000).

The diary began with a statement of what the researcher knew about Hip Hop culture at the beginning of the ethnographic process. Less structured in format than the researcher's field notes, the diary became a place to document my knowledge of the culture, my understanding of the ethos, my interest in the music, dance, and art of the culture, the development of my DJ skills, my motivations for Hip Hop related consumption, my relationships with other members of the culture (and at times non-members), my relationship with the products and brands, and a place to document my transformation.

The personal diary was not updated as regularly as the field notes. In the initial months of the ethnographic process, during the periods of accelerated learning, the diary was updated frequently, weekly or more often. However during the latter periods of the ethnographic process, months would sometimes pass without a single entry. This seemed justified as I had come to understand the culture through a lived experience and hence there wasn't much to report from an emic perspective, as my point of view was no longer changing. At the conclusion of the data collection period 52 entries had been recorded in the personal diary, comprising 48 double spaced A4 pages.

3.8   Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 individuals who had an active interest in the Australian Hip Hop culture. The subcultural participants ranged in age from 17 to 32 years. Only two of the informants were female, however this was deemed adequate, as the Hip Hop culture in Australia is a predominantly male domain. A profile of the interview subjects can be found in Appendix E (p.306). The interviews ranged in length from 11 to 50 minutes, with the average interview lasting 33 minutes. All interviews were conducted in natural environments, ranging from a coffee shop to a Hip Hop store to ensure that the informants felt comfortable and hence were willing to be introspective and report underlying motivations behind their perceptions (Reynolds and Gutman 1988). Each of the interviews was digitally recorded and transcribed shortly after by a paid transcriber who was informed of the confidential nature of the material. The researcher then listened to and read the transcriptions at the same time, examining for accuracy and added other striking features such as laughing, long silences and other instances remembered by the researcher that provided additional context to the interpretation. In total, the interview transcripts comprised 603 double-spaced A4 pages.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as this technique is well suited to discovery-oriented tasks (Wells 1993). In addition, McCracken (1988b) promotes the use of the in-depth interview as the method of choice when cultural categories are themes of the investigation. The advantages are further highlighted by Fournier (1998) who suggests that the thick descriptions provided yield insights into the theories of symbolic consumption and brand loyalty unavailable through the use of

other techniques. However, interviews do have problems associated with reactivity. Knowing that the researcher is recording information has been known to cause people to change their speech and behaviour, limit what they are willing to discuss, or avoid the researcher altogether (Carson et al. 2001). This is even more likely to occur when discussing symbolic consumption, as many people will not freely admit their latent motives. However, in the study conducted this situation was minimised, as the researcher had already developed a relationship of substance with the informants via participant observation. In addition, the researcher adopted Mariampolski's (2006) suggested technique of maintaining rapport by mimicking the informant's posture, pace of speech, and level of eye contact. Hence, it was felt that the informants treated the researcher as a real member of the group and revealed their inner selves (McCracken 1988b).

Hip Hop members who had already accepted my presence as a researcher, and participant in the culture under investigation, were the first informants interviewed. Special arrangements were made to conduct the semi-structured in-depth interviews in that the interviews were assigned as something different from the usual social interaction between the ethnographer and the informant in contrast to unstructured conversations. Theoretical sampling was utilised by the researcher to determine the next interviewees. That is, the decision of whom to interview was dependent on the generation of theory. Hence, data analysis and interpretation of the early interviews was conducted before the later interviews had occurred. As the emergent theory developed, early interviews (participant observation and researcher introspection) dealt with a relationship between one's membership status and symbolic Hip Hop

consumption; later interviews were conducted with more interested non-members of the culture.

The researcher approached all of the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the guide presented in Appendix F (p.315). However, as the ethnography progressed and the interviews evolved, the wording and order of the questions were modified, questions that seemed inappropriate were taken out, and at other times new topics and other supplementary questions were added. The time, date and informants relationship with the researcher, along with a brief description of the setting was recorded for every interview.

Non-directive questioning was used within semi-structured in-depth interviews to stimulate the informant into talking about the broad area of interest (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). The richest and most detailed narratives of the interviews were answers to the following question dealing with the transformation of self as one evolves through a subculture:

> *Tell me about your evolution through Hip Hop culture, from your first contact with it, to where you are now – with particular reference to the products and brands you've been consuming throughout, why you've been consuming them, and what they represent?*

This question provided the informants with the opportunity for them to detail their personal 'Hip Hop life history', explaining to the researcher how it was that they became involved in the Australian Hip Hop culture. As individuals have been found to view their own sense of identity as structured in terms of a narrative linked to key

episodes in their lives (Ahuvia 2005; Belk and Costa 1998; Holt 2002; Riessman 2002), it was determined that this method would yield more valid answers than other directive techniques. As the informants provided answers to this question, the researcher frequently relied on the laddering technique to uncover the structural aspects of consumer knowledge (Gutman 1982, 1990; Reynolds and Gutman 1988; Wansink 2003). That is, the researcher probed informants to make them think critically about the connections between the attributes of a product or consumption activity and their own personal value system. For example, the researcher may have interjected the narrative with "You mentioned that you would only wear Nike Air Force Ones. Why was it that you would only wear Nike Air Force Ones?" If the informant replied with, "Because they were great, man. Everyone had Air Force Ones". The researcher could have replied with, "But why were they great, and who do you refer to by everyone?" Hence, in essence, the researcher conducted guided introspection as the continued probing forced the informant to introspect (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993).

Throughout the interviews, the researcher played the role of a naïve outsider coming to learn about things from the participant's point of view. That is, during the interview the researcher suppressed his own knowledge and opinions and avoided educating or informing respondents, letting the informants teach him about their view of the world instead. This was at times a difficult task as many of the informants viewed the researcher as an expert in the area as he was 'doing his PhD in Hip Hop'.

In order to gain a marketer's perspective of the Hip Hop subculture, three additional interviews were conducted with brand and entertainment managers of a globally

recognised Hip Hop related brand, and with the CEO of a youth marketing agency. Their responses were closely compared to six of the 30 interviews with Hip Hop enthusiasts, specifically those who worked as designers of local Hip Hop brands and the owner of a local Hip Hop store. Such a comparison provided valuable insights into the local/global, sacred/profane, authentic/inauthentic and underground/commercial debates that were frequently heard and cited by members.

3.9   Non-Participant Netnography

The researcher also conducted a non-participant netnography of the Australian Hip Hop culture. That is, ethnographic research techniques were adopted to examine the computer-mediated culture that emerged online at www.ozhiphop.com. Kozinets (2002b) suggests that netnography can be readily applied to online consumption communities and is particularly advantageous as it is unobtrusive. Hence, this technique was chosen to supplement and triangulate the data collected during the participant observation, with data that were free from researcher bias. As such, the researcher acted as professional lurker, examining the community's common value systems, norms, rules and sense of identity without ever interacting online (Catterall and Maclaren 2002). The regular contributors to www.ozhiphop.com could be characterised as devoted, enthusiastic and knowledgeable. These regular contributors were found to look up to, and were influenced by, a small group of esteemed contributors who acted as opinion leaders. While netnography is an examination of a 'virtual' world, it is important to note that these interactions that take place within the forums are perceived as very 'real' by participants and as such have consequential effects on their real world consumer behaviour (Kozinets 2002b; Matsen and Plowman 2003).

The web forum www.ozhiphop.com was chosen as it was recognised as the predominant web based forum utilised by the Australian Hip Hop culture and was widely used amongst that particular community. Of the 30 informants interviewed, 15 were asked whether they used www.ozhiphop.com. Of these, ten indicated that they used the site regularly to obtain information, three didn't have access to the Internet, and the final two, both interested non-members of the culture who were lacking in subcultural knowledge, had never heard of the site. In addition, www.ozhiphop.com was chosen as compared to any other Australian Hip Hop web forum it had by far the highest amount of traffic with over 12,000 members having made over 1.29 million posts. Hence, on average, the site receives 829 posts per day.

While the web forum was regularly visited during the ethnographic period, only 46 threads were downloaded and analysed to limit the data to a manageable level. These threads were chosen for further examination due to their relevance to the topic of interest. With over 68,000 available threads, the researcher used two processes to examine their relevance. First, words of interest were entered into the search engine within www.ozhiphop.com and the resulting threads were then scanned by the researcher for relevance to the topic. Second, over the course of the research project, the ethnographer visited the site on a weekly basis. During each visit the researcher would scan the newly posted threads for relevance to the topic under investigation. So for example, threads such as 'Can whites dress black? (FUBU, etc)' and 'The deal with Australian Hip Hop fashion…" were pursued, while threads such as 'Ground Up 3 Mixtape Out Now' and 'Bliss and Eso – Mad Tight Film Clip' were judged not to be relevant. Furthermore, posts made to the selected threads that were deemed off-

topic were ignored and excluded from the analysis. This resulted in a volume of text with avatars that was 235 A4 pages long, representing over 2000 posts, and containing more than 300 distinct user names. Conversational participation from a range of participants was deemed important to ensure the data were representative and not unduly influenced by a vocal minority of participants with extreme views.

3.10   Progressive Reading of the Literature

Unlike positivistic research, which examines the research literature prior to the collection of data to discover gaps to be addressed, a grounded approach to theory generation does not require a literature-based problem. Here, the ethnographic discoveries prompted a selected reading of the related literature, which in turn led to additional ethnographic investigation. That is, as the ethnographic work progressed, emergent theories directed the researcher to the literature which best informed, explained and contextualised the findings. These readings were then used to further develop propositions which in turn influenced further data collection. That is, the data collected were compared to the literature in a process of triangulation similar to the way you compare data from two different sources. Hence, the reading of literature was emergent and relevant and both shaped and reflected the interpretations presented. As such, the findings presented in the following chapters reflect the balance between the literature and the field that is consistent with the ethnographic approach conducted. In contrast, the literature discussed in the previous chapter is an acknowledgement of the background knowledge that the researcher had prior to the ethnographic investigation and despite every effort to adopt a grounded approach and remove all existing theories from the mind before entering the field, such a complete

abandonment is impossible and this knowledge would have had some influence on the data analysed.

3.11   Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the tradition of grounded theory, everything was considered as data and hence the researcher's field notes, personal diary, informant interviews and netnographic threads were inserted into the qualitative analysis software package QSR N6 for analysis. The researcher utilised QSR N6 as a data management tool to more efficiently store, organise and code the plethora of the ethnographic data. Throughout the descriptions of the ethnographic techniques utilised, the quantity of the data that were collected has been listed. The point of listing the quantity of data was not to imply the quality of data, but rather to indicate the extensiveness of the documentation from which this work draws.

The analysis began with an impressionistic reading of all of the data to identify the recurrent themes that manifested within (Mick and Buhl 1992; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994). This was followed by open coding of the data by line unit. Having found what was thought to be the core categories, a third examination of the data took place. This selective coding utilised the selected core categories to guide the coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Sixteen core categories and 84 codes were labelled and can be found in Appendix G (p.318). Some reflected the interpretations derived from the ethnographic immersion (e.g. self-expression and authenticity), while others were derived from the literature (e.g. brand image and brand avoidance). After labelling it became easy to identify and examine relationships (Spiggle 1994), and hence conduct theoretical coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This process was aided by QSR N6

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which displays a diagrammatical illustration of inter-relationships and allows for occurrences across the entire database to be displayed in a single document. As noted by Pettigrew (2002), this process ensures that the resulting interpretation, the theoretical memoing, is an accurate representation of the data, and that themes are not unduly influenced by rare occurrences. The generation of theory was enhanced by the researcher's deep familiarity with the data as repetitive reading and examination of the data in its entirety, and at the levels of core category, individual code, and code intersections, enhanced the derivation of meaning. While this approach sounds sequential, in reality, the coding was very much an iterative affair (Spiggle 1994). Data were inserted into the software package as it became available and coding and analysis impacted on the direction of future research efforts.

Upon completion of the analysis, interpretations were presented to the key informant Nixon by way of a member check. As advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), and Kozinets (2002b), member checks enhance the credibility of the interpretations through participant verification. The member check with Nixon was conducted over ten hours. During this period the findings and context chapters of the thesis were read aloud, analysed and discussed sentence by sentence. Nixon's comments were invaluable, allowing the researcher to elicit more specific insights into the phenomenon, a number of which were incorporated into this document. Nixon's overall evaluation of the context and findings chapters was positive and he indicated that the findings were a truthful representation of the subculture. His one significant concern was in relation to the Australian Hip Hop culture's depiction as a male enclave which precluded women (as discussed in section 4.6). The discrepancy between Nixon's and the researcher's interpretation was

analysed, and the language used to describe this finding was toned down, though not significantly altered. This was deemed appropriate as it was determined and openly acknowledged by Nixon that his perception of the subculture was somewhat idealistic and he wanted to present the subculture in a positive light. Nevertheless, this discrepancy in interpretations is acknowledged as a limitation and is discussed further in section 6.4. Finally, it should be noted that the emergent theory presented in chapter 5 was understandable to Nixon, and hence, fulfils the 'understandable to the participants' criterion of grounded theory noted by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990).

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations need to be acknowledged at this point. First, throughout my fieldwork I found that I needed an explanation for my study. I began by presenting myself as a PhD student conducting an investigation into Hip Hop style and marketing. However, such overt representation of the 'square' academic world was met with suspicion. This, I feel, was heavily influenced by the representation of Hip Hop culture by local journalists who often present the community members as criminals, vandals and gang members. Hence, I began to find it easier to talk down my position and present myself as a student writing an assignment about Hip Hop style and marketing. Whenever a further explanation was needed I have always been honest and forthright, however by providing this explanation the cultural members were less intimidated by my presence.

In addition, as Hip Hop in Australia is a counterculture, and one that is intrinsically tied up with graffiti art, many of the subcultural participants were conducting

practices that were illegal. Hence, to effectively study these individuals in their natural setting, it was necessary to take the moral decision that the researcher would observe such acts without informing the authorities. This was necessary for the researcher to obtain the trust of the informants and strengthen rapport.

Furthermore, my field notes, personal diary and the semi-structured in-depth interviews are littered with references to illegal activities, primarily graffiti art and marijuana use. In addition, while permission was given by the informants to be interviewed (upon acknowledging that their responses would be treated confidentially and reporting would mark them unidentifiable), individuals who were simply observed and netnographic participants were not informed of the researcher's presence and intentions. Hence, I feel I owe my informants the duty of care to treat the data collected as confidential and, to protect the privacy of the informants, pseudonyms have been used throughout the reporting.

Finally, the researcher not only has an academic responsibility to report on the culture of investigation as it occurred, but also has the ethical obligation to members of the Australian Hip Hop community to represent the culture in its true form. Nevertheless, the ethnographic method utilised has the effect of producing thick descriptions that are accurate only at moments in time. Hence, the individuals in the study are presented in unchanging and virtually timeless state. However, in reality, the Australian Hip Hop culture (and life for that matter) is much more fluid, and hence many of the individuals have moved on temporally, spatially and developmentally.

3.13   Summary

In summary, this study of the consumption practices of the Hip Hop culture in Australia was conducted using four methods of ethnographic research: prolonged participant observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and non-participant netnography, combined with a progressive review of the literature. Ethnography was chosen as this approach can yield better insights into the way people interact with brands than more modernist approaches (Goulding 2003), and has been found to be particularly effective when little is known about a targeted group (Mariampolski 2006). A grounded approach to theory generation was utilised as it is the standard approach adopted by ethnographers and has been acknowledged to have considerable potential within the field of consumer behaviour (Goulding 1998).

The ethnographic research took place between June 2002 and June 2006. Extended presence and participation in the field allowed the researcher to 'learn the language' of those under investigation, and to experience life as one of the subjects (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). An Adelaide Hip Hop DJ who was an acquaintance of the researcher facilitated initial entry into the Hip Hop culture in Australia and the researcher accompanied the gatekeeper and a number of his friends to around 150 Hip Hop nights held across Adelaide and around Australia. In addition, the researcher accompanied the gatekeeper through a wide variety of contexts that Agar (1996) would describe as 'hanging out', such as playing records, playing basketball, watching television, shopping, socialising, drinking and partying.

Becoming a member of a subculture meant entering as an aspiring member and undergoing a process of socialisation whereby subcultural capital was obtained

(Thornton 1995a). Hence, the nature of the ethnographic process was evolving, which allowed the researcher to interact with different elements of the subculture and to experience the signifying practices of Hip Hop consumption as an insider. During this period, the researcher kept field notes of his observations and informal conversations, which were then written up as soon as possible after the event. Furthermore, the researcher kept a personal diary of the process, which was a useful record of his cognitive and emotional experience, and allowed him to conduct personal introspection (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000).

During the course of the study, 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals who had an active interest in the Australian Hip Hop culture were undertaken. The researcher utilised guided introspection to obtain the necessary data: as he had obtained membership status himself, a good rapport with the informants was established, and hence the information was of quality (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000). This technique was chosen as it has been found to be particularly useful when cultural categories are under investigation (McCracken 1988b; Wells 1993). Furthermore, netnographic research of a web forum regularly visited by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture www.ozhiphop.com was conducted using the methods prescribed by Kozinets (2002b).

The researcher's field notes, personal diary, interview transcripts and netnographic threads were imported into QSR N6 for coding. The various sources of data were initially coded in their entirety using open coding. Selective coding was then used to synthesise and relate data to conceptual topics of interest, such as the members' interpretations of brands, the glocalisation of the culture, and other major categories

that emerged from the data interpretation and literature review. This process enhanced the researcher's familiarity with the data and facilitated the derivation of meaning ensuring the resulting interpretation reflected persistent themes (Pettigrew 2002).

Finally, every effort has been made to conduct the ethnographic investigation into the Australian Hip Hop culture in an ethical manner. As such, the moral decisions that were made by the researcher have been acknowledged.

CHAPTER 4: THE AUSTRALIAN HIP HOP CULTURE

4.1   Introduction

This Chapter provides a detailed description and thematic analysis of the subculture under investigation. The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with the context necessary to understand the actual lived experiences of the subcultural participants and the researcher during the ethnography. A discussion of Hip Hop's origins and its arrival in Australia begins this chapter, followed by an examination of Australian Hip Hop as a glocal subculture that has differentiated itself from the parent culture and developed into its own distinct entity. The next section describes Australian Hip Hop as a counterculture that provides space for members to develop and express their self-concepts alongside other members with similar interests, and to position their unique values, attitudes and opinions against the dominant and mass culture, and in relation to other youth subcultural groups. The next section analyses how the predominantly white members of the Australian Hip Hop culture overcome their race and claim Hip Hop authenticity via proficient knowledge of, and respect toward, the culture, and truthful representation of their identity. The final section demonstrates that the Australian Hip Hop culture is a gender salient male enclave where members enact the rebel model of masculinity.

4.2   Hip Hop's Origins and Arrival in Australia

The aim of this section is not to provide a complete history of Hip Hop culture (see Rose (1994) for a comprehensive review); instead the aim is to provide a description of the origins of the culture and its migration to, and subsequent existence in, Australia. The purpose of providing a brief historical account of Hip Hop's origins

and arrival in Australia is to enhance the reader's understanding of the subculture of consumption under examination. Specifically, to be able to understand the complexities behind the Hip Hop oriented consumption of the young and predominantly white Australian men studied, one must understand the origins of Hip Hop culture, including its underprivileged and African American heritage, its ascension from an underground obscurity to a profitable commodity, its associations to gangs, violence and misogyny, and its arrival in Australia via the media.

Hip Hop culture revolves around four key activities: rapping, graffiti art, breakdancing and DJing. It originated in the South Bronx area of New York City during the early 1970's, when a number of predominantly black, urban youth threw street parties to entertain their friends and neighbours (Dyson 2004; Rose 1994). The music at these parties was performed by a DJ who would alternate the playing of records from two turntables such that the music wouldn't stop and the crowd would keep dancing. DJ Kool Herc improved this technique by isolating the breakbeat in two identical records and playing them over and over again such that the most danceable section of the song could be extended (George 2004). During the extended breakbeat some members of the audience, many of whom were Hispanic Americans (Tanz 2007), would partake in what has now become known as breakdancing, a dynamic, competitive, acrobatic and pantomimic style of dance which is considered to be the physical expression of Hip Hop culture (George 1998; Holman 2004; Pabon 2002). Over time, MCs began talking over the breakbeat to promote the DJ and other dance parties, and this developed into rapping; the rhythmic delivery of rhymes. During this early period in the history of Hip Hop, rapping usually revolved around good times, partying and friendship, however as the Hip Hop culture evolved MCs

began to rhyme about problems in their area and issues facing their community (George 2004). As such, Hip Hop music is considered to be the aural and verbal expression of the values and attitudes of members of the Hip Hop community (Dyson 2004; Rose 1994). The connection between Hip Hop culture and graffiti emerged as many of the street party attendees were graffiti artists (New York's famous graffiti epidemic had begun a few years prior) and that the street parties were held in environments where graffiti was prominently displayed (Castleman 2004). As such, graffiti has since become known as the visual expression of Hip Hop culture, capable of expressing the values and attitudes of the Hip Hop community (George 1998; Rose 1994).

It is often cited that Hip Hop culture has gone through at least three waves since its inception (Maxwell 2003; Rose 1994; Toop 2000). The earliest period has become known as 'Old School Hip Hop' and refers to the music, art and dance that assisted in the creation and development of the culture during the 1970s, through to Hip Hop's first significant mainstream success in the early 1980s (Perkins 1996). This period is readily associated with the founding fathers in Hip Hop's history such as the DJs Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash, the MCs Kurtis Blow and the Sugarhill Gang, the graffiti artists Taki 183 and Dondi, and the early members of the breakdance group the Rock Steady Crew (George 1998; Perkins 1996; Rose 1994). This period of Hip Hop was immortalised in a number of films and documentaries that examined and displayed life as a member of the Hip Hop culture in New York City, such as Wild Style (Ahearn 1982), Style Wars (Silver and Chalfant 1983), Beat Street (Lathan 1984) and Breakin' (Silberg 1984). These films and documentaries, together with the book Subway Art (Cooper and Chalfant 1984), and the music video 'Buffalo Gals' (a

new-wave electro song written and performed by the English singer, songwriter and former manager of the Sex Pistols, Malcolm McLaren (1983), which featured breakdancing, DJing, and graffiti art), were released internationally and provided Australian youth with their first images of Hip Hop culture (Maxwell 2003). As most Australian youth had little to no direct interaction with US Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop in Australia was constructed circa 1983 almost entirely through an active social engagement with various forms of media which provided them with an understanding of the ideological constructs (Maxwell 2003). Further evidence of the role of the media in the arrival of Hip Hop culture in Australia emerged throughout the ethnographic research. For example, Jay-C, a veteran of the Australian Hip Hop culture, revealed that:

> *Jay-C: (Hip Hop) came here through the normal channels, you know? A few films like 'Beat Street', and a couple of books on spray can arts, stuff like that.*

That Jay-C considers the arrival of a culture in such a manner as 'normal' demonstrates the seminal role of global media outlets in the diffusion of culture and the absence of any 'real' interaction with US Hip Hop culture in Australia. Without such interaction, knowledge of the culture and its defining ethos was constructed through a pastiche of cultural materials rather than through social interaction and a lived experience with the parent culture. As such, considering the content of cultural materials that made the journey across the Pacific, it is not surprising that the ethnographic informants indicated that the earliest Hip Hop culture in Australia was more skewed toward breakdancing and graffiti art than the US culture. Similar findings have emerged from previous studies investigating local interpretations of

popular culture when it is broadcast internationally (Gillespie 1995; Howes 1996; Jackson 1999, 2004; Miller 1992, 1998).

The second wave of Hip Hop is often referred to as 'New School Hip Hop' and is readily associated with the Hip Hop groups that received US chart success and international followings in the 1980s, such as Run DMC, Salt-n-Pepa, and the Beastie Boys (the first white, middle-class Hip Hop artists) (George 1998; Perkins 1996; Rose 1994). During this period, Hip Hop became more than just a culture, but also a profitable commodity, with Hip Hop music, fashion, and entertainment projected and consumed throughout the world. As such, marketers began to take an interest in hip hop artists and their potential influence amongst teenagers and young adults. A seminal moment in this relationship was in 1986 when the group Run DMC was paid US $1.5 million to endorse Adidas after executives of the company were taken to a sold-out show in Madison Square Garden to witness thousands of concert goers wave their Adidas sneakers in the air as the group played their single 'My Adidas' (George 1998; Kaikati and Kaikati 2004). Following this commercial success, references to brands, and particularly sneakers, became increasingly prevalent within hip hop music throughout the 1980s. During this period, the Australian Hip Hop culture began to organise itself around the New York model with young Australians interested in the culture forming crews and regularly coming together in parks, shopping malls, and the few stores that stocked hip hop records or were prepared to import hip hop recordings. The first Australian hip hop recording to be released on vinyl 'Combined Talent' occurred in 1988 by the group Just Us, and the first Australian graffiti magazine was published that same year, however as the culture was still relatively small, they were not widely circulated (Maxwell 2002; Pollard 2003).

The third wave of Hip Hop culture became increasingly influential with political and sometimes militant artists like Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions and A Tribe Called Quest using the popularity of their music to disseminate the values, opinions and problems of disenfranchised black youth throughout the world (Condry 2006). During this period, Hip Hop culture became increasingly Afro-centric. This made it difficult for the predominantly white Australian youth practising Hip Hop, to claim to be Hip Hop in any authentic sense. This stigma was perpetuated by the Australian media and dominant culture throughout the 1990s and as such, the Australian Hip Hop culture became an underground subculture with little recognition as a legitimate cultural practice. In the US, this third wave of Hip Hop developed into the 'gangsta rap' style of the 1990s (Ro 1996). This style of Hip Hop articulated the realities of life for US gang members and was personified by the artists Ice-T and NWA. Gangsta rap has been heavily criticised for its negative portrayal of women and the African American race, and the glorified portrayal of ghettos, violence, drug use, promiscuity and materialism (George 1998; Rose 1994). Due to the nature of Hip Hop disseminated throughout the world during the 1990s, Hip Hop culture and gang culture became inextricably associated (Ro 1996). As such, in addition to the race dilemma, participation in the Hip Hop culture by Australian youth was also perceived to lack authenticity due to their lack of gang affiliations (Maxwell 2003).

The consumption modes of gangsta rappers and the Hip Hop culture that revolved around it was extremely symbolic. For example, bold colours and logos were worn to signify gang membership. Specifically, in the Los Angeles region, the LA Raiders' logo was adopted by both of the major gangs, however those in the Crips wore blue,

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and those in the Bloods wore red (George 1998). In addition, baggy pants were worn to reflect the prison inmate look (US prisoners had their belts taken away to avoid acts of suicide and violence), hoods had the functional utility of hiding one's face while partaking in illegal activities (and also the symbolic quality of informing others that you partook in such activities), and exceptionally large gold and diamond jewellery were consumed as signs of wealth (which may not have necessarily been acquired legally) (Klein 2000; Rose 1994). Within Australia during this point in time, the consumption of Australian Hip Hop members could be seen as a minor reflection of the images that were broadcast on television, with baggy pants (particularly the brand Cross Colours), and hoods becoming increasingly popular amongst members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. The interview data also revealed that some of the graffiti writers had their crew names embroidered on the back of their jackets, and other members would steal desirable products from retail stores such as the latest sneakers, or expensive clothing that would be symbolic of wealth (such as the premium Australian label Country Road).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the majority of the Hip Hop culture that was disseminated throughout the world was extremely commercialised. During this period Hip Hop was used to sell high end fashion (such as Polo Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger), sports brands (such as Nike and Reebok), black owned brands (such as FUBU and Phat Farm), alcohol brands (such as St Ides, Hennessey, Courvoisier, and Seagram's Gin), motor vehicles (such as Cadillac and Mercedes), and foodstuff (such as Sprite, Frosted Cheerio's and McDonalds who even offered to pay US rappers up to $2.80 every time a song with Big Mac in the lyrics was played on the radio) (Duffy 2005; George 1998; Herd 2005; Negus 2004). In a study of the prevalence of alcohol

use in rap lyrics, Herd (2005) revealed a sharp increase in songs that mentioned alcohol brands after 1993. During the period between 1994 and 1997, 71% of Hip Hop songs that referred to alcoholic beverages referred to them by brand name. As brand placements in Hip Hop songs became increasingly prevalent, the brand consultants Agenda Inc launched American Brandstand, a research project which tracked all mentions of brands in the US Billboard Top 20 singles chart. In the first half of 2004, there were 645 brand mentions in the Billboard chart, and only one of these was in a track by a non-Hip Hop artist (Agenda Inc 2004). From a brand manager's perspective, perhaps the most successful of all of these songs was Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy's hit collaboration 'Pass the Courvoisier'. This song is an ode to the beverage, describing it as something that cannot be lived without, which was most likely responsible for the brand's 18.8% leap in sales growth in 2002 (MTV 2003). Despite the growth of an extremely commercialised Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop as an underground subculture continued to exist in the United States in the beginning of the 21st century, and advances in telecommunications and media technologies created an environment where this underground subculture could be accessed throughout the world (Appadurai 2001). Hence, Australians who were interested in learning about the underground variation of Hip Hop culture could now access images and reviews via the Internet and hear the music via community radio programs.

4.3   Australian Hip Hop as a Glocal Subculture

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s much of the Hip Hop culture in Australia emulated the Hip Hop culture that was being broadcast from the US. While a local interpretation of the culture had been constructed, the majority of subcultural participants tried to replicate the culture that was being broadcast via the media.

During this period, the Hip Hop culture in Australia could be viewed as an example of global homogenisation, where cultures throughout the world become increasingly alike as a consequence of the diffusion of popular culture and the migration of goods throughout the world (Howes 1996; Strinati 1995). However, by the turn of the century Hip Hop culture in Australia had embraced a number of distinguishing features that differentiated it from the US Hip Hop culture, while celebrating its place within the global Hip Hop community (Pollard 2003). Such culture creation came about through the fusion of local conditions with the globally broadcast culture in a process that Robertson (1995) describes as 'glocalisation'. This process creates greater diversity and spawns new cultures as many different interpretations of popular culture artefacts are made as they are consumed throughout the world (Miller 1994; Robertson 1995).

A growing body of work collectively examines the glocalisation of Hip Hop in a range of globally and culturally diverse settings. Scholars have researched Hip Hop in US cities outside of New York, such as Houston (Sarig 2007) and Los Angeles (Ro 1996), and in countries outside the USA such as the UK (Bennett 1999a; Hesmondhalgh and Melville 2001; Swedenburg 2001), Japan (Condry 2001), the Netherlands (Wermuth 2001), Germany (Pennay 2001), Korea (Morelli 2001) and New Zealand (Mitchell 2001). Each of the cultures investigated has combined elements of US Hip Hop with their local culture. For example, Japanese Hip Hop crews rap in Japanese and within their lyrics there is no mention of guns or misogyny, and very little violence (Condry 2001), while Islamic Hip Hop crew Fun-Da-Mental rap lines from the Koran, such as 'Al-lahu akbar' (God is greatest) (Swedenburg 2001). Although different in many respects, each culture investigated is similar in that

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they were all conceived through the diffusion of US Hip Hop via the media. Furthermore, in each case, imitation of US Hip Hop representations portrayed in the media was initially undertaken and was followed by a fusion of the local culture with US Hip Hop. Also, as a result of this glocalisation, each culture has, in its own way, had to negotiate issues regarding imitation and authenticity.

Evidence of glocalisation has also been found in the Australian Hip Hop culture, with previous studies describing individuals who have adopted a local interpretation of the values and symbols of the culture and have developed a local Hip Hop identity (Masters 2001; Maxwell 2003). To borrow from the Hip Hop vernacular, Hip Hop in Australia has differentiated itself from its US origins with local 'flavour'. For example, in relation to hip hop music, American accents are abandoned for Australian accents, and talk of ghettos is replaced with talk of the suburbs. A quote from Mick D, a member of the Oz Hip Hop Internet forum, provides evidence of these glocalising effects on both the content and accent of Australian hip hop lyrics:

> *Mick D: The thing that makes Oz hip hop unique is the fact that locals can relate to both the subject matter and the lingo, and to be honest, it's refreshing.*

In addition to the impact glocalisation has had on Australian Hip Hop music, the construction of a distinct Australian Hip Hop culture has lead to the development of an Australian Hip Hop industry catering specifically to the needs of the subcultural members. Stores stocking primarily Hip Hop, and in some instances specifically Australian Hip Hop goods, cater to the market. These stores act as physical community centres for the Australian Hip Hop community, selling Australian Hip

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Hop fashion labels such as One Leg, Materialism, and Blank, Australian Hip Hop music, and acting as a meeting place for the subcultural members and a centre for the exchange of Hip Hop related information. However, despite the existence of these physical meeting places, the Australian Hip Hop culture is rarely, if ever, experienced in totality. The closest instances that the researcher encountered were the big musical events (i.e. the Culture of Kings album launch), however there was no specific venue described as one solely for Hip Hop events. For one night, particular venues become the home for the culture, however the following night they would be hosting Australian Rock & Roll bands, for example. In addition, unlike the urban density of New York, the suburban sprawl of Adelaide was simply not conducive to large group congregation. Younger members were most likely to regularly associate with a small group of the same friends in a member's bedroom or back shed (as their parents didn't appreciate the company in the living room), and older members did the same in a friend's apartment, backyard, or at the pub. The absence of regular large group congregations meant that much of the communication passed between members was facilitated via the web forum www.ozhiphop.com. Social interactions on this web forum shaped and reinforced individual interpretations and expanded the consumption of hip hop music, shows and brands, beyond their initial experience (Jenkins 1992). This forum coupled with Australian Hip Hop music, film, magazines, street press, websites and radio shows had the capacity to connect individuals, reinforce the subculture's existence, and to develop and express the group's collective identity. Hence, the Hip Hop culture investigated in this thesis was perhaps best described as neo-tribal. A dispersed and loosely organised group of individuals with similar consumption interests who rarely come together in totality, and encountered much of the subculture's existence through their consumption of niche media (Maffesoli

1996). Indeed, 'Hip Hop culture' as an umbrella identity encompassing US Hip Hop culture and the many glocal cultures around the world is also neo-tribal in nature in that members feel a part of this global community through their interactions with other members via electronic media, although they rarely, if ever, meet in person.

During the period of ethnographic observation, the Australian Hip Hop culture grew considerably in size. The general consensus amongst the cultural members studied was that the beginnings of this growth spurt occurred circa 2000 when Australian Hip Hop music began to achieve some recognition beyond the inner sanctum of Hip Hop members. Specifically, the release of a compilation album 'Culture of Kings' saw Mass MC's 'BBQ Song' achieve what no other Australian MC had done before and receive airplay on the national youth broadcaster Triple J. The growth in awareness and interest in the culture accelerated in 2001 when Triple J launched its first weekly Hip Hop show, which for the first time gave artists an infrastructure to have their music heard nationally. In addition, 2001 saw the Hip Hop fanzines Stealth and Out4Fame transform into fully-fledged magazines with national distributions, full colour layouts and, in the case of the former, a free CD containing many Australian Hip Hop recordings. In 2002, the year the ethnographic research began, further interest in the culture was spawned due to the release of Culture of Kings II, a 42 track double compilation album that gave national exposure to the artists as they conducted launches in most major cities, and achieved feature album of the week status on Triple J. That same year, the web forum www.ozhiphop.com was launched, providing members with a virtual meeting place to discuss the culture, while at the same time providing the increasing number of aspiring members with access to the knowledge required to understand the culture's history, values and symbolic cues and,

hence, ability to gain membership. Another online initiative which fuelled the growth of Hip Hop events in 2002 was the construction of the 'OZ Cella', a directory of all Australian Hip Hop artists that made it not only possible, but simple, for promoters anywhere to organise Australian Hip Hop shows with their preferred artists. Furthermore, some of the interest in Hip Hop during that year was sparked by the success of white American rapper Eminem, and his starring role in the semi-autobiographical film '8-Mile'. While Eminem's work is generally not well received by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture (as discussed further in section 4.4), the mainstream success of this film did increase the acceptability of non-black participation in Hip Hop, which further fuelled the culture's growth.

While it is possible to single out Eminem as a catalyst for growth in the Australian Hip Hop culture, the Australian Hip Hop group to fulfil this role was undoubtedly the Hilltop Hoods. The Hilltop Hoods were the first Australian Hip Hop group to achieve major mainstream success with the release of their 2003 album 'The Calling'. This recording was the first Australian Hip Hop album to go gold (and later platinum), and was supported by a national tour and warm reception on Triple J as the station's 'album of the week'. Their first single 'The Nosebleed Section' was awarded the 9th favourite song of 2003 by those who voted in the Australia's largest music poll, Triple J's Hottest 100. It also became the first Australian Hip Hop song to achieve high rotation on the commercial radio stations Nova and Triple M, and on commercial music video stations and programs such as Channel V and Video Hits. Their next album, the Hard Road, debuted at number 1 on the Aria charts, went gold within in a week, and saw them headlining national festivals of over 20,000 fans. The success of the Hilltop Hoods inspired the major record labels with the confidence required to

invest in Australian Hip Hop (such as the release of the Warner Music compilation 'Straight from the Art'), which combined with the vast improvements in the quality of the artistic expressions and professionalism of cultural members (be they DJ, MC, graffiti artist or breakdancer), further increased the culture's exposure and appeal within mass culture. In addition to the masses, consumers of the fine arts were also exposed to the Australian Hip Hop culture during the period with documentaries on the Australian Hip Hop culture (such as Skip Hop (Guthrie 2005) and Rash (Hansen 2005)) premiering at the nation's major film festivals, breakdance performances (such as Breakin') occurring at the nation's major arts festivals, and Australian Hip Hop artists collaborating with established traditional musical ensembles (such as the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra).

As previously stated, this increase in exposure of Australian Hip Hop's artistic expressions lead to a growth in cultural members throughout the ethnographic period. This influx of new members was perceived to have both a positive and negative impact on the Australian Hip Hop culture. In regards to the positives, a substantial growth in new members had the effect of substantiating the culture's existence and legitimacy as a glocalised Australian youth culture distinct from the US version. In addition, a substantial increase in membership and exposure amongst the mass culture meant that the practitioners of Australian Hip Hop culture (be they DJ, MC, breakdancer or graffiti artist) had their first opportunity to turn their passion into an occupation. For members of the Australian Hip Hop culture the incentive of this opportunity wasn't the potential to make money, but the ability to be able to devote their time to the Hip Hop lifestyle without the obligation of undertaking the everyday and mundane tasks that a more ordinary occupation entails. This particular nuance of

the glocal culture was perceived to be in stark contrast to commercialised US Hip Hop and the US Hip Hop culture of the 1980s where such success was seen as an avenue to escape life in the ghetto (Rose 1994). Another perceived potential benefit of the increased exposure and growth in members was the ability for Hip Hop practitioners to expose their artistic expressions to a greater number of interested individuals. Widespread exposure of artistic expression spread the culture's countercultural values and provided the artist with ego-enhancing recognition. Ego enhancement was a common motivation for Hip Hop participation and the recognition of one's skills by the Hip Hop community (such as a graffiti artist who has achieved 'King of the Line' status by being recognised as the most prolific graffiti artist on a train line) was highly desired.

In regards to the negative impacts, the culture's increased exposure and an influx of new members diminished the appeal of the Australian Hip Hop culture for existing members. Throughout the ethnography, relatively long-term members often expressed resentment toward such growth in numbers and mainstream exposure as they felt that they had lost ownership of something that was once theirs, and new participants often failed to understand the culture's values or to follow the subcultural norms that had been established. Take the following two interview extracts for example:

> *Jay-C: There was a difference from when it got radio play and when it didn't, and it, you know, before, it was ours. It was youth tuning into an underground radio station at night, or… it was just our music, you know? And then it did become commercialised, then kids were getting onboard and they were picking up a spray can and were tagging, and there was a mess everywhere. And then people… yeah, there were toys everywhere, like, tagging, tagging, tagging.*

Rocky: A good breaker to me is somebody that doesn't have a whole combination of moves, but somebody that can just make something up in relation to whatever is being played. That's real self-expression, but in all honesty I don't think that there's much self-expression in breakdancing anymore. It's pretty much just a list of moves and you go out and you learn it. It's like a freaking PS2 game or something. You know what I mean? You just learn combinations.

In the first extract, Jay-C expresses nostalgia toward a previous era when he felt that he had an influential stake in the culture, its values and norms. In contrast, he expresses resentment toward new members who often lacked an understanding of the culture's values and failed to learn and obey the subculture's norms, and as such sparked cultural disorder and encouraged cultural change. The specific example that he provides is of new members with an interest in graffiti art marking their pseudonyms in public spaces without respect for the highly complex set of rules that the previous era had developed to ensure order within the community, enhance the aesthetic appeal of graffiti and limit interest from the authorities. In the second extract, Rocky, a well-respected breakdancer in the Australian Hip Hop community, expresses his belief that Hip Hop's artistic expressions, and in his specific example, breakdancing, should be admired for their ability to express one's self. However, it is his belief that this value had dissipated as new members were simply rote learning outward expressions such as a series of breakdance moves in much the same way one would master a video game.

Another negative impact of the increased exposure of Australian Hip Hop and the subsequent growth in numbers had on existing members was a mundaning effect on their self identities. As an unpopular subculture, Australian Hip Hop had the effect of providing members with a unique and differentiating identity. As young people often use subcultures to develop a distinct sense of self (Thornton 1995a), the popularisation of the culture made their self concepts less distinct and hence participation in the subculture lost much of its original appeal. In addition, one of the primary motivations for joining the Australian Hip Hop culture, its subversive potential (as discussed further in section 4.4), was diminished and the culture became more sanitised as broad acceptance harmed its socially resistant nature. The erosion of the culture's rebellious image was exacerbated by the commodification of the subversive symbols associated with the subculture, such as graffiti art and Hip Hop fashion. For example, throughout the ethnographic period, graffiti art was used to promote a range of mainstream, and often feminine, products such as bras and tampons. Such commodification stripped the symbols of their countercultural meanings and rendered them palatable to the wider public. Interestingly, Hip Hop members were generally not opposed to the use of Hip Hop iconography within marketing communications, as long as the culture was represented accurately with the richness and depth they felt the culture deserved. Unfortunately for the members, this was often not the case. In regards to Hip Hop fashion, the brand Polo Ralph Lauren, a well-established Hip Hop icon, became the third most popular brand amongst Australian males aged 16-29 during the ethnographic period (Lifelounge 2005), and was often consumed in a feminine pink. However, it should be noted that while some members claimed that this was an example of mass culture appropriating Hip Hop fashion and nullifying its subversive appeal, before Polo Ralph Lauren became

synonymous with Hip Hop fashion, it was originally an upmarket fashion brand that was later adopted by US Hip Hop members to conspicuously demonstrate wealth and as a form of bricolage that challenged the hegemony of the dominant culture (as discussed further in sections 4.4 and 5.6).

4.4   Australian Hip Hop as a Counterculture

The Australian Hip Hop culture investigated, with its unique and local identity, was inherently countercultural in nature. First and foremost, the culture was an entity that provided space for members to develop and express their self-concepts alongside other members with similar interests, and to position their unique values, attitudes and opinions against the dominant and mass culture, and in relation to other youth subcultural groups. However, unlike traditional countercultures as defined by the Birmingham theorists (e.g. Clarke 1975a; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978), the Australian Hip Hop culture did not partake in a class-based struggle. Despite that, over half of the informants were either unemployed or in casual or part-time work at the time of interview, only a small minority made any sort of references to social class or economic conditions, and there were certainly no suggestions that their affiliation with Hip Hop was a response to such factors. The absence of such a response may have been because the majority of the informants came from middle-class, rather than working-class backgrounds and many of them were provided with support and accommodation by their parents. In addition, as Australia had been undergoing its longest ever period of economic expansion during the ethnographic period, which included the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years (Costello 2007), for many of the subcultural participants lack of full-time employment was a lifestyle choice rather than a consequence of economic factors.

While there was no evidence of any class-based struggle within the Australian Hip Hop culture, what did consistently appear throughout the interviews were references to freedom from rules, structures, and controls, and from the predictability of conventional lifestyles. The illegal nature of graffiti art, the rebellious tone of many rhymes, the use of the turntable as a musical instrument and the unorthodox dance styles meant that the outward expression of the culture was also symbolic of emancipation. In addition, the adoption of monikers by members as a way to subvert authority and ensure anonymity, and the assemblage of crews that resembled gangs contributed to the culture's 'outlaw' image. This rebellious public image has been found to be the major appeal of Hip Hop for many young white men (George 1998; Spiegler 1996; Swedenburg 1992), and as most of this study's participants first became interested in Hip Hop during their teenage years (the age range most commonly associated with rebellious behaviour and identity formation)(Erikson 1968), it was not surprising that many of the informants cited the desire to rebel against the mass and dominant culture as their primary motivation for pursuing an interest in the Hip Hop culture. For example, when discussing his emerging interest in graffiti, Keaton expressed his motivation for participating as a simple counter hegemonic response:

>   Keaton: I don't know... it was pretty much a big 'fuck off' to everyone.

Similar responses were made by the Punks in Muggleton's (2000) study, and previous countercultural research has found freedom from conventional society to be a core cultural value in the hippy, surfer and new biker cultures (Irwin 1973; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Willis 1978), further supporting the notion that countercultures

are not necessarily reactions to class-based systems but can be manifestations of cultural opposition to the dominant ideology and mainstream orthodoxy. The example of Mulray further illustrates the point: In a discussion about his motives for being a graffiti artist, he expressed his frustrations with the dominant and mass culture, and indicated that he saw much of the purpose in his art as being a vehicle to encourage individuals within mass culture to question their place and subordination within mainstream society by the dominant culture.

> *Mulray: I see people go to work and see one of my big throw-ups* (graffiti painted quickly with one layer of paint and an outline) *of "Think" or "Unlearn" and what must they think? "I've got to go to work every day and this is the bullshit I have to deal with, and it's just because I've had it forced on me by society". To me, it's about that - taking something back.*

While the above quote provides some evidence that members of the Australian Hip Hop culture perceived the dominant culture to be placing restrictions on life and work, they also felt that even harsher restrictions were placed on them as a means to limit their opposition to the dominant ideology. The most obvious and frequently disparaged were anti-graffiti laws that were perceived as stifling artistic expression and sanitising the environment in an effort to create a bland and obedient society. During the ethnographic period, a common and much heated discussion amongst members, particularly in the online forums, were the proposed changes to the State of Victoria's (2007) anti-graffiti legislation. These measures were perceived as draconian as they overturned the presumption of innocence for anyone caught carrying a can of spray paint on the state's public transport system and could see offenders imprisoned for up to two years and fined a hefty $27,000. While anti-graffiti

laws were the most commonly cited restriction enforced by the dominant culture to limit the counterculture's insurgence through expression, other lawful measures were also cited such as noise restrictions and anti-drug laws. While these laws apply to all members of society, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture felt specifically targeted by the dominant culture, and perhaps with good reason. For example, in 2004 the then Federal Treasurer Peter Costello went as far as to blame Hip Hop for the "moral decline" of Australian youth in a speech at the Hillsong Church (Mitchell 2006).

While the perception of Hip Hop's cultural expressions as counter hegemonic responses to the dominant culture were common, the most common 'other' to which the Australian Hip Hop culture was opposed was commercialised youth culture. Members of the Australian Hip Hop culture investigated believed that the manifestations of youth culture should be the consequence of authentic expression. In contrast, they believed that the majority of artefacts consumed by the majority of youth were mass-produced and mass-marketed and hence inauthentic. While a reading of this data from a Birmingham theorist's perspective would suggest that the commercialisation of youth cultural products is capable of communicating and spreading the dominant culture's ideology, propagating its values and reinforcing its position, Australian Hip Hop members never acknowledged this possibility and instead viewed the commercialisation of youth culture as a consequence of marketing catering toward the undifferentiated tastes of mass culture. As such, most of the negative feelings expressed as a result of the commercialisation of youth culture were aimed squarely at the perceived ignorance of the undifferentiated masses they

described as 'the mainstream' rather than at the dominant culture, or specifically the creators or marketers of the content.

Whilst the Australian Hip Hop culture positioned itself against mass culture and while the ethnographic informants continually made disparaging comments about the mainstream, the entity itself is particularly abstract, and could perhaps be better described as an 'imagined other' that the Australian Hip Hop culture defined itself against. In the course of the four-year ethnographic research, the researcher never encountered individuals who identified as belonging to either a mass or mainstream culture. While many individuals indicated that they had mainstream tastes in cultural products, such as music and entertainment, and indicated that a number of cultural products had 'gone mainstream', as a cultural entity the concept lacked tangibility. Hence, as a culture that Australian Hip Hop members used to compare and define their culture against, mass culture, or the mainstream, seemed to be everything and nothing at the same time; a generalised stereotype of a homogenised culture that does not exist. Members of this 'imagined' mass culture were perceived to be heavy consumers of, and heavily influenced by, mainstream media such as Video Hits (a popular music video program), SAFM (a popular radio station) and the Advertiser (a popular newspaper). Hence, the mainstream the Australian Hip Hop culture positioned itself against was their perception of an undifferentiated mass of consumers of commercialised youth culture, broadcast via the major media outlets.

An integral aspect of the process by which individuals assign labels and meanings to subcultural groups is their perception of the group's representation in the media (Thornton 1995a). As such, the subcultural participants perceived Hip Hop's portrayal

by major media outlets to be misrepresenting the Hip Hop ethos. As the commercialised youth culture that was projected presented Hip Hop as manufactured, materialistic, black, American, violent, and misogynistic, members felt that the Australian Hip Hop culture was being assessed with this frame of reference, and was hence misinterpreted. The members' key concern with mass culture's misinterpretation of Hip Hop was that they would be marked as inauthentic as they weren't black or American, and labelled as 'wannabes' infatuated with the black race, American popular culture, materialism, violence and misogyny. Such an interpretation attacked the very heart of the culture's values and reduced its legitimacy as an Australian youth subculture (as discussed further in section 4.5). While subcultural participants often belittled US Hip Hop stars and the media corporations they believed to be propagating this representation, the target of most of their angst was once again the mainstream who they perceived as ignorant and gullible.

In addition to disseminating commercialised youth culture, Australia's major media outlets influenced the general public's perceptions of the Australian Hip Hop culture in another way. On the rare occasions that the existence of Hip Hop in Australia was referred to specifically, general media messages took the form of moral panic stories. This had the effect of reinforcing the countercultural nature of the subculture through certifying transgression. However, there was much discussion on whether this was a desirable outcome for the subculture. Many felt that such reporting further reduced the ability of Australian Hip Hop to be perceived as a legitimate youth culture. In contrast, others, particularly the younger and less experienced members of the culture, revelled in the notoriety and championed their idealistic countercultural beliefs. For example, in January 2006 after Channel 9's 'A Current Affair' aired an episode which

compared Australia's graffiti artists to terrorists, the following dialogue appeared, amongst others, on the web forum www.ozhiphop.com:

Tags: Dudes, graffiti is illegal. If Hip Hop wants to be respected in society it must unfortunately accept society's rules.

Lokura: Fuck earning society's respect. If that's what you want you missed the whole point of Hip Hop. It's a subculture, it's a revolution, it's a movement. We don't need society's respect; we need to recreate society to Hip Hop's rules.

In addition to their opposition to dominant and mass culture, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture who partook in this study also compared themselves against other more tangible subcultural groups. The comparison against other subcultural groups allowed members of the subculture to establish boundaries and to develop and defend their unique subcultural identity. The group that the Australian Hip Hop culture most commonly compared itself to were often referred to as the 'Homies'. These individuals claimed to be Hip Hop yet were perceived to have a limited understanding of the culture and to be merely emulating the commercialised Hip Hop, and in particular the gangsta rap, that was being broadcast by the major media outlets. As such, the 'Homies' were perceived to be inauthentic as their behaviour was based around a gangster fantasy that the subcultural participants emulated from the media, when in reality no such gangster culture existed in Australia. While the 'Homies' were not the focus of this study, previous research suggests that subcultures of consumption can indeed be based around the consumption of fantasy experiences (Belk and Costa 1998; Costa 1998; Park and Deshpande 2004). These fantasies can be created through interpretations of music, lyrics, music videos,

films, television programs and video games (Belk and Costa 1998; Park and Deshpande 2004). As such, Kelley (1996) argues that for many young white males the consumption of gangsta rap is a mythic adventure into an imagined ghetto: a place of unbridled violence and erotic fantasy. In these fantasies young males can forge strong masculine gender identities that they cannot possibly assume at school, at work, or at home. In an extension of the current study, Arthur (2006c) suggests that such escapism by young male consumers of hip hop music in Australia falls into two categories: the pimp fantasy and the gangster fantasy.

The 'Homies' emulation of gangsta rap, and their enactment of gangster fantasies resulted in what was perceived to be a more violent and criminal subculture than the one under study. However, much of this behaviour was perceived by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture to be posturing in public spaces (such as around shopping malls) in an effort to be perceived as tough. This perceived inauthenticity was further highlighted in their cultural expressions as many of their raps revolved around issues surrounding guns and the ghetto when such issues weren't truly reflective of the individuals' lives. In this way, the 'Homie' culture threatened the integrity of Australian Hip Hop, as it was argued that mass cultural members were incapable of differentiating between the two. As such, witnessing the 'Homies' emulating the manufactured hip hop presented in the mass media reaffirmed their misinterpreted evaluation of Australian Hip Hop for the general public. This comparison with the 'Homies' frustrated and angered the Australian Hip Hop community, as it reduced their cultural identity to a mere replica of a manufactured commodity which once again attacked the culture's values. The verbal demonstration of such frustration was found in abundance throughout the ethnographic data and was often similar in

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substance to the following conversation between Barber and Step where the differentiation between the cultures is stressed and the inability of the general public to distinguish between the two highlighted:

> *Barber: They kind of call us "Homies" but we're not really like that.*
>
> *Step: Everyone calls us "Homies", but there's Homies and then there's us...*
>
> *Barber:…You know, we don't fight, we don't go out looking to start shit, we're just, like, into our own Hip Hop and people generalise it and say "Oh yeah, you're still Homies".*

Another youth subculture that the Australian Hip Hop culture positioned itself in opposition to was the rave subculture. The rave subculture was perceived to be particularly shallow and superficial, in contrast to the members' perception of their own subculture as deep and esoteric. That is, the generalised stereotype of a raver was an individual more concerned about experiencing an exhilarating and socially charged methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) high, than they were concerned about the quality of the music that their subculture championed. In addition, these traits were perceived to be further exemplified by the ravers' fondness for digitally produced electronic music (in contrast to that played on vinyl or with 'real' instruments) and their faddish consumption habits and seemingly bizarre fashion (such as their use of glow sticks and fuzzy leg warmers). Furthermore, the rave subculture was perceived as particularly weak and effeminate, which allowed the Australian Hip Hop culture to develop through comparison a strong masculine subcultural identity. The enactment of a particularly masculine gender identity is discussed further in section 4.6.

The findings of the ethnographic research suggest that the Australian Hip Hop culture not only positioned itself against other youth subcultures, but actually positioned itself alongside another, specifically, the skateboarding subculture that existed in Australia during the ethnographic period. While skating and Hip Hop don't appear to have a strong historical connection in Australia or abroad, they both place a large degree of importance on their common values of self-expression and freedom from rules. In addition, Hip Hop music (along with punk music) could be heard on a lot of skate videos that were popular amongst the skate culture at the time, possibly causing some of the perceived alignment. During the course of the ethnographic period, the researcher took up skateboarding as many of the members also participated in this activity. However, it should be noted that very few of the informants participating in this activity considered themselves part of the skate culture. For them skating was an activity that they participated in, rather than a lifestyle, which was their approach to Hip Hop. Nevertheless, they not only accepted that a skate culture existed, they acknowledged that it was a way of life for some individuals and they respected and even championed this choice of lifestyle as they felt skaters were guided by a similar set of values as themselves.

This section has highlighted the countercultural nature of the Australian Hip Hop culture. In contrast to early subculture studies, rebellious behavioural norms were not a reaction to a class based struggle but a manifestation of cultural expression aligned to the cultural values, and opposed to the dominant ideology and mainstream orthodoxy. In addition, the Australian Hip Hop culture also positioned itself against other subcultures, the 'Homies' and the rave subculture, and positioned itself in parallel to the skate subculture. The next section undertakes an analysis of how the

issues of race and authenticity are negotiated by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture.

4.5   Race in the Australian Hip Hop Culture

We will begin this section by defining race as a social construct which allows groups of people to be loosely bound together by their ancestry and/or morphological characteristics (Appiah 1985; Lopez 1994). Race is central to the Hip Hop culture, and to write about Hip Hop immediately involves questions of race, racialism, and racism, as Hip Hop's musical roots can be found in African American and West African music, the majority of the original practitioners of Hip Hop were African American, and the culture's artistic expressions are often perceived to be an articulation of black culture. As such, white involvement in what is often perceived as a black art form is problematic as it smacks of appropriation. Nevertheless, white people have been both participating in and consuming black subcultural expression, specifically jazz and blues, throughout most of the twentieth century (Brown 1999; Rudinow 1994). Research into white consumption of jazz and blues started in the 1960s with studies by Jones (1963) and Keil (1966). Jones (1963) addresses the complex and historical relationship between white audiences and African American music, including the claim that black music has been lucratively expropriated by white people, while Keil (1966) encourages white audiences to not only consume the music but also to use it to enhance their understanding of African American culture and to integrate it into their own lives. In contrast, Brown (1999) and Rudinow (1994) examine whether white people misappropriate the cultural heritage and intellectual property of the African American race through their participation in jazz and blues. Their findings suggest that these traditionally black art-forms can be understood and

practiced by non-blacks as long as their participation is authentic. That is, these non-black participants must be not only musically proficient, but full of respect and empathy for the art-form, and capable of understanding the subculture's symbolic cues.

The question of whether or not race is (or should be) a factor for inclusion within Hip Hop culture has generated polarising debates among Hip Hop fans as well as scholars (see for example, Forman 2002; McLeod 1999; Templeton 2003). Those who suggest that non-blacks should not participate in Hip Hop argue that one cannot truly understand Hip Hop unless one knows what it is like to live as a black person in the US and that to do so without this understanding is an appropriation of black culture. While these assertions are common, many other researchers and Hip Hop participants alike have argued that, in a similar vein to jazz and blues, non-blacks can participate in Hip Hop as long as they do so in authentic manner. As such, white members of the Hip Hop community who have proficient knowledge of, and respect for, the culture, and who truthfully represent themselves through not trying to be black are generally accepted. In support of this argument is the wide-spread acceptance by the black community of white Hip Hop artists who exemplify artistic honesty, such as the Beastie Boys and Eminem, and the prohibition of those who haven't, such as Vanilla Ice, who fabricated his life history to make claims he grew up in a poor black neighbourhood (Armstrong 2004; Rose 1994).

All members of the Australian Hip Hop culture whom the researcher discussed the topic with unanimously agreed that one did not need to be black or American to participate in the culture. This assertion was necessary for them to legitimise their

participation, due to their predominantly white racial backgrounds and lack of contact with, and hence understanding of, black people living in the US. The members argued that anyone could participate in Hip Hop, regardless of race, class, or nationality as long as they had an understanding of the cultural values and expressed themselves in a manner that was a true representation of their identity. Those who didn't were chastised for their inauthentic behaviour, which harmed the culture's outward claims of legitimacy. Take, for example, a scene that played out at the 2004 Australian Record Industry Awards. US Hip Hop outfit the Black Eye Peas were presenting the award for Best Urban Release, and announced the winner Australian Hip Hop crew Koolism for their album 'Part III of Random Thoughts'. Upon accepting the award from the Black Eyed Peas, Koolism's acceptance speech went as follows:

> *MC Hau: ...We'd like to accept this on behalf of the whole Australian Hip Hop community. We're trying to build this foundation and ...*

> *DJ Danielsan (interrupting): To Mnemonic Ascent and all the Australians that 'keep it real' for want of a better phrase. Be yourself. Enough of that American wannabe trash.*

At this point the audience booed to show contempt at what many in the industry must have thought was an attack on the Black Eyed Peas, however DJ Danielsan quickly clarified:

> *DJ Danielsan: Hey America Rules. These guys are all good (referring to the Black Eyed Peas). I'm talking about Australians who are wanting to be something that they're not. That sucks, so thanks everybody, it's a great honour, and we very much appreciate it. Peace.*

The first line of the speech shows evidence of a glocal culture, as Hau accepts the award on behalf of whole Australian Hip Hop community, and speaks of building its foundations. If the Australian Hip Hop community were not its own unique culture, but rather a culture imitating US Hip Hop, then there would be no reason to suggest that it would need a foundation, as there would be nothing to support. In the second line of the speech, Danielsan gives thanks to Koolism's brother crew Mnemonic Ascent, and then all Australians that 'keep it real'. This is Danielsen's acknowledgement to all those he perceives as legitimate members of the Australian Hip Hop culture, those individuals who express themselves authentically in their participation and have a thorough understanding of the culture's history and values, regardless of background. In contrast, Danielsen berates those individuals whom he would consider non-members despite practicing an element of the culture. He perceives these individuals to be imitating US Hip Hop style and trying to be something that they are not, African American, through their actual and symbolic representations. While these non-members did not take their imitation of African American Hip Hop style as far as the 'blackers' in Cornyetz's (1994) and Wood's (1997) studies, Japanese youth who darkened their skin via the consumption of makeup and tanning salons, they did consume Hip Hop fashion in a manner that was perceived to be symbolic of an African American heritage. By condemning such behaviour, Danielsen is drawing boundaries around what is acceptable participation and consumption behaviour as a legitimate member of the Australian Hip Hop culture and, by so doing, is protecting the predominantly white members from claims of appropriation. Accusations of appropriations came in the form of ridicule similar to those faced by members of the British Hip Hop culture in Bennett's (1999a) study.

Hence, as suggested by Monte, normative influence may be an explanatory factor for the avoidance of black brands:

> *Monte: …a lot of people who got into hip hop in Australia in the early days found themselves ridiculed by their peers and they were told you know 'you're trying to be black' or whatever and they were so afraid of that and so determined to prove that that wasn't the case that they've gone in the other direction and they've tried to show 'oh no Aussie hip hop is not like that, we're this' and they've toned all that down and they've eliminated that aspect…*

While clear barriers were drawn around participation and consumption behaviour to prevent the imitation of African American style, these did not seem to exclude the use of Australian accented African American Vernacular English. In particular, members of the Australian Hip Hop community frequently used Hip Hop slang derived from African American Vernacular English. Bucholtz (1999) argues that the use of African American Vernacular English by non-blacks can give the impression one has physical strength, is physically violent, and hyper (hetero)sexual. While the data specify that members of the Australian Hip Hop culture did use African American Vernacular English to enact masculine identities (discussed further in section 4.6), its use with an Australian accent was not perceived as an imitation of African American style as it was deemed to be the global Hip Hop argot. However, one word that the members of the Australian Hip Hop culture refused to use out of respect toward the African American culture was 'nigga'. This is in contrast to Armstrong's (2004) suggestion that the word does not distinguish an individual by race, but by a shared understanding and experience of the countercultural nature of Hip Hop, and, as such,

can be used by, and used to describe, authentic Hip Hop members of all racial backgrounds. This was not the case for even the most committed and knowledgeable members of the Australian Hip Hop culture in this study, and suggests that either the Australian Hip Hop culture is distinct in this respect, or there are issues with the validity of Armstrong's analysis. As Armstrong did not provide any examples of non-black Hip Hop members using the word without receiving sanctions, and as there appears to be coding inaccuracies in his work, specifically the classification of Eminem as a gangsta rapper, the latter scenario appears more likely and further highlights the problems that can occur when subcultural research is conducted without prolonged contact with the field.

The vast majority of Australian Hip Hop culture members were acutely aware of the race connotations constantly made of their participation in Hip Hop and felt a need to defend their participation through the assertion that Hip Hop was an egalitarian culture that welcomed all races. Upon introducing myself and my interest in the Australian Hip Hop culture as a research topic, one of the most spontaneous and common responses I received were claims that legitimised white participation. The following quote from my first and only interaction with Adam, a young breakdancer that I met at a Hip Hop show, illustrates this point:

> *Researcher: So what does Hip Hop mean to you?*
>
> *Adam: It's not about making out you're black; it's about building our own culture.*

The swift and immediate response to define the meaning of Hip Hop by what it is not, rather than what it is, demonstrates the seminal nature of the topic to the subcultural

participants. In addition, Adam's remark about 'building our own culture' reinforces the glocalised nature of the Hip Hop subculture in Australia. Members of the glocalised Australian Hip Hop culture were aware that the culture that they were building was at risk of being threatened by accusations of appropriation. The subcultural participants went to some lengths to try to limit these accusations, the most extreme of which was the protectionist behaviour undertaken by the administrator of the Australian Hip Hop web forum www.ozhiphop.com who banned postings from all American internet service providers. This act was undertaken to protect the culture from the potential threat of African Americans posting on the site and accusing the members as being imitators and appropriators of a culture that they are not capable of understanding. In doing so, the web forums administrator was essentially erasing the racial dimension of Hip Hop from the discussions and allowing the Australian members of the site to construct their own reality of what Hip Hop is through dialogue. However, it must be acknowledged that from the perspective of the original participants, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture may have appropriated something that is not, and never can be, theirs. Nevertheless, there are plenty of precedents of white people claiming Hip Hop in the US and throughout the world (see for example the book 'Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop outside the USA' (Mitchell 2001) where non-blacks from a range of countries make claims to Hip Hop authenticity).

This section has analysed how the predominantly white members of the Australian Hip Hop culture overcome their race and claim Hip Hop authenticity via proficient knowledge of, and respect toward, the culture, and truthful representation of their identity. Members of the culture often engaged in protectionist behaviour to further

guarantee the legitimacy of the culture, including chastising individuals who imitated African American behaviour and placing restrictions on US postings on an Australian Hip Hop web forum. The use of Australian accented African American Vernacular English was deemed acceptable, but the use of the term 'nigga' was not. In the following section, the nature of the Australian Hip Hop culture as a male enclave in which masculinity is enacted is discussed.

4.6   Australian Hip Hop as a Male Enclave

Throughout this section the term 'sex' is used to refer to an individual's biological sex and 'gender' is used to refer to psychological features associated with biological sex that are socially constructed (Fischer and Arnold 1994; Palan 2001; Patterson and Hogg 2004). Hence, gender is the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time that may also be applied at a subcultural level (Palan 2001). In contrast, gender identity is the degree to which an individual identifies him or herself with the traits that society has deemed to be masculine (such as dominance, independence, self-confidence, assertiveness, strength and virility) and feminine (such as yielding, dependent, emotional, affectionate, gentle and submissive) (Fischer and Arnold 1994; Kimmel and Tissier-Desbordes 1999; Palan 2001). The Australian Hip Hop culture investigated was one in which the performance of a particularly masculine gender identity was extremely salient. This was somewhat expected as previous research has found the enactment of masculinity to be a common characteristic within Hip Hop culture (Kelley 1996; McLeod 1999; Payne 2006; Rose 1994; Stephens 2005; Watts 2004). These studies have explored how street life-oriented African American men organise meaning around their masculinity, particularly in the face of perpetual social injustices.

In Payne's (2006) study, African American men offered stories of how they used Hip Hop to craft or construct their masculinity in the face of blocked educational and economic opportunities. These young men expressed a particular desire to 'stand up and be a man' with the intent of providing for, and keeping together, their family to the best extent that they could. However, due to their economic circumstances, the role of 'bread winner' was not an option for many of the African American men studied and this had a tremendous impact on the way in which they constructed their masculinity. Furthermore, societal changes have meant that the role of 'bread winner' has become feminised. Specifically, women are now increasingly educated and working, the evolution of economy from industry to services has favoured the rise of women in professional circles, and physical strength has lost much of its utility for society (Kimmel and Tissier-Desbordes 1999). Furthermore, as men who play the role of the 'breadwinner' are often members of the establishment, they are often perceived as cowardly and broken men (this is particularly true amongst members of the Hip Hop counterculture) (Holt and Thompson 2004). As such, Kelley (1996) and Rose (1994) argue that supporting one's family is no longer a measure of manhood for street-life oriented African American males, rather playing the role of the 'rebel' is. In what Holt (2004) describes as the rebel model of masculinity, a strong gender identity is enacted through demonstrating an opposition to the dominant and mainstream culture. "More warrior than father, more seducer than husband, more class clown than serious worker," the rebel figure is personified by the Hip Hop gangsta, "such as found in the rap music of Tupac Shakur and Wu Tang Clan and popular feature films such as Boyz in the Hood" (Holt and Thompson 2004, p.428). This rebel model of masculinity fits extremely well with the countercultural nature of Hip Hop. Hence, it

is not surprising that Kelley (1996) and Rose (1994) found that the young men they studied enacted their gender identities through acts of power, aggression, violence and (hetero)sexual promiscuity. In particular, they were encouraged to display their machismo through standing up for themselves regardless of the costs, retaliating if anyone humiliated or disrespected them, and treating women as sexual objects. The latter is in sharp contrast to the bread winner model of masculinity as heterosexual conquests free of commitment were prized much more than marriage, which in some cases was even viewed as emasculating.

While the young, white Australian men researched in this study didn't face the same race and poverty-related problems as street-life oriented African American men in the US, they did enact a masculine gender identity in much the same way. One of the simplest ways to perform masculinity is through acts of aggression and or violence. Although in my four years in the field I was never once involved in a fight, I was very much intimidated at the beginning of the socialisation process. Take for example, the following field notes from a Hip Hop night I attended during my first month in the field:

The place was dark, dingy and full of guys. You could smell the testosterone in the air. I tried not to look too many dodgy characters in the eyes.

Or from one of my informants:

Dannon: Yeah last time I went there, or the time before, I almost got into three fights man, just walking in… the crowd is fucking so angry.

Although the above scenarios are extreme examples, they do illustrate the nature of Hip Hop culture in Australia as a counterculture where the rebel model of masculinity is regularly performed through outward displays of intimidation and aggression. While actual acts of violence within the culture were uncommon, masculine gender identities were enacted through adherence to the community's countercultural values, participation in MC, DJ, breakdance or graffiti battles, the use of African American Vernacular English and conspicuous consumption which symbolised masculinity and masked the cultural signs of femineity. In regards to this latter point, aggressive music, oversized clothing and a shaved head are examples of common patterns exhibited by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. Interestingly, whilst there was almost uniform adherence to this consumption pattern, when probed the immediate response of almost all informants was that they weren't interested in fashion and characterised individuals who were interested in fashion as 'being gay'. As such, while their behaviour clearly demonstrated a thorough understanding of the appropriate subcultural fashion and underlying symbolic cues, and probing revealed an extensive knowledge of the subject, the informant's prompt assertion that they lacked interest in the topic was essentially a knee-jerk reaction to protect their masculine gender identities from being attacked for having a concern in what was perceived as an effeminate hobby. These findings are similar to those reported by Watts (2004), who suggested that young men interested in Hip Hop culture (many of whom are teenagers, a very critical stage in terms of identity formation) enact their gender identities through consumption as a consequence of the feminisation of the breadwinner role. That is, unable to assume a masculine role at work, school or home, the young men studied are undertaking masculine identity projects through the consumption of symbolic products, services and leisure (Holt and Thompson 2004).

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Several consumer research studies support this notion. For example, in their consumer ethnography, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) enact their own masculinity by becoming bikers, rebellious men who live for the freedom of the open road (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), while Sherry et al. (2001) contend that the themed restaurant and bar chain ESPN Sport Zone appeals to men in large part because it creates a place of fun that allows men to compete and enact their masculinity.

According to Caru, Cova and Tissier-Desbordes (2004), masculine gender identities can only be enacted in the presence of other men. That is, in order for men to assume a masculine identity, they need to spend time with other men in enclaves that exclude strong feminine identities and are dedicated to the rituals of masculinity. In modern society, many traditional enclaves of masculinity that preclude women have virtually vanished (i.e. gentlemen's clubs, hunting associations and golf courses that bar women) and hence, men share their masculinity in places where passions that are mainly shared by men are enacted (for example, where a team sport like rugby or football is played, or where subcultures like motor racing or Hip Hop meet), precluding women by default. The Australian Hip Hop culture investigated was without doubt a male enclave. Limited in time and space, these gatherings also provide the security to leave behind less masculine gender identities (such as those enacted at school or work) in a manner similar to how the Whitby Goth Festival provided Gouding et al.'s (2003) goths an opportunity to escape their quotidian genders. Although women were not completely absent from this modern bastion of masculinity, they were relatively marginalised and constantly positioned at the periphery. Because of this, women were rarely taken seriously as members of the culture. Take the following female member's perceptions, for example:

> *G-One: I think you can't overlook the fact that a female presence in a majority male occupation… can lead to men reacting badly to women's presence… We're often seen as "some rapper's girlfriend" or "just there to sleep with MC's."*

My observations in the field are consistent with the above statement. In fact, I too could be accused of having assumed women to be 'some rapper's girlfriend'. To some extent, women were treated as material possessions and the 'ownership' of an attractive and much desired sexual being served the purpose of flaunting one's masculinity to the group. Hence, the more desired one's girlfriend was, the more it enhanced their own masculinity, and as such it would appear that these 'trophies' were (indirectly) encouraged to dress extremely provocatively. This, of course, made it extremely hard for women who actually wished to actively participate in the culture to be perceived as more than a sexual object. In response, observations suggest that the majority of females in the Australian Hip Hop culture who were respected by men were those enacting masculine traits. For example, the majority of women held in high regard as members of the culture masked the signs of their femininity via consumption, participated in MC, DJ, breakdance or graffiti battles, and enacted masculine traits such as self-confidence and aggression. These findings are similar to those reported by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) who found that the few female bikers who were respected in their subculture of consumption conspicuously displayed signs of machismo.

During the ethnographic period, a group of females interested in participating in Australian Hip Hop culture and in need of a space to call their own and secure from

the sexism so prevalent in Hip Hop, created a forum entitled 'Ladies in Hip Hop' on the Australian Hip Hop website www.ozhiphop.com. This forum acted as a place where direct and legitimate criticism of the sexism in Hip Hop could be discussed, however it was often reduced by men to 'bitching' or complaining as way of containing dissent. For example, a male web forum member writes about the 'Ladies in Hip Hop' forum:

> *H-Bomb: Already we have a website for Australian Hip Hoppers, no doubt a minority. Having a place for the girls to hang out is cool but when you look at the site they bitch, moan, complain, fight, threads get locked. It is seriously crap.*

The same forum has even been hijacked by male Hip Hop members on several occasions with posts made for no other reason than to annoy the females and to teach them their subservient place within the culture. For example, a post in the 'Ladies in Hip Hop Forum' was made by a male forum member entitled 'Keeping your bitches in line', which listed the best ways for a man to control his girlfriend. According to Guevara (1996), the enactment of masculine gender identities within Hip Hop keeps many females from becoming participators. This proposition was supported in the context of the Australian Hip Hop culture investigated and reinforced in the following quote by a female Hip Hop participant:

> *G-One: I think women are easily put off by what they see on the outside of Hip Hop. That it is primarily a 'battle culture' that cuts down the weak and focuses on very masculine habits and achievements. I don't think that ethos attracts women in vast numbers.*

This masculine environment ensures the Australian Hip Hop culture remains as a male enclave and restricts entry from other men who may be too insecure with their masculinity to take the first step. The fact that Hip Hop is a male enclave where masculine gender identities are enacted contradicts the common claim, by Australian Hip Hop members, that Hip Hop is egalitarian. As discussed in section 4.4, Hip Hop's egalitarianism outlook is deemed important to members of the Australian Hip Hop culture as it allowed the white, Australian, middle-class suburban males to participate and claim authenticity despite not being black, American, urban or poor. Hence, the egalitarian nature of the Hip Hop culture investigated extends to and transcends race and class, but not sex. Yet the self-serving white male-oriented nature of this so-called egalitarianism was rarely discussed and essentially ignored.

Other scholars (McLeod 1999; Stephens 2005) have traced the overt display of masculinity within Hip Hop as a necessary enactment by cultural members, as it is a norm influenced by the key cultural value of remaining authentic. While the essence of one's gender identity is unlikely to change, in a gender relevant situation, such as being around members of the Hip Hop culture, one's beliefs and behaviours will be more influenced by gender because of the importance of gender in that situation (Gould 1996; Palan 2001; Patterson and Hogg 2004). As such, gender identity is more salient in a subcultural setting where one is influenced by the presence of the group, as opposed to a private setting where one is more likely to behave in-line with one's actual self-concept. McLeod's (1999) research found six claims of authenticity within Hip Hop culture; a social-psychological dimension, a racial dimension, a political-economic dimension, a social-locational dimension, a cultural dimension, and a gender-sexual dimension. In regards to the gender-sexual dimension, he suggests Hip

Hop participants must display masculine attributes, that is, to be seen as 'being hard,' and to never be seen as 'being soft,' that is, to display feminine traits. The notion of 'selling out' or 'going commercial' is associated with 'being soft' and hence feminises the artist and creates a perception that they are no longer authentic. The ethnographic research supports this notion and evidence was found of a dramatic shift in the proportion of the sexes who attended underground Hip Hop performances (mostly male) and those who attended the concerts of Hip Hop acts that had achieved some mainstream success (approaching a 50/50 split). As such, many Hip Hop artists who achieved mainstream success needed to reaffirm their masculinity in other ways. One strategy employed by a graffiti artist turned fashion designer in this study was to outsource all the selling of his clothing to his partner such that his designs were perceived as a creative pursuit and not produced to make a profit. An alternative strategy, suggested by Thornton (1995a), is for an artist to continually recreate their own image and even name, and in doing so avoid selling out. Such a strategy would explain Sean Combs' transformation from Puff Daddy to P. Diddy to Diddy. Alternatively, previous studies have found that in the US these artists often espouse themes of killing, the use of guns, the use and dealing of drugs, sexism, misogyny and homophobia (Hutchinson 1999). These themes are often exaggerated and invented boasts, but they constitute important cultural and emotive resources for scripting a powerful masculine identity. For example, Eminem's track '97 Bonnie & Clyde', a murder fantasy about his girlfriend, generated much controversy for its violent and misogynistic imagery (Stephens 2005). These complaints were probably justified considering that the market for this music is adolescent males, the very group that statistically commits the most hate crimes (Stephens 2005). However, as a white rapper, Eminem must constantly enact his 'realness' by performing 'hardness'.

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Though Eminem is white, his poor economic background, affiliation with and acceptance by black artists and hypermasculine behaviour validate his social-locational and racial 'realness'. His often explicit depictions of violence, misogyny, homophobia and hostility toward pop singers rhetorically position him as resistant to mainstream culture and hence, not 'soft', even though his success is largely attributable to white, suburban teenage audiences (Stephens 2005). While artists such as Eminem were often berated by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture as manufactured and inauthentic, these same members performed similar acts of 'hardness' to demonstrate their authenticity within the Australian Hip Hop culture. Take for example the following lyrics from the battle track 'Simmy the Gravy Spitter' by the Hilltop Hoods:

> *You couldn't battle me with that lame rhyme,*
>
> *You couldn't come hard with two women at the same time,*
>
> *You walk in the club dipped in jewels and Versace,*
>
> *Only gay guys wear that much gold, ask Liberace.*

These masculinist narratives are essentially verbal duels over who is the most masculine MC around. In the first line, Suffa MC of the Hilltop Hoods accuses his competitor's rhymes of being weak and effeminate by being lame. In the next line, he directly takes a swing at his competitor's masculinity and sexual prowess. The third line is an attack on his competitor's conspicuous consumption habits. The wearing of jewels and high-end mainstream fashion such as Versace is perceived as inauthentic by the Australian Hip Hop culture as you are pretending to be something you are not (i.e. a wealthy gangsta). Furthermore, it associates the competitor with mainstream Hip Hop artists who wear this fashion, and are considered as 'soft' because they have

gone commercial. The final line again feminises Suffa's competitor by associating him with a homosexual. The ethnographic findings suggest that these lyrics are not meant as literally homophobic, rather they illustrate the playful use of language within Hip Hop.

Stephens (2005) argues that the use of homophobic terms in Hip Hop is more appropriately termed genderphobia than homophobia. He argues that Hip Hop artists use homophobic language to critique gender behaviour, not sexual orientation. That is, Hip Hop members often espouse homophobic rhetoric, but these taunts are usually directed at male rivals as a way of stripping them of their manhood, and mocking their masculinity and strength. Hence, within Hip Hop, heterosexual people are often victims of taunts such as 'fag', 'gay', and 'poof'. Free and Hughson (2003) found similar rhetorical use of the terms amongst football hooligans. Participators in the Australian Hip Hop culture were very much aware of the emasculating ability of such taunts. Take the following insight, again from G-One:

> *G-One: It is still acceptable in most cases, to the majority of listeners, for a male MC to diss another male for being 'gay' or a 'fag'. This is casual homophobia, but it's allowed. Why? Because it defines for the listeners and the rapper what it means 'to be a man'. This gay epithet is used countless times because it is a useful shorthand way to assert that 'a real man' is tough, never weak, is staunch and never a sook, and fucks, and is never fucked.*

This type of discourse feminises the other, strips them of their masculinity, while it masculinises oneself in front of other men. Homophobic rhetoric is not the only way to emasculate another. Sexist taunts based on female genitalia (i.e. pussy, etc) are also

used to label those who are deemed feminine. These performances are scripted within the institutional structure of the Australian Hip Hop subculture (as in Celsi et al.'s (1993) apolitical skydiving community). Because of the use of such homophobic and sexist language, Hip Hop culture and music is often criticised for promoting homophobia, sexism and misogyny throughout the world. With tracks like 2 Live Crew's 'We Want Some Pussy' and Dr. Dre's 'Bitches Ain't Shit', it is perhaps too easy a target. However, it should be stated that sexism in Hip Hop has been greatly exaggerated by the mainstream press. The music is rich, complex, and multifaceted and the style and subject matter ranges from obsessive sexism to the politically intelligent, from gangster-style storytelling to Christian rap (Rose 2004). Within Australian Hip Hop, homophobic, sexist and misogynistic lyrics are rare (although they do exist). However, lyrics such as those described above that feminise the other are abundant particularly in freestyle performances, and are even often made as comments in ordinary conversation.

This section has demonstrated that the Australian Hip Hop culture is a gender salient male enclave where members enact a rebel model of masculinity. Masculine gender identities were enacted through adherence to the community's countercultural values, participation in MC, DJ, breakdance or graffiti battles, the use of African American Vernacular English and conspicuous consumption which symbolised masculinity and masked the cultural signs of femineity. Such performances were found to limit female Hip Hop membership de facto. In addition, Hip Hop members often use sexist and homophobic taunts, not as attacks on females or homosexuals, but rather, to feminise the other, and hence masculinise themselves.

4.7   Summary

This Chapter has provided the context necessary to comprehend the lived experiences of the subcultural participants and the researcher during the ethnography. The chapter began by describing Hip Hop's origins as a cultural expression that originated in the South Bronx area of New York City in the early 1970s, followed by a discussion of the culture's three main periods and subsequent arrival in Australia. Next, the Australian Hip Hop culture as an example of glocalisation was discussed. An industry has since developed catering specifically to the needs of this glocal culture. This chapter also revealed that the Australian Hip Hop culture has grown considerably in size and prominence amongst the general public with both a positive and negative impact on the culture's members.

The countercultural nature of Australian Hip Hop was discussed in section 4.4. In contrast to early subculture studies, rebellious behavioural norms were not a reaction to a class based struggle but a manifestation of cultural expression aligned to the culture's values and opposed the dominant ideology and mainstream orthodoxy. In addition, the Australian Hip Hop culture positioned itself against and alongside other subcultures that existed during the ethnographic period.

Section 4.5 revealed that the predominantly white members of the Australian Hip Hop culture overcome their race and claim Hip Hop authenticity via proficient knowledge of, and respect toward, the culture, and truthful representation of their identity. Analysis of the data also revealed that members of the culture engaged in some protectionist behaviour to further guarantee the legitimacy of the culture.

Finally, the analysis conducted in section 4.6 demonstrated that the Australian Hip Hop culture is a gender salient male enclave where members enact the rebel model of masculinity. Masculine gender identities were enacted through adherence to the community's countercultural values, participation in MC, DJ, breakdance or graffiti battles, the use of African American Vernacular English and conspicuous consumption which symbolised masculinity and masked the cultural signs of femininity.

The rich description of analytical themes presented in this chapter has provided the reader with a thorough understanding of the nature of the Australian Hip Hop culture. Such an understanding is necessary to be able to clearly comprehend the ethnographic findings presented in the following chapter. Specifically, the following chapter examines symbolic consumption within the Australian Hip Hop culture and its relationship to one's position in the status hierarchy.

CHAPTER 5: SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION WITHIN THE AUSTRALIAN HIP HOP CULTURE

5.1 Introduction

The findings of the analysis of symbolic consumption within the Australian Hip Hop culture are presented within this chapter. The chapter begins with an analysis of status within the subculture of consumption. Specifically, the relationship between one's position in the subcultural hierarchy and one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital is discussed. An analysis of the symbolic consumption of interested non-members follows. Specifically, their use of objectified subcultural capital to gain access to the community is examined. The next section examines the symbolic consumption of peripheral members who were found to use objectified subcultural capital to assert their membership, yet were required to participate in symbolic production to further enhance their standing in the status hierarchy. The consumption of a homologous style by soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture is then examined, and representations of their chosen element and geographic locale are analysed. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the varied symbolic consumption behaviour of hard-core members.

5.2 Status within the Australian Hip Hop Culture

The overall findings of the ethnographic research have been summarised and presented in Figure 3. The analysis revealed that one's position within the subculture's status hierarchy was determined by an evaluation of one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. Hence, over time, as individuals advanced their Hip Hop skills and acquired further knowledge of Hip Hop

Figure 3: Status within the Australian Hip Hop Culture

High Status

An individual's position on the status continuum is determined by an evaluation of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital

Hard-core

Consumption varies depending on the individual and the situation ranging from the abandonment of objectified subcultural capital, to the consumption of a homologous yet distinctive style

Varied levels of commitment

Soft-core

Objectified subcultural capital is used to represent their subculture and self-identities through the consumption of a homologous style

High levels of commitment

Peripheral members

Objectified subcultural capital is used to assert membership

Limited levels of commitment

Interested non-members

Interested non-members use objectified subcultural capital to gain access

Low levels of commitment

Low Status

and Australian Hip Hop, their status within the Australian Hip Hop culture increased. This discovery supports previous findings which suggest that subcultural capital confers within-group status amongst subcultural participants (Kates 2002; Thornton 1995a; 1995b). However, the findings of this study further our understanding of the nature of status within a subculture of consumption through the inclusion of subculture-specific social capital as a determinant of status. That is, the findings revealed that the standing of an individual's social connections and the individual's ability to influence them also had an influence, though a less profound one, on their position in the status hierarchy. For example, personally knowing a well-respected DJ enhanced one's standing in the status hierarchy, and securing his services for a party advanced one's standing further. While the inclusion of subculture-specific social capital as a determinant of status may appear intuitive, it is a significant theoretical

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contribution as position as a determinant of status has never been specifically addressed in previous studies.

In addition, the findings of this study further our understanding of the phenomenon by revealing that the objectification of subcultural capital through consumption did not necessarily increase as one's status advanced. That is, while Thornton's findings were replicated in that both embodied and objectified subcultural capital conferred status, only embodied subcultural capital was found to have a consistently positive relationship with one's position within the status hierarchy. In contrast, the use of objectified subcultural capital as a marker of distinction was found to vary as individuals evolved through the status hierarchy. Interested non-members used objectified subcultural capital to gain access to the community, whereas peripheral members used objectified subcultural capital to assert their membership. In contrast, soft-core members were found to use objectified subcultural capital to represent the subculture and their inextricably Hip Hop self-identities through the consumption of a homologous style, in the vast majority of situations. With an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, it was not necessary for hard-core members to use objectified subcultural capital as a marker of distinction. Rather, the consumption of objectified subcultural capital for hard-core members was found to vary depending on the individual and the situation. Within a Hip Hop situation, some hard-core members were found to abandon the use of objectified subcultural capital, whereas others played a mentoring role through the consumption of a homologous yet distinctive style. In non-Hip Hop situations hard-core members were found to enact a number of different roles, frequently abandoning the consumption of objectified subcultural capital.

It should be noted that whilst previous studies imply that individuals progress through a structured transformation commencing as a non-member and culminating with hard-core membership (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), the researcher rarely found himself or others being placed in such distinct categories by the study participants. Rather, as individuals furthered their Hip Hop skills and knowledge, and developed and advanced social relationships with Hip Hop members, their status within the Australian Hip Hop culture increased. Henceforth, status within the Australian Hip Hop culture was viewed as a continuum ranging from those individuals with no embodied subcultural capital and no subculture-specific social capital, to those with an abundance of it. Furthermore, an individual's position in the status hierarchy was found to be fluid, contested, frequently negotiated and dependent on the individual making the evaluation. That is, gauging one's status was in effect an approximation of one's accumulated skills and knowledge and the value of one's social network. These approximations were often revised as new information came to hand that provided a more accurate indication. In addition, evaluations of both embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital varied considerably depending on the embodied subcultural capital of the individual making the assessment. Hence, while an individual's embodied subcultural capital and the extent and influence of their social network may have remained constant, perceptions of their position in the status hierarchy differed depending on the Hip Hop knowledge of the individual making the evaluation. As such, an individual's position within the status hierarchy frequently moves up and down as different members make and revise assessments of their capital. However, over time, as they expand their network, advance their relationships, and further their Hip Hop knowledge and skills, they

generally advance up the hierarchy. While the structure encountered was more fluid and negotiated than the distinct groups reported by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), these broad categories did exist and as such, as displayed in Figure 3, have been transposed alongside the status continuum to enhance the analysis of consumption as an individual evolves through the status hierarchy, and to enable the comparison of findings with previous studies.

The findings presented in this study, specifically that one's position within a subculture of consumption is dependent on one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, is in contrast to previous research findings by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995). As previously discussed, their findings suggest that one's position in the status hierarchy is dependent on one's commitment to the ideology and consumption values of the subculture. As such, these studies found that for hard-core punks and bikers, participation was a full-time commitment that was displayed conspicuously in a homologous style, such as through the consumption of amphetamines and mohawks, or a Harley Davidson and associated garb. While these studies should be commended for drawing our attention to the evolution of a subcultural self, their theory does not apply to the current case for two reasons. First, a full-time commitment was common within the neo-tribal Australian Hip Hop culture, but it was not a necessary requirement for hard-core membership. Whereas the hard-core punks and bikers were found to look down upon those with a less than full-time commitment (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), part-time participation is accepted within the Australian Hip Hop culture, as it was for Goulding, Shankar and Elliot's (2002) ravers. While the findings show that a full-time commitment to the subculture's ideology was the norm for soft-core

members, and this commitment increased steadily as they progressed through the status hierarchy, hard-core members were found to be more likely and capable of compartmentalising their work, family and leisure. As a number of the hard-core members had aged beyond their teens and early twenties, the responsibilities of work and family had, for many, encroached on their countercultural lifestyles. Furthermore, the leisure pursuits of hard-core members had often broadened beyond Hip Hop. These hard-core members were still admired and respected for their embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, regardless of their lack of full-time commitment. Hence, the findings suggest that a near full-time commitment was necessary for members as they climbed the subcultural hierarchy as much time and effort was required to increase their subcultural skills and knowledge, and to develop and nurture social relationships with other Hip Hop members. In contrast, hard-core members had already obtained much embodied subcultural capital and the amount of time required to keep these skills and knowledge up-to-date was less substantial. Similarly, their social networks were well established and their maintenance required a less significant time contribution by comparison. Hence, hard-core members' abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture specific-social capital exonerated them from the full-time subcultural commitment required for gaining Hip Hop knowledge and skills, and developing social relationships.

In addition, the findings of this study show that in the case of the Australian Hip Hop culture one's commitment to the subculture's consumption values did not necessarily increase as one advanced up the status hierarchy. Once again, this contradicts the previous findings by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), where hard-core members were found to display their extreme commitment to the subculture's

values through the consumption of a homologous style. In the current study, commitment to the subculture's consumption values through the consumption of a homologous style tended to increase as members advanced through the peripheral and soft-core membership stages, but varied considerably once an individual had achieved hard-core membership. As indicated in Figure 3, due to their abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, it was not necessary for hard-core members to display extreme levels of commitment to the subculture's consumption values. Rather, commitment to the subculture's consumption values was found to vary depending on the individual and the situation. In Hip Hop situations, some hard-core members abandoned the homologous style altogether. However, it should be noted these individuals perceived their own behaviour to be more aligned to the counterculture's anti-conformist values than adherence to the homologous style. Hence, if an individualistic interpretation of the consumption values of the subculture is taken, then these hard-core members did demonstrate a commitment in these situations. However, in non-Hip Hop situations hard-core members were found to enact a number of different roles and to adopt the associated garb. As such, their commitment to the subculture's consumption values varied.

As a counterculture, the Australian Hip Hop culture appears to be unique in this way, as members' consumption patterns are in contrast to the more homogenous consumption styles reported in the Birmingham studies (e.g. Hebdige 1975; 1979, Jefferson 1975 and Clarke 1975). However, the lack of reporting of such nuances in countercultural style may have resulted from the authors' semiotic methodologies, as only prolonged contact with the field can provide such insight. To further highlight this point, outsiders of the Australian Hip Hop culture, including the researcher prior

to the ethnography and another marketing academic who accompanied the researcher to several Hip Hop events, found the culture's homologous style to be virtually homogenous. It wasn't until the researcher had acquired the embodied subcultural capital necessary to identify the culture's distinguishing symbols that this stereotypical characterisation was rejected.

The findings of the analysis discussed above are consistent with the views of the subcultural participants who flatly rejected the assertion that one's position in the status hierarchy was in part determined by one's commitment to the culture's consumption values. As discussed in section 4.4 and 4.6, members perceived Australian Hip Hop to be a masculine and esoteric counterculture, and members remarked that status based on one's consumption habits implied shallow, weak, conformist and feminine qualities. In contrast, the assertion that a subcultural hierarchy was based on one's Hip Hop knowledge and skill was met with strong support. In fact, on occasions, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture referred to 'Hip Hop knowledge' as being the fifth element of Hip Hop culture (in addition to DJing, MCing, graffiti, and break-dancing), an interpretation that was promoted by Hip Hop DJ and pioneer Afrika Bambaataa (2008). As such, obtaining a basic understanding of Hip Hop's history was viewed as an essential criterion for Hip Hop membership and having an advanced knowledge of Hip Hop history increased one's position in the hierarchy. Take the following extract from an interview with OB MC for example:

> *OB MC: It's poisoned man… You've got kids coming out of school that are listening to all that poof, that real faggot shit… It's really destroying our culture, because music like that has got no culture. I want to see 50 Cent here*

in front of me, I'll give him a spray can and tell him to do me a piece or I'll put him on a deck and say scratch to this beat. He wouldn't know what's going on, and I think that's wrong. To get into Hip Hop, the real Hip Hop, you've got to know the elements, you've got to know who started it, you've got to know who Grandmaster Flash is, who Africa Bambaataa is. You've got to appreciate the thing you're in not just because it's great to be in, but you've got to pay homage, you've got to pay respect to the people that invented it. You've got your KRS-Ones, you know people like that, there should be temples man where people can go and pray to these fucking people, you know what I mean? I think you're missing the point if you don't know who these people are and who's done this, or who was the first person to scratch, or who was the first person to do a blockbuster piece, you know? Who the first person was to ever do a train, who the first person was to do a tag in New York, or in the Bronx, the first break dancing crews, you know what I mean?

Throughout the interview OB MC reveals that he treats seminal people, places and events in Hip Hop history with what Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) would describe as sacred reverence. Such an admiration was common amongst soft and hard-core Hip Hop members. Participation in the culture with ignorance of such valued knowledge, or a lack of Hip Hop skill, was perceived as inauthentic and profane as it failed to differentiate the Australian Hip Hop culture from the commercialised Hip Hop (personified by artists such as 50 Cent) and the 'Homie' culture against which members positioned themselves. Hence, OB MC perceives individuals who partake in Hip Hop with a lack of Hip Hop skills and understanding of the culture's history and values as non-members who are 'missing the point' and threatening the subculture's

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legitimacy. As such, esteem was placed upon members based on the assessor's perception of the individuals' Hip Hop knowledge and skills. Hence, in the above example, embodied subcultural capital was a much better indicator of one's standing within the community than one's commitment to culture's ideology and consumption values. While this may not have been the case in previous studies that link one's commitment to the subculture's consumption values to one's position in the status hierarchy (e.g. Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), it is possible that the researchers have misinterpreted their findings and confused simultaneity between the two constructs with causation, particularly as one evolves through peripheral and soft-core membership stages. For example, Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) reading of the seniority, participation, leadership in group activities, and riding experience as commitment, could have just as easily been interpreted as the informal education necessary to have acquired much embodied subcultural capital. Similarly, the visible indicators of commitment described in the study (tattoos, motorcycle customisation, club-specific clothing, and sew-on patches), could easily have been interpreted as the objectification of subcultural capital by soft-core members and a limited number of hard-core members. In fact, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) even provide some indication that a small number of the hard-core bikers had abandoned the use of objectified subcultural capital or were consuming in a homologous yet distinctive style of consumption as they were "at liberty to deviate from established custumery and create individual styles" (p.56).

The remainder of this chapter examines the symbolic consumption of interested non-members, and peripheral, soft-core and hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. First, interested non-members use of symbolic consumption to gain access to

the community is analysed and discussed. This is followed by an analysis of the symbolic consumption of peripheral members, including a discussion of the necessary role of symbolic production in order to advance up the status hierarchy. An analysis of soft-core members' subcultural representations through homologous consumption follows. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the varied symbolic consumption behaviour of hard-core members.

5.3   The Symbolic Consumption of Interested Non-Members

In the absence of the embodied subcultural capital necessary to effectively fulfil the role of Hip Hop member, non-members who wish to align themselves with Australian Hip Hop often look to the visible signs of the culture for guidance. The consumption of stereotypical characteristics of the culture enhances the role performance of interested non-members and minimises the risk of sanctions in their attempt to gain access to the Australian Hip Hop community. Unlike Goulding et al.'s (2002) British rave scene, there were no doormen at Australian Hip Hop shows who decided whether one was made to feel a part of an exclusive community and permitted to enter the club through an appraisal of their dress. In fact, absolutely anyone over eighteen (and under providing the license permitted) was allowed to enter an Australian Hip Hop show providing they paid the club fee. Nevertheless, once inside the club, members often excluded newcomers based on their appearance. In the following extract Dannon, a non-member of the culture, describes his experience of attending a few Hip Hop shows while dressed in the subcultural style commonly known as 'alternative'.

> *Dannon: I've been to a few Hip Hop gigs, and just felt very unwelcome there.*
> *I've been kicked in the back of the leg and been told that I shouldn't be there*
> *because I'm a grunge bag, and shit like that. It's just like, I don't want to come*

here to appreciate some good music and then be told I shouldn't be there because of what I'm wearing.

While Dannon's case is extreme, it demonstrates the consumption-centric normative influence that the male enclave can place on interested non-members to avoid sanction. As previously stated, in an effort to avoid sanctions interested non-members often look to the visible signs of the culture for guidance. However, as these individuals lack embodied subcultural capital, they were in some instances found to rely on stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media. These instances support the findings of previous subcultural studies (Irwin 1973; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) where interested non-members have been found to look to oversimplified and superficial images of the subculture for consumption guidance. In the case of Hip Hop, one only has to turn on any of the various music video channels to see a plethora of symbolic images that could be relied upon to help fulfil the membership role. Images of African Americans, gangster rappers, violence, and misogyny come to mind. In addition, as previously stated, the little media coverage that was given to Australian Hip Hop culture usually presented the culture in a negative light, presenting members as vandals, and violent gang members. It was this media portrayal that these particular non-members use to identify the symbolic cues necessary to help them access the Australian Hip Hop community. As such, in these instances non-members frequently consume brands perceived by members to be symbolic of African American Hip Hop and consumed locally by members of the 'Homie' culture, a subculture that members positioned themselves against. In these instances non-members also consume an abundance of mainstream hip hop and Gangster Rap, musical styles that were in opposition to the subculture's

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countercultural nature. Furthermore, these non-members often attempted to rap in American accents, further reinforcing the stereotype that subcultural participants were simply imitating American Hip Hop culture. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, these non-members have failed to correctly define the situation due to a lack of embodied subcultural capital. As such, the social information inherent in their stereotypical consumption was not successful at fulfilling the role of Hip Hop member, as the individuals who decoded the information, existing Hip Hop members, had different meanings for the signs and, hence, they were misinterpreted. Specifically, members of the Australian Hip Hop community perceived these individuals to be consumers of fantasy, and deemed the consumption of African American brands to be an inauthentic expression of self and its inclusion would challenge the legitimacy of an Australian Hip Hop culture. Hence, members of the culture sanctioned these non-members by chastising them until they left the cultural milieu or their behaviour adhered more closely to the culture's values. Take the following interview extracts for example. In the first quote, J-Know gives his opinion of consumers of brands that are perceived as black as individuals who are engaging in fantasy. In the second quote OB MC discusses the sanctions that interested non-members' face for failing to adhere to the culture's norms on the web forum www.ozhiphop.com:

> *J-Know: When I see people who wear Wu Tang, because it's so heavily connected with Gangster Rap, I see people who want to portray themselves as gangsters, which is fine if you live in Harlem or the Bronx or somewhere like that, but here in Adelaide it's pointless. It's almost as if they're trying to assume someone else's identity. They're not being true to themselves at all.*

OB MC: As soon as people get on there and talk about Tupac and all that American Gangster Rap, they don't want to know about it. Aussie Hip Hop is doing it properly. We've still got the culture and the four elements. So they really pretty much disrespect all the kids that come on there and talk with their cap letters, getting on there for the first time talking about how much gangster they are and putting up photos of themselves with bandanas, you know what I mean? Obviously there are people that sort of knock that.

Whilst in some instances interested non-members looked to the stereotypical signs of Hip Hop perpetuated by mainstream media for guidance, in the majority of cases interested non-members never consumed what were perceived to be African American Hip Hop brands. Knowledge of which brands were perceived to be symbolic of African American Hip Hop appeared to be some of the earliest embodied subcultural capital that interested non-members acquired, and was again attained through the consumption of mainstream media. However, the reasons why interested non-members placed these brands in their inept sets varied. First, it should be acknowledged that the possibility of racism exists, although it was never confessed, and seems unlikely considering their interest in Hip Hop culture. Second, in some instances, individuals appeared to avoid the consumption of these brands out of a respect for African American culture, claiming that to consume these brands as a non-black would be an appropriation considering the symbolic meanings imbued within the brands. For example, the brand FUBU is commonly perceived to be an acronym for the phrase 'For Us, By Us', where 'Us' is a reference to the African American community. A more common reason for the anti-consumption of brands that were perceived as black was the fear of being labelled a 'Homie' by the broader Australian

community. As 'Homies' were often perceived as aggressive, criminal, and misogynistic deviants infatuated with gangsta rap, many interested non-members felt they had considerable reason to distance themselves from such associations. Finally, most non-members with an interest in Australian Hip Hop culture are introduced to the community through a friend already affiliated with the subculture. Through the process of modelling, these individuals observed the symbolic cues of their Australian Hip Hop affiliated friends and consumed in a similar manner when attempting to gain access to the community.

Regardless of how interested non-members attained the knowledge that brands perceived to represent African American Hip Hop were not acceptable within the Australian Hip Hop culture, aspiring members generally consumed in a relatively homogenous fashion once this knowledge was obtained. Specifically, as interested non-members were lacking in embodied subcultural capital, they tended to turn to mainstream Hip Hop brands that were not perceived as black. Evidence of such consumption was revealed in an analysis of the researcher's early field notes, where a distinct lack of embodied subcultural capital was manifest in the researcher's consumption habits. Take for example the following extract detailing the researcher's first shopping expedition for Hip Hop fashion:

> *This afternoon Nixon provided me with details of a store the Daily Grind, and a 'really hot chick' that works there. As I have yet to buy any Hip Hop clothes I thought I would check it out. It was a Skate/Hip Hop shop and they play Hip Hop music in the store and sell DC, Ecko, and skater gear. Across the way is Street Core Clothing, which I would describe as a hybrid Club/Hip Hop store. They also sell Ecko, Tweak (more clubber wear), drunknmunky, and a lot of*

graffiti clothing. From this store I bought an Ecko T-shirt as it included a free

Hip Hop CD put together by Stealth Magazine and an Ecko hoodie, mainly

because I liked the huge poster of Fred Durst burning a pair of shoes (?). Also

it seems to me from my few experiences so far that hoodies are the way to go,

especially those that are extremely baggy and have some cords and places to

put your hands. I bought the small, even though I am usually a large, because

the thing was so big and I felt a bit uncomfortable. I asked the retailer what he

thought and he said it looked good but I needed to get a looser pair of jeans.

Throughout the extract, there are a number of indications that, as an interested non-member, I was lacking in embodied subcultural capital, which in turn had a direct influence on my consumption habits. For one, my limited knowledge of Hip Hop stores led me to rely on information that I had absorbed from my key informant. As my key informant was a member of the Australian Hip Hop culture, I was under the false impression that the Daily Grind was perceived to be a Skate/Hip Hop store. Having now analysed the field notes from an insider's perspective, it is clear that Nixon's enthusiasm for the store was not based on any supposed Hip Hop affiliations, but on his attraction to the staff, however the confusion does emphasise the strong connection between Hip Hop and skate culture in Australia. Second, having found nothing to my liking in the Daily Grind, I found myself turning to a mainstream store that sold both rave/club and Hip Hop fashion, subcultures that define themselves in opposition to one another. As I lacked this knowledge, and was not aware of any non-mainstream Hip Hop stores, or of the culture's distaste toward mass cultural goods at the time, my initial Hip Hop fashion purchase, like many other interested non-members, was of a mainstream brand. In addition, while I exhibited some embodied

subcultural capital in that I knew that Ecko was perceived as a Hip Hop brand, at the time I was oblivious to Ecko's links with Hip Hop, being the graffiti based roots of founder Mark Ecko, and its subsequent loss of credibility within the Australian Hip Hop culture due to the content of its advertising, the nature of its stockists, and its mainstream acceptance. Specifically, evident within the abstract was the appeal Fred Durst (the lead singer of mainstream rap-core band Limp Bizkit) had on me, a celebrity who is perceived to lack credibility amongst members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. Furthermore, the ethnographic data revealed that interested non-members were more likely to rely on the assistance of retail sales staff than individuals who had attained a detailed understanding of the symbolic cues. Finally, the ideal social self-concept that I wanted to project was that of Hip Hop member. However, at this early stage in the transformation process, I felt uncomfortable consuming some of the products that would have helped me fulfil this role, as they were not aligned to my actual self-concept, and hence were a poor reflection of my actual self. This conflict between the desired consumption patterns of my actual self and ideal social self were frequently negotiated and were a consequence of identity play. That is, as interested non-members typically have no ideological commitment to the subculture, the new roles played are at times uncomfortable, and quickly abandoned in more conventional situations. In this way, the symbolic consumption of interested non-members in this study parallels the experimentation stage described by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). However, as revealed in a later field note, as my purchases were successful as symbolic cues and helped me gain access to the community while avoiding harsh sanctions, I began to feel much more comfortable and gradually overtime my actual self-concept began to shift to become more closely aligned to my ideal social self-concept, which in turn impacted on my consumption habits.

Further support for the assertion that interested non-members gain access to the subcultural community via the symbolic consumption of mainstream Hip Hop brands was found within the ethnographic data. Take the following interview extract from the hard-core member Lab, for example. Throughout the extract Lab indicates that interested non-members are most likely to buy highly commercial Hip Hop brands, what he identifies as "the latest crap."

> *Lab: The first thing people would probably do if they wanted to access it would be to, I suppose, dress similarly you know, with those brands, or even other brands that are the latest crap or whatever, and go to the gigs and hang out and hopefully talk to people… (Wearing the brands) is more accessible than meeting some of the people because some of the people involved in the scene probably are really going to be unapproachable.*

While the consumption of mainstream Hip Hop brands was in opposition to the countercultural nature of the subculture, and hence frowned upon to some extent, such consumption provided interested non-members with access to the community in a manner that the consumption of brands perceived as black could not. Nevertheless, a non-member's consumption of mainstream Hip Hop brands provided Hip Hop members with the symbolic cues necessary to infer a lack of embodied subcultural capital and hence position them at the bottom of the status hierarchy. However, with the assistance of mainstream brands not perceived as black, non-members could overcome their insecurities and gain access to the community without harsh sanctions for their lack of ideological commitment, and they were relatively free to observe the subculture and advance their understanding of the culture's history, values and

symbolic cues. In this way, individuals could advance their embodied subcultural capital and, hence, eventually increase their standing in the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, a number of non-members continued with the identity play, casting their costumes on and off when they wished to be entertained at hip hop shows. These non-members resembled the peripheral members described by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), as their lack of motivation for status progression meant they were continuously free from the ideological commitment that membership entailed. The symbolic consumption of peripheral members is discussed in the following section.

5.4   The Symbolic Consumption of Peripheral Members

Individuals who gained access to Australian Hip Hop community and through the attainment of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital advanced their standing to the second rung of the status hierarchy have been identified as peripheral members. While the standing of peripheral members is above that of the interested non-member, they quickly become aware of the low levels of esteem that soft and hard-core members place on them in the community. As such, peripheral members attempt to increase their standing within the subculture through the attainment of Hip Hop knowledge.

Analysis of the ethnographic data revealed that embodied subcultural capital was acquired in a number of ways. First, individuals attained Hip Hop knowledge by listening to, questioning, and observing members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. In this way, much of the embodied subcultural capital that members possess is acquired passively through vicarious learning at Hip Hop events, gatherings at local

Hip Hop stores, and assemblages of Hip Hop crews. In addition to relying on existing members as a source of subcultural capital, individuals with a budding interest in the Australian Hip Hop culture actively seek out Hip Hop knowledge from a variety of alternative sources. In particular, a small number of movies, books and records, such as Style Wars (Silver and Chalfant 1983), Subway Art (Cooper and Chalfant 1984) and Criminal Minded (Boogie Down Productions 1987), are treated as sacred texts, and are avidly consumed and studied repeatedly, as they inform individuals of the Hip Hop ideology. Niche media, such as Hip Hop and Australian Hip Hop magazines, non-commercial Hip Hop radio programmes and most frequently Hip Hop specific web forums, also provide individuals with the information required to advance their Hip Hop specific knowledge. Finally, hard-core members were often found to point peripheral members in the right direction in what could best be described as a mentoring role. The symbolic consumption of these hard-core members is examined in section 5.6; however, the following web forum post is an example of this mentorship as it relates to peripheral members' acquisition of subcultural capital. In the data, D-One confesses to his consumption of commercialised Hip Hop before he was provided with some guidance from hard-core members in relation to valued sources of Hip Hop knowledge.

> *D-One: It wasn't Beat Street or Subway Art that caught my attention, even though I have now studied them thoroughly, but Warren G and Snoop Doggy Dogg, so I guess it was '94 that I got into it… Anyways, I talked to some older heads and they pointed me in the direction of the Beatnuts (thankyou).*

The analysis found that some of the embodied subcultural capital that peripheral members acquired was objectified in their consumption, and the social information

inherent in such consumption provided peripheral members with distinction that advanced their standing in the subculture. As peripheral members had a greater wealth of Hip Hop knowledge to rely on, their consumption was found to be more in line with the countercultural values of the subculture than that of non-members. Specifically, peripheral members were more inclined to consume brands symbolic of Australian Hip Hop, as opposed to mainstream Hip Hop brands. Nevertheless, the analysis revealed that while their consumption was relatively reflective of the counterculture's anti-mass values, peripheral members were still perceived by the community to lack the ideological knowledge of soft and hard-core members. Take the following extract of an interview with Leo, a hard-core member, for example:

> *Researcher: What do you think about a person if you see them wearing a Burn T-shirt?*
>
> *Leo: I'd just think that they were into it.*
>
> *Researcher: Into what though?*
>
> *Leo: It all depends what age. At 25 I'd say that they have probably got a clue. And they have bought that T-shirt consciously because it is from the Hip Hop store and that represents where they're at… At 16, I would say the same thing. But I would say they are a bit more aspiring to be more involved… They're just getting into the culture and are like "Wow! - This goes with this."*

From the interview extract, it is evident that Leo perceives consumers of the Australian Hip Hop brand Burn to fall into two categories: individuals with a deep knowledge of the culture and an understanding of the culture's values who are using it to express their self-identities, and individuals who are aspiring to be more involved and have recently obtained an understanding of the affiliation between the brand and

the Australian Hip Hop culture. The latter are peripheral members who are generally younger and, through consumption, are demonstrating their embodied subcultural capital and attempting to advance their standing in the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, over time, through the process of reflexive evaluation, the consumption habits of peripheral members impacted on their perceptions of self. Hence, Hip Hop became an increasingly important part of the peripheral members' self-definition as their consumption became more homologous in nature, and they advanced their Hip Hop knowledge. In contrast, as evident in the previous extract, and as discussed further in section 5.5, the inherently Hip Hop self-identities of soft-core members were more commonly expressed through the consumption of the homologous style, rather than influenced by them.

For peripheral members, the consumption of an Australian Hip Hop brand demonstrated Hip Hop knowledge on two counts. First, in most cases, local graffiti artists designed Australian Hip Hop brands and their consumption implied the consumer was knowledgeable of these artists' work. Take for example the following extract from hard-core member S-One, a graffiti-artist and co-founder of an Australian Hip Hop brand. Within the extract, S-One reveals that in his opinion individuals who wear his brand are aware of the designers' backgrounds as graffiti artists. As graffiti artists rarely publicise their identities for fear of retribution from the law, he suggests that this brand knowledge is much more difficult to obtain than, for example, the heavily promoted endorsements of sports stars. Hence, as the knowledge is restricted, its currency as a marker of status increases, which adds to the appeal of such brands amongst peripheral members.

S-One: The people who are sort of into (wearing this Australian Hip Hop brand) are more 'in the know' sort of. You know you can pick it up and go "this is a top by Valour, I've seen his stuff before and I know what they do" and stuff like that. Whereas other people are just like "some pro-skater from America is in on this label, so I'm going to get down with that". The other people who pick it up are sort of more, they know where it's from, and then they work out where we're coming from.

In addition, the consumption of Australian Hip Hop brands demonstrates knowledge of the existence of Australian Hip Hop stores. As Australian Hip Hop fashion was generally produced in niche runs, and hence limited in distribution, the sourcing of these brands was an indication that the individual was knowledgeable of the culture's few physical community centres. As previously stated, these stores acted as a meeting place for the subcultural members and a centre for the exchange of Hip Hop related information. Hence, the consumption of goods that members perceived to have originated from Australian Hip Hop stores conferred status on the individual. Specifically, it communicated that the individual was aware of one of the culture's few physical meeting centres, and as such were likely to have obtained considerable embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital from the process of 'hanging out' in this environment. Hence, the brand choice of peripheral members was often dictated by the limited selection of brands available within these stores. In fact, the ethnographic data showed that for peripheral members, store choice often drove Hip Hop-centric consumption and provided a venue for members to advance their embodied subcultural capital, including the attainment of knowledge on the

backgrounds of Australian Hip Hop brands. Take the following extract from Leo for example:

> *Leo: I went to (a local Hip Hop store) early on. It was about 10.30 and they weren't open yet. But there was all these kids out the front. And I was like "What are you kids doing?" "Oh we're just waiting". And I'm like "Where are you from?" and I got chatting to one kid, and he was like "Oh you know, I'm from Dandenong" or something. And I was like, "What are you doing", and he was like, "Well it's school holidays and I've just come in, and I just want to buy something". And I said, "What are you going to buy? Are you going to buy paint?" And he said, "Nah, nah, nah, I've only got X amount of dollars so I will just see what that will buy me from this store." So it was more like, that's the store. That is where you go to be Hip Hop. That is where you buy your piece of Hip Hop for that week, or that holiday.*

While peripheral members' consumption habits were more in line with the counterculture's anti-mass values than the consumption of non-members, there were some mainstream brands that peripheral members consumed, and in doing so, advanced their standing in the status hierarchy. The consumption of these brands demonstrated knowledge of the culture's history. For example, the objectification of mainstream brands that were immortalised in seminal movies and music videos, such as 'Beat Street', 'Wild Style', or Run DMC's 'My Adidas', demonstrated embodied subcultural capital. Hence, these mainstream brands, specifically Nike, Adidas, Puma, Kangol, Fred Perry and Polo Ralph Lauren, maintained their appeal within the Australian Hip Hop community despite their mainstream acceptance, investment in non-Hip Hop related activities, and lack of support for the Australian Hip Hop culture.

However, it should be noted that it wasn't the consumption of these brands that enhanced one's status, but the consumption of specific styles of the brand that were reflective of a sacred time. As such, for example, the consumption of any pair of Adidas sneakers did not enhance one's standing in the subculture, but the consumption of a pair of Adidas Superstars, known colloquially as Shell Toes within the subculture, did. These specific brand makes exhibited what Grayson and Martinec (2004) define as indexical authenticity, and were henceforth sacred, as they were perceived to be an important component of the original Hip Hop style. As such, under these conditions mainstream brands were not perceived as artificial, but inherently archetypal. The knowledge of which items were perceived to exhibit indexical authenticity was obtained through research of the culture's history and was clearly noted by peripheral members. Take for example, the following interview extract from Alpha:

> *Alpha: Fred Perry is full rocked by old school graffiti writers. It's sort of 80's tennis wear, and a lot of these guys want to wear a nice Polo. Because it was all about Polo back in the 80s, especially if you look at the old school graffiti documentaries. Mesh hat, tight fitting Polo shirt done up to the top, a pair of Lee Dunroy with a permanent crease and a pair of Puma Clydes or Adidas Shell Toes and you were a B-boy. That was the B-boy uniform. Either that or you were wearing small shorts with socks pulled up.*

Throughout the ethnographic period the marketers behind these mainstream brands re-released a large number of these sacred items. The most prevalent number of re-releases was in the sneaker industry (particularly amongst the brands Nike, Adidas and Puma); however, the re-release of retro jackets, shirts, and tracksuits also

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occurred. These re-releases had no indexical authenticity, however they did exhibit iconic authenticity, as their physical manifestations resembled items that were authentic (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh et al. 2006). As such, these re-releases provided peripheral members with a simple solution to obtain the symbolic qualities capable of communicating Hip Hop knowledge without the long protracted search or relatively expensive price tag. In the view of many soft and hard-core members, this had the effect of profaning the sacred through commercialisation. As such, while it was difficult to differentiate between the sacred and the profane without questioning or a closer examination, once the distinction was made, the esteem placed on the consumer of items that were deemed to have indexical authenticity was far greater than those who consumed the profane. Take the following interview extract for example. Within the extract Monte, a hard-core member, makes a distinction between consumers of the rereleased version of a sneaker imbued with Hip Hop history, and consumers of the original sneaker. While both versions are capable of communicating knowledge of Hip Hop's history, the consumption of an original is for Monte indicative of an individual with a relatively high position in the status hierarchy, known colloquially as a 'Hip Hop head'.

> *Researcher: "If I was wearing (Nike) Air Force 1s, would you make an association with that?"*
>
> *Monte: "It depends on whether it's a new-school one or a classic, if you're wearing a classic then you're probably a head."*

The re-releasing of sacred fashion items was not the only phenomenon that had increased the ease with which peripheral members could obtain objectified subcultural capital. The emergence of eBay as an online marketplace simplified the process of

obtaining sacred goods. Whereas once Hip Hop members were required to undertake time-consuming offline searches for such desired artefacts, authentic fashion items can now be found and purchased with a few clicks. As online marketplaces increased the availability of such goods, members perceived it to have a profaning effect, as the goods began to lose their mystique and uniqueness. This infuriated a number of soft and hard-core members who were sneaker collectors and had spent years of their lives and thousands of dollars obtaining what was once one-of-a-kind collection. In a non-fashion related example, soft and hard-core members who were DJs also expressed some resentment toward the ascension of online marketplaces. For the DJ, much like the sneaker collector, much of value of the record collection was in the experience of collecting the records. As such, many informants recalled heart-warming stories of digging through dusty record crates in search of the elusive original. The purchasing of vinyl from an online marketplace didn't provide the same experience and hence, was generally opposed. However, as the decoder of the symbolic communication was incapable of determining where the vinyl was obtained from, such consumption of sacred records purchased in this manner still advanced one's standing in society. In contrast, it was evident from one's consumption of CDs and MP3s that the way the music was obtained lacked what Leigh et al. (2006) would describe as existential authenticity and, as such, status should only be awarded for the cultural knowledge that was manifest in one's taste in music, and not for the inferred purchase experience. In an effort to protect their position in the hierarchy, and reduce the threat illegal music downloads posed to their vast record collections, DJs were found to highlight the importance of such existential authenticity and continually reinforce the inferior sound quality of MP3s, the cold and clinical feel of CDs, and the warm, real feel of vinyl.

In addition to the relative ease with which peripheral members can now obtain objectified subcultural capital, many hard-core members expressed resentment toward the ease with which peripheral members could attain Hip Hop knowledge. Since Hip Hop's inception, an abundance of resources for attaining Hip Hop knowledge have become increasingly available, such as the DVD rereleases of the sacred films 'Wild Style' and 'Beat Street', or the increasing number of university courses devoted to the subject (The Hip Hop Archive 2008). However, much of the information peripheral members use to advance their Hip Hop knowledge is obtained from the World Wide Web. The abundance of this information and the ease and speed with which it can be accessed was found to irritate hard-core members the most. The majority long-term hard-core members have generally attained Hip Hop knowledge through time-consuming offline searches and interaction. These experiences were deemed to be a payment of one's dues before a higher position in the status hierarchy could be achieved. In contrast, peripheral members are now capable of attaining this information in a fraction of the time without leaving home. In this way, the experience of obtaining knowledge from online sources lacked existential authenticity and shortcut the initiation process. Nevertheless, the phenomenon has increased class mobility within the subcultural hierarchy. However, hard-core members perceive it to have profaned what was once sacred, and degraded the value of the embodied subcultural capital they had acquired. This finding is consistent with Thornton's (1995a) suggestion that subcultural capital can only maintain its currency as a marker of distinction when it is restricted to some degree. As such, in an effort to protect their position, hard-core members have placed an increasing importance on embodied subcultural capital not so easily attained online. Specifically, they reinforce

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participation in one of Hip Hop's four elements and a demonstration of Hip Hop skills through the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences as a requirement before advanced levels of esteem and respect should be awarded.

While the categories of peripheral, soft-core and hard-core were not found to be distinct and rigid, a clear delineation between members who participated in one of the four elements, and those who did not, was found. As peripheral members had an interest in, and knowledge of, the culture, but did not participate, they were perceived to be fans, and, as in Jenkins' (1992) study, this reinforced their subordinate position in the status hierarchy. As an example, take the following quote from a soft-core member Keaton. Keaton looked down upon those who do not participate in one of Hip Hop's four elements as they had failed to live the production experience, a necessary requirement of the existentially authentic. As such, through their lack of symbolic production, peripheral members failed to communicate the identity of a natural community member.

> Keaton: People that make it are on a different wavelength again to people that listen to it, like, totally like not even comparable. Like I'd hardly find an insight into something from someone that isn't making it. It's almost like the ones I respect, live what they talk.

Further evidence was obtained from the researcher's ethnographic experience. During the first twenty-one months of ethnographic immersion, the researcher had obtained a great deal of embodied subcultural capital in the form of Hip Hop knowledge. In addition, as I was commonly known amongst the community as someone 'doing his PhD in Hip Hop' my standing was often elevated in the eyes of many. Furthermore, as

I had interviewed and had extended contact with many soft and hard-core members, I was perceived to have obtained a great deal of subculture-specific social capital. Nevertheless, I continued to feel that I was perceived as an outsider to some extent and reported concern within my field notes that my position in the status hierarchy had reached a plateau. At first, I felt that this may have been an unintended consequence of my motivations as a researcher, and as such I was being perceived as a quasi-member. However, upon identifying as a DJ, I quickly advanced in status and realised that my previous hiatus in status advancement was a result of my lack of existential authenticity.

While I had briefly attempted all of the four elements during the first twenty-one months of ethnographic immersion, and had spent many days with my key informant on his turntables, up until this point I did not consider myself, and was not considered by others, as a practitioner of any of the four elements. To participate in the one of the four elements to an extent where it is incorporated into self-definition requires individuals to overcome a number of barriers to entry. These barriers maintain the structural integrity and exclusivity of the Hip Hop culture. Members overcame these barriers and incorporated an element of Hip Hop into their self-definition through making a number of sacrifices in an initiation process that fits Van Gennep's (1960) description of a rite of passage. Specifically, individuals were observed sacrificing their time and career progressions so that they could dedicate themselves to their chosen element (for example, many individuals who had moved beyond the peripheral stage were either unemployed or working in part-time positions), their life savings (for example the standard DJ equipment within the culture cost $2,500 plus records which on average cost AUD $40 an album and needed to be constantly updated), their

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bodies (breakdancers were constantly putting their bodies on the line, and moves such as the head-spin risked spinal damage), and their good name and freedom (penalties for graffiti art range from fines to imprisonment). These sacrifices are necessary so that the individual could move beyond the status of a peripheral member and experience what Chalmers and Arthur (2008) describe as a sacred lifestyle.

The goods and consumption experiences that were produced by subcultural members, be they recorded music, live music, entertainment, fashion or art, are appraised by other members of the culture and one's standing in the subcultural hierarchy is evaluated based on the amount of skill and knowledge demonstrated or whether an extraordinary experience is delivered. The analysis revealed that members preferred to appraise an individual's embodied subcultural capital on the basis of production, rather than consumption. For example, my key informant kept reminding me that the ownership of turntables didn't make me a DJ; it was my ability to 'mix'. In this way, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture are similar to the members of the MG subculture of consumption who fail to assign status to the owner of an indexically authentic 'museum MG' if they lacked subcultural self-efficacy (Leigh et al. 2006). However, due to the intermittent nature of production compared to the ever-present nature of consumption, the appraisal of status in this fashion is not always possible.

While soft and hard-core members were found to prefer to assess one's position in the hierarchy through the assessment of skills, it should be noted that the consumption of Hip Hop materials was enough to infer a relatively high standing within the community amongst outsiders. For example, from my ethnographic experience, it was evident that outsiders to the community perceived the ownership of turntables to infer

a relatively high status within the culture. However, as my new referent others required the demonstration of skills through the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences, I didn't incorporate this new moniker into my self-definition until this was achieved. This finding is consistent with Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) observation that soft-core members were less concerned with how outsiders see them, and more focused on the opinions of other subcultural members.

On rare occasions, the researcher encountered, or was told of, individuals who were able to circumvent this categorisation and were perceived as soft-core core members by the Hip Hop community despite a lack of participation in one of the culture's four elements. However, the data suggests that these individuals demonstrated an abundance of embodied subcultural capital through their participation in other less prominent aspects of the culture. For example, they may have been the producer of Hip Hop beats, a beatboxer, or the host of a Hip Hop radio show. In this way, these individuals were still producers of Hip Hop-centric goods or consumption experiences, and as such, were existentially authentic. Hence, other members were capable of evaluating their status on the basis of embodied subcultural capital evident in their symbolic productions. As such, for peripheral members to advance along the status hierarchy and become soft-core members, the production of goods and consumption experiences was necessary, and while it was most commonly achieved through their participation in one of the four elements, it could also be achieved through other methods of production.

The production of goods and consumption experiences by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture was constructed as self-expressive art which resisted against hegemony, in a manner similar to that of Kozinets' (2002) Burning Man participants. This conceptualisation, as opposed to one pertaining to commerce and the pursuit of profit, allowed the culture to maintain its oppositional nature, a requirement essential to its countercultural ideology. Furthermore, the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences enabled the subcultural participants to better communicate their strong, masculine and uniquely Australian Hip Hop identities better than the consumption of Hip Hop fashion. It also provided members with a greater sense of ownership over the subculture as they viewed it as something that they had created and not a cultural commodity they were simply sold. As such, the Australian Hip Hop culture as experienced by soft and hard-core members can be conceptualised as a subculture of production as much as a subculture of consumption. Hence, as an analytic category it is possible that the literature has overemphasised the role of consumption and underestimated the role of production in the analyses of previous subcultures of consumption. The following section examines the symbolic consumption practices of soft-core members.

5.5   The Symbolic Consumption of Soft-Core Members

Analysis of the ethnographic data revealed that Hip Hop is an inextricable component of the soft-core members' self-definition. That is, as individuals advanced beyond the second tier of the status hierarchy through proficiency in the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences and the demonstration of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, their perception of self was found to be more embedded in the collective and exemplary of the group. This finding is in

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contrast to previous subcultural studies where a strong identification with the culture was limited to hard-core members (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). For the soft-core members in this study, Hip Hop has become more than a casual interest, but a near full-time commitment and an organising framework guiding their lives and identities. Such high levels of commitment provided soft-core members with the opportunity to continue to improve their Hip Hop skills, advance their Hip Hop knowledge, and develop social relationships with other members, and hence obtain greater esteem. Due to their enduring near full-time commitment, the soft-core members observed in this study were rarely found to enact multiple selves in alternative situational contexts. Hence, in contrast to interested non-members, their ongoing commitment to the subculture's values meant that they rarely partook in identity play. As such, the researcher observed a strong and enduring congruency between soft-core members' self-concepts and the product-images and brand-identities evident in their consumption.

The self-concept/product-image congruence described above was reflected in the consumption of a homologous style. Common features of the homologous style that was closely adhered to by soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture included baggy jeans, hoodies (being hooded sweatshirts), t-shirts or polo shirts, beanies or baseball caps, and sneakers or skate shoes (further highlighting the connection between the two cultures). While these items are not particularly distinguishing (they are frequently consumed by the vast majority of Australian male youth), there were certain stylistic features of these items that distinguished the subcultural style as unique. These included, but were not limited to, the consumption of fashion that depicted Hip Hop iconography (such as graffiti, turntables and

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microphones), brands that were imbued with symbolic meaning specific to Hip Hop, bright colours, bold patterns, and retro styles that demonstrated a knowledge of the subculture's history. When combined into an ensemble, these stylistic features created a homologous style that became a formidable expression of subcultural identity. Specifically, their dress communicated the values of a tough, masculine, subversive, expressive and uniquely Australian counterculture. When combined with a homologous ensemble, the consumption of an Australian Hip Hop brand of T-shirt that includes a graffiti print provides an example. Such consumption challenges the dominant culture and reinforces the counterculture's tough and masculine image through the use of graffiti, which is illegal. In addition, as the general public would lack the subcultural capital necessary to decipher what is written in the graffiti art, or to correctly interpret the Australian Hip Hop symbolism encoded within the brand, such consumption reflects the subversive nature of the Australian Hip Hop community but reinforces its unique and expressive Australian identity. While this specific example does not manipulate a style that has an existent meaning in mass culture, it is a form of resistance through symbolic communication. Hence, while not a form of bricolage in the true sense of the word, it can be viewed as a counter-hegemonic response. Evidence of bricolage within the Australian Hip Hop culture was limited to the consumption of high-end fashion brands, such as Polo Ralph Lauren and Nautica, generally perceived by the broader Australian community to symbolise affluence via their expensive price tags and their loose connections to the upper class sports of golf, boating, tennis and polo. In contrast, these brands had developed alternative meanings within the Australian Hip Hop community and as such were consumed as authentic representations of their identities.

It should be noted that while the homologous style was closely adhered to by soft-core members, a loosely homologous style was evident amongst the entire Australian Hip Hop culture. This loosely homologous style was the result of two factors. First, due to their limited subcultural capital, peripheral members frequently consumed in a manner that was unrepresentative of the subcultural values. Second, due to their abundance of subcultural capital and elevated standing in the status hierarchy, hard-core members were free to deviate from the consumption norms. As such, a limited number of hard-core members abandoned the use of objectified subcultural capital and hence consumed a variety of incongruous styles (as discussed in section 5.5). Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the homological style of the Australian Hip Hop culture was not static but evolved over time. This evolution of the homological style was aided by the changing seasons and the fashion cycle. The hoodies and beanies consumed in the winter months are functionally inappropriate for Adelaide's long hot summers and as such, come summer, one homological style is substituted for another more befitting. Upon winter's return, the previous winter style is re-consumed, however tweaked to reflect the subculture's evolving identity. Such consumption reflects the neo-tribal nature of the Australian Hip Hop culture, and the continuing dynamic of subcultural evolution.

The homologous style of soft-core members was not restricted to clothing, but also extended to the consumption of music, entertainment, intoxicants and hairstyles. Not surprisingly for a subculture that is comprised of its own musical genre, the music consumed by these committed members was rather uniform and expressed many of the subculture's values. Specifically, soft-core members were heavy consumers of Australian Hip Hop (which often expressed a unique Australian identity) and what is

often referred to as Underground Hip Hop coming out of the United States (which was perceived as authentic as it was unmanufactured and expressive). In contrast, many hard-core members were found to consume a variety of musical genres and were free to experiment with the consumption of mainstream styles (as discussed in section 5.6), whereas interested non-members were found to consume a high proportion of the mainstream Hip Hop coming out of the US. In regards to entertainment, soft-core members frequented many of the same drinking establishments that hosted Hip Hop MCs, DJs and breakdancers. At these drinking establishments, and in the privacy of their own homes, the majority of soft-core members consumed similar intoxicants, further adding the homologous style. Specifically, the drugs of choice for members of the Australian Hip Hop community were alcohol, in particular beer or pre-mixed dark spirit and cola cans, and marijuana. The subculture's heavy consumption of alcohol expressed resistance to society's norms and expressed a hard, aggressive and masculine image. In addition, members' use of the illicit drug marijuana was homologically related to the subculture's emphasis on self-expression, and further communicated the subversive nature of the counterculture, positioning the subculture in opposition to the rave scene, whose members were perceived to be heavy consumers of the artificially manufactured drug ecstasy. Finally, the homology that existed in the Australian Hip Hop culture, and that was most closely followed by the soft-core members, was extended to the consumption of hairstyles. While no one haircut was uniform, by far the most popular amongst the community was the closely shaved head which communicated the cultural values of hardness and masculinity (much like the skinheads in Clarke's (1975a) study). In addition, the shaved head positioned the cultural members as authentic by differentiating the glocal cultural style from the African American Hip

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Hop style where the Afro or dreadlock hairstyle expressed racial liberation from suppression and links with Africa and nature (Mercer 1987).

Soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture were aware that they were consuming in a manner that expressed a unique identity that differentiated them from members of the mass culture, but at the same time represented their membership of a subcultural group. However, it was common for these members to downplay the importance of such symbolic consumption and to reiterate that one did not necessarily have to consume Hip Hop fashion to be considered 'Hip Hop'. This denial of the importance of symbolic consumption within the subculture was made for a number of reasons. First, as stated in section 4.6, this was necessary, as an interest in fashion was perceived to feminise their gender identity in a gender salient male enclave. Second, the acknowledgement of the existence of Hip Hop fashion inferred a certain superficiality of the culture that was in opposition to the members' own perceptions, and contrary to the self-concepts they desired to project. Third, conforming to the group's norms appeared to contradict the cultural value of expressing one's identity in an authentic manner. Finally, symbolic expressions that conformed to a set of rules ascribed by the group appeared to contradict the anti-conformist nature of the counterculture. When pressed, members often argued against the existence of the first two points, stating that they didn't have an interest in fashion and that Hip Hop was egalitarian and women were welcome to join. In regards to the last two points, soft-core members explained such contradictions through stating that while they were conforming to subcultural norms, they were still rebelling against mass culture and expressing themselves truthfully as members of the Australian Hip Hop culture.

The following extract from a conversation the researcher had with two informants, Keaton and Nixon, who at the time were both deemed to be soft-core members, illustrates the point:

Researcher: When did you start wearing Hip Hop clothes?

Keaton: I wouldn't say that, it sounds pretty fucking cheesy to say 'start wearing Hip Hop clothes?'

Nixon: Can I say something? That's the thing man. There's no like Hip Hop clothes. You used the term. You've got to know what it means. I don't think it means anything. I sort of know what you're getting at, but technically man... This whole concept of Hip Hop clothes, I don't know?

Researcher: A Hip Hop style?

Nixon: It's more like the attitude rather than like a style in some ways, and the attitudes like, 'casual'

Keaton: The attitude is reflected in the clothes to the max.

Nixon: 'Casual and convenient', you know what I mean?

Keaton: And 'won't conform'

Nixon: And it doesn't matter if you're going somewhere formal or whatever you just dress the same way, like at uni, you know what I mean? You're going out to eat, going to the pub, you just wear the same shit all the time and I reckon most dudes are the same. You know what I'm getting at man? It's not like you use baggy pants and a hoodie and those are your Hip Hop clothes. That term is just wrong. It's about what you don't wear and it's more about attitude than style. But I reckon the main thing is casual, comfortable but casual, you know what I mean? That's the bottom line, and I think most people

feel that way. It's a full like laid-back image that you tend to project and it's like there's other shit that you're more worried about than clothes.

Throughout the interview both Nixon and Keaton dismiss the notion of 'Hip Hop clothes', although they do recognise that a loosely uniform style exists with the Australian Hip Hop culture and that style closely parallels the culture's values. Nevertheless, Nixon and Keaton both defend themselves and their culture from accusations of superficiality by reinforcing that there is much more to Hip Hop than fashion, and Hip Hop's cultural members are concerned about more important things. They argue against the use of the term 'Hip Hop clothes' as they believe the term infers that Hip Hop culture is a spectacle performed through the acquisition and conspicuous consumption of clothing, rather than a lifestyle where members must acquire cultural knowledge. In doing so, both Nixon and Keaton are protecting the Hip Hop culture (and themselves) from the claims of femininity and superficiality (and hence inauthenticity) that they believe such performance oriented consumption implies. While both informants resisted the term 'Hip Hop clothes' throughout the interview, they made considerable effort to articulate the symbolic meaning of the homologous consumption style they both choose to wear. Keaton suggests that the anti-conformist nature of the counterculture is communicated through the homologous style, whereas Nixon suggests that the homologous style reflects cultural members' nonchalant attitudes toward life. Nixon explains that this attitude is expressed through their adherence to the homologous style and consumption of loose-fitting, comfortable clothing regardless of the situation.

An additional insight that can be gained from this extract is that the avoidance of certain products, brands and consumption styles plays an important role in establishing and communicating one's inherently Hip Hop self-concept for soft-core members. Specifically, within the extract Nixon states that, 'It's about what you don't wear…' implying that for soft-core members anti-consumption also plays a significant role in the communication of one's identity and cultural values to others. Consumption that was an inauthentic expression of one's identity, and non-reflective of the culture's values, is considered inappropriate. Hence, consumption behaviour that is not perceived as an authentic expression of self, and does not project the culture's subversive and masculine values, is avoided. Consistent with studies that investigate the effects of group influence (e.g. Stafford 1966; White and Dahl 2006), the outcome of failing to follow these cultural norms is a negative sanction, in this case, loss of status within the Hip Hop hierarchy. Evidence of the status-reducing effect of such consumption was seen throughout the ethnographic data and was also evident in the continuation of the previously discussed conversation with Nixon and Keaton:

> *Nixon: The only time (what clothes I wore) would be an issue is if like I got up*
> *to DJ some big Hip Hop show and I was wearing some Eminem shit, or*
> *fucking DADA, or FUBU or some shit. You know what I mean?*
> *Researcher: Why would that be an issue?*
> *Nixon: Because that sort of stuff is representative of a mindset that fully*
> *abuses Hip Hop. Basically, the image that projects is associated with Hip*
> *Hop, but most people that are fully into it, are offended by it, and that's just*
> *what you don't wear, you know what I mean? You're representing the shit*
> *that's fucking attacking the culture, by wearing that sort of shit.*

> *Researcher: How's it attacking the culture?*
>
> *Nixon: Like Puffy's got a clothing line right? And Snoop's got a clothing line, and what's his name? Master P. And these are all people that make a lot of fucking money, but make shit music basically. From a full Hip Hop stand point right now, the stuff they're making is diluted and personally I don't like it and nobody does who understands Hip Hop. It perpetuates the stereotype that Hip Hop has already got, that it's an ignorant fucking gangster culture that's all about nothing, which is the total opposite to the truth of what it is. That sort of stuff just perpetuates that stature.*

Throughout the extract, Nixon suggests that the conspicuous consumption of Hip Hop brands perceived by the Australian Hip Hop community as being representative of mainstream Hip Hop would have a negative impact on his subcultural standing. Specifically, the consumption of brands endorsed by mainstream artists, such as Eminem, Snoop Dogg and Diddy, would indicate to his referent others that he was lacking in embodied subcultural capital, in much the same way that the consumption of their music would. As symbols, these brands communicate meanings that are contrary to the counterculture's anti-mass values, and as such, fail to conform to the homologous style. Furthermore, the meanings within these brands threaten the integrity of the Australian Hip Hop culture as they communicate that Australian Hip Hop is merely an imitation of US Hip Hop culture. As many of the brands mentioned above are perceived to represent African American Hip Hop, such as FUBU and DADA, such consumption was perceived as an inauthentic expression of self. While this process is very similar to that described in our discussion of interested non-members, an important difference is that soft-core members already hold a relatively

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high position in the status hierarchy and as such are capable of influencing the values and consumption habits of interested non-members and peripheral members. Hence, it is important that members of the culture enforce harsh sanctions on such behaviour and reduce their potential influence through downgrading their position in the status hierarchy. It should be noted that despite Nixon's assertion that the specific example given is the only time his subcultural standing would be affected by his consumption, the ethnographic evidence suggests otherwise. Specifically, any symbolic consumption in opposition to the culture's values is considered inappropriate for soft-core members and frequently sanctioned. For example, the consumption of metrosexual fashion was perceived to be symbolic of feminine traits and was in opposition to the male enclave's masculine values, and hence, such behaviour received sharp criticism.

Soft-core members' conformance to the homologous style demonstrated their belonging to the group and communicated the group's masculine, subversive and uniquely Australian values. In addition, the symbolic consumption of soft-core members was consistently found to make two additional representations. Specifically, it communicated the individual's participation in one of the four elements, and their allegiance to their geographic locale. Both of these representations were closely tied to soft-core members' perceptions of self-identity and are the focus of the remainder of this section.

Analysis of the ethnographic data revealed that the consumption styles of the soft-core members made a symbolic representation of the various element of Hip Hop they participated in and identified with. That is, while soft-core members consumed a

homologous style, their consumption also expressed their participation in, and identity as, a breakdancer, graffiti artist, MC or DJ. As an example, take the following encounter the researcher had with Nixon during the ethnographic process. One afternoon the researcher and Nixon were watching a DJ documentary together when an advertisement for the brand Mixwell appeared:

Researcher: What's Mixwell?

Nixon: It's a brand. I'd love to get some of that.

Researcher: Why would you like to have that brand?

Nixon: Because the designs are dope.

Researcher: Why do you like the designs?

Nixon: Because they're dope, man.

Researcher: Yeah, but why do you think they are dope?

Nixon: Look man, I'll tell you why I like them. I like them because they represent my culture to everyone else. But not the entire culture, the specific part of the culture that I like, that I'm a part of.

Using the laddering technique suggested by Wansink (2003), the researcher obtained a meaningful understanding of how Nixon represented his identity as a DJ through the consumption of brands. Specifically, the exchange illustrates the linkages between the attributes that have meanings for Nixon as a consumer. Nixon initially reveals that he would like to consume the Mixwell brand because of their designs. He considers these designs as dope, a slang word for excellent, as they use iconic DJ symbols (turntables, mixers, needles, records, etc). Upon further probing, he reveals that the consumption of such iconic symbols would represent his culture to everyone else. However, not Hip Hop culture in its entirety, the specific part that he identifies strongly with - DJ

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culture. Hence, for Nixon, the consumption of the Mixwell brand would be an authentic representation of his identity.

Representations such as the one described above provided other members with the symbolic cues necessary to identify an individual as a practitioner of one of the four elements within the Australian Hip Hop culture, providing they had the embodied subcultural capital necessary to decipher the cues. The ability to be able to identify DJs, MCs, breakdancers and graffiti artists via their symbolic consumption demonstrated one's embodied subcultural capital and, hence, increased one's standing in the status hierarchy. Take for example the following extracts from interviews with Valour and Jay-C, in which both informants discuss the symbolic cues one must identify and interpret to uncover a graffiti artist, known colloquially within the community as writers.

> *Researcher: Is there a way you can tell if another person is a writer?*
>
> *Valour: Blue jeans, Nike tracksuit top and have (Nike) Max or (Nike) Air Max. When I was in Year 8, the start of high school, (Nike) Air Max's, grey with orange and blue were the kicks to have. Everyone knew you were a writer… Nowadays it's the same sort of thing. They're wearing the same stuff, but what you look for now is the (Nike) jacket, and if you look at that kid for more than five seconds you'd see a few different coloured paint spots on the jacket… or just look down at the shoes. They'll have the Nike's on, but they'll have the paint splotches on them. They'll have Nike's or Adidas. It's pretty much a dead giveaway.*

Jay-C: There is this weird little secret, this little elite thing amongst writers – almost like it is a kind of cool thing if you can get to know the other guys because they are so fucking underground – plus they are, like, big names and stuff. And I remember, yeah, we'd go up the train station and stuff and we'd sort of try to spot them. We'd see one then go, "There, that guy! Look at that stuff – that's (Ralph Lauren) Polo there. Look at the paint on his hands". No shit.

Within both extracts Valour and Jay-C name specific brands, and, in Valour's case, particular makes of brands that are used as distinguishing symbols to identify graffiti writers within the Australian Hip Hop culture. In addition, both informants discuss the symbolic significance of remnants of paint on an individual's clothes, shoes and hands. An awareness of such symbolic cues was a factor of one's embodied subcultural capital and the demonstration of such knowledge through the identification of graffiti writers increased one's standing in society. Evidence of the status enhancing ability of the demonstration of such knowledge is illustrated in Jay-C's description of an 'elite thing', where it is 'kind of cool' to 'get to know the other guys'.

Using the symbolism within consumption to identify other Hip Hop members also provided individuals with the opportunity to further their subculture-specific social capital. The data revealed that members, including the researcher during the ethnographic process, often approached other individuals on the basis of what was communicated through their dress. As illustrated in the following quotes, conversations were often undertaken with strangers who had the embodied subcultural

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capital necessary to identify the symbolic cues. For example, Elk would be willing to talk with an individual who knew of the record label logo he was wearing, and Alpha would be asked by members if he 'bombed', a slang term for the act of doing graffiti, based on the symbolism present in his oversized shoe laces. However, it should be noted that members frequently remarked that while members often met in this manner, and the consumption of the symbolic cues was perceived as a reliable indicator of one's interest in Hip Hop culture, it did not mean that the individuals involved would necessarily like each other.

> *Elk: If that person knows what I'm wearing then we can have a conversation. Like, if they know the record label logo that I'm wearing, and they come up and talk to me, then we're on the same level. So it's kind of like revealing your hand, but not being vulnerable about it.*

> *Alpha: I used to look for the gear so that I could identify with someone because this Hip Hop culture's so underground. That was how we could identify one another. We'd be on the train and a guy would look at your shoes and if you had fat laces, or whatever, or you were wearing this, that or the other, they'd go "Do you bomb?"... That's how you would meet them. You'd sort of identify with one another.*

The symbolic cues that represented one's chosen element were often born from a utilitarian function. For example, breakdancers often wore a more tight-fitting version of the homologous style, and long shorts in summer, as baggy pants and hoodies produced wind resistance, which slowed them down, and regular shorts failed to protect their knees from grazing. In a similar vein, graffiti writers frequently wore

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hoodies and backpacks as they provided the functional utilities of masking one's face, and storing one's paint. Furthermore, the consumption patterns of soft-core members often went further than representing one's participation in a chosen element, but was also capable of communicating particular nuances within. For example, when playing shows DJs looked for the symbolic cues evident in the clothing of the breakdancers in the audience for guidance for which type of music to play. A particular consumption style would indicate that the breakdancers were unlikely to be performing any 'power moves' that evening, and as such, music more suitable for 'uprocking' should be performed.

The consumption of soft-core members was also found to frequently represent their geographic locale. Forms of expression within the Hip Hop culture have previously been found to be tied very closely to the concept of locality and a representation of one's geographic place (Decker 1993; Forman 2002). In Hip Hop's early days in New York in the 1970's, graffiti artists would represent their neighbourhood by writing their name and street number wherever they went. For example, graffiti pioneer Taki 183 lived on 183rd street in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan (Cooper and Chalfant 1984). Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) found such graffiti was a way for subcultural participants to personalise and claim their neighbourhood as their own. In a similar manner, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture lay claim to a sense of belonging through identifying with a sense of place. Evidence of such representations is in the names of Australian Hip Hop crews and in the accents and lyrics of tracks. For example, the Hilltop Hoods originated from the Adelaide Hills, rap in Australian accents and incorporate Australian icons and Australian issues into their rhymes. Representing one's place through acts of expression was encouraged by soft and hard-

core members and as such had become a cultural norm that was rarely defied, as illustrated in the following quote by Alpha:

> *Alpha: Adelaide's such a small place. I could never understand the difference between South and North. To me it was bullshit, but I was encouraged to represent the South, so I did. Always used to talk about the Southside in my rhymes.*

Representations of one's place via consumption were seen in the soft-core members' preferences for Australian Hip Hop magazines over US Hip Hop magazines, and the increased popularity of Australian hip hop music and Australian Hip Hop brands. In this way, soft-core members represented their national identity through their consumption. While it should be noted that pride in one's own national identity is common amongst Australian youth and substantial country-of-origin research suggests that consumers prefer their own country's products (Phau and Prendergast 2000), the data showed that these consumption choices were also made to more accurately express their self-identities and to support the glocal culture. In regards to this second point, soft-core members felt that symbolic representations of a particularly 'Australian' Hip Hop culture would dissipate the perception that members were imitating an African American art form and would increase the longevity of the culture through financial support. Evidence of such support can be seen in the following quote by Tommy G, and was further motivated by an informal 'Support Aussie Hip Hop' campaign that was initiated during the ethnographic period, where Australian Hip Hop musicians placed 'Support Aussie Hip Hop' logos on the back of their recordings.

> *Tommy G: I figure any cash flow through (the local Hip Hop store) is important, especially for Adelaide, because they organise events, and the more funding they've got, the more funding there is for events. So it's pretty much an investment when I spend in there.*

While soft-core members were found to express their national identity through consumption, they were rarely found to represent their ethnicity. Hence, in contrast to previous studies in which Hip Hop members have been found to represent ethnicity through Hip Hop (Forman 2002; McLeod 1999; Templeton 2003), only a small number of Australian Hip Hop members were found to make any such representation, and those that did were of a non-white ethnicity. This finding is not surprising considering the previously discussed connotations associated with white participation in Hip Hop and members' attempts to overcome their race and claim Hip Hop authenticity. As such, for the majority white members of the Australian Hip Hop culture, representations that were deemed to be symbolic of one's ethnicity were avoided. In contrast, symbolic representations of one's nation, or one's city were preferred. The following episode, observed by the researcher, illustrates the point. At the launch of an Australian Hip Hop compilation album in Adelaide in 2003, MC Reason was throwing out promotional product to the crowd. As he grabbed a Zoo York visor from the bag he asked the crowd:

> *Reason: Who wants a Zoo York visor?*

At this point, the crowd screamed for the free merchandise, however Reason added:

> *Reason: Wouldn't you prefer something with Adelaide on it?*

At which point the crowd let out a deafening roar. This example illustrates the pride Australian Hip Hop members have in representing their glocal culture and geographic

locale. The Zoo York brand is generally liked by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture due to its association with the spiritual home and history of Hip Hop. Furthermore, it is not perceived as a brand that has 'sold out', like Ecko, or as a 'black' brand, like FUBU. However, when offered a choice between a Zoo York visor, and a hypothetical product with the name of the host city written on it, the crowd preferred the hypothetical product. They did so because they would prefer to represent their own place more than a foreign place, despite its Hip Hop associations, as such consumption would support the local Hip Hop culture and be a better expression of their self-concept. Similar findings were reported in a qualitative study by Newman (2001), where all eight teenage members in an American Hip Hop crew unanimously agreed they represented their city and borough, and as such often wore clothes emblazoned with New York, Queens, or Number 7, a subway line that runs through much of the borough. Representing one's neighbourhood through one's consumption also served the additional purpose of supporting one's area in a rivalry with other areas. Such consumption is an outcome of the competitive, masculine and tribal nature of Hip Hop culture in which crews battle each other for supremacy. However, only on rare occasions did the researcher witness any identifying signs of a member's crew within their fashion. Instead, soft-core members frequently consumed products and brands that were symbolic of Hip Hop in their home cities, and as such competed in a friendly rivalry with other Australian cities through their consumption. The following extract from by Elk illustrates this point:

> *Elk: (The consumption of local Hip Hop brands is) a statement about, you know, representing local Hip Hop, and maybe Melbourne Hip Hop, depending on the shirt. Or to the point where sometimes, because there's different local clothing companies in different cities, like Sydney's got a couple, Melbourne's*

*got a couple, so you find the Sydney people normally levitate towards the
Sydney, Melbourne towards the Melbourne, and it's kinda like a friendly
clothing rivalry I think as well.*

As consumers within the different cities throughout the country were more likely to consume brands that were representative of their home city than an alternative city, differences in homological style existed. These differences were not confined to the brands consumed but were also evident in the styles of fashion that were consumed and the cultural values that were expressed. For example, the consumption of the Hip Hop community that was encountered in Melbourne was slightly more 'yobbish' in style than the one encountered in Adelaide and appeared to be communicating the subculture's easygoing and masculine values, whereas the consumption style of the Sydney Hip Hop scene projected a more retro subcultural image that appeared to place more emphasis on acknowledging the subculture's history. However, it should be acknowledged that while the researcher visited Hip Hop nights and Hip Hop stores in Sydney and Melbourne, this work was peripheral to the study, and should be treated with some caution. Specifically, without having spent long periods of time at these cultural sites, it is difficult for the researcher to conclude with any certainty that his interpretation of the symbolism expressed was the same as for individuals who lived within these cultural sites.

This section has analysed the symbolic consumption of soft-core members. As a result of a near full-time commitment, Hip Hop is an inextricable component of soft-core members' self-definition and is reflected in their consumption of a homologous style. Their consumption and anti-consumption demonstrated embodied subcultural capital

and was found to be expressive of the subcultural values, and representative of their chosen element and geographic locale. The following section examines the symbolic consumption of hard-core members.

5.6   The Symbolic Consumption of Hard-Core Members

Hard-core members accumulated an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital and, as such, occupied the position at the top of the status hierarchy. As very few members of the Australian Hip Hop culture had such extensive knowledge, accomplished skills and valuable social networks, hard-core members were the fewest in number. Their knowledge, skills and social networks were respected and admired by soft-core members, as too were their significant contributions to the Australian Hip Hop community. Such reverence was evident in the language of soft-core members who sometimes referred to hard-core members as Kings and Pioneers. As soft-core members placed such a high-esteem on hard-core members, they frequently influenced their values, opinions, attitudes and behaviour. As was previously found by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), the hard-core members in this study acted as arbiters of meaning and opinion leaders who shaped and influenced the subculture's direction. In effect, as soft-core members had incorporated Hip Hop into their self-identity, hard-core members influenced the soft-core members' perceptions of self. Peripheral members who had attained the embodied subcultural capital necessary to identify the hard-core members also treated them with respect. However, the evidence suggests that at this point in one's subcultural evolution, the motivation for respecting hard-core members was more likely to be based on a desire to assert one's membership through learning and conforming to group norms rather than of a literal admiration of the hard-core

members and their superior knowledge, skills and social connections. Nevertheless, regardless of their motivations and whether they had the necessary embodied subcultural capital to identify hard-core members, the behaviour of peripheral members was strongly influenced by the hard-core members as they played an influential role in defining the culture's norms.

Whereas soft-core members understood Hip Hop in collective terms which were illustrated in their shared values and homologous style, hard-core members understood Hip Hop in individualistic terms, such as being true to oneself, and doing what one wants regardless of the pressure of others. It is argued that such a conceptualisation was consistent with the culture's countercultural nature and emphasis on authentic self-expression, yet promoted creativity and personal growth. As such, hard-core members do not feel pressure to conform to the group's established cultural norms. Rather, their behaviour is constructed as a genuine representation of their self-identities and a true marker of authenticity. As a result, the symbolic consumption of hard-core members was particularly diverse as truthful representations of self-identity ranged from those that closely paralleled the homologous style of soft-core members, to those that were not at all symbolic of Hip Hop. Such diverse representations were possible, as hard-core members were not required to assert their position in the status hierarchy through the consumption of objectified subcultural capital. Hence, while hard-core members understood the common symbol system within the culture, their abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital afforded them the freedom to abandon the use of symbolic cues. As an example, take the following interview extract from the hard-core member Lab, which will be referred to throughout this section:

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Lab: I know for a fact that some dudes in Hip Hop feel they need to have a certain label from Melbourne, or from Adelaide or whatever, to feel a part of what they're doing. To me, that's totally anti-Hip Hop, because Hip Hop should be about expression. You know, that's not about expression, that's like being a fucking sheep and following what everyone else is wearing, and so it really goes against the grain of what Hip Hop's about… People who get involved in something, anything they feel passionate about, once they get to a point of being sort of accepted, say socially in those kind of groups, and they're doing something of a quality level, there's no need for any kind of identity clothes-wise… It's irrelevant what they wear. Some of the best dudes that do graffiti, you could not pick them out in the crowd man. They just wear nothing that's related to Hip Hop. Usually the better ones go into other areas as well because they don't feel confined by subculture. That's basically what happens, as people get older and better they tend to sort of move into other areas as well. And then there's guys who are into Hip Hop one hundred per cent, four element theory, all that stuff, dress that way and they're wild writers as well, so it's a double edged-sword.

Within the extract Lab remarks that the need to express one's identity through consumption dissipates for hard-core members as they have established an esteemed position within the status hierarchy. Evidence of this effect was found in abundance within the ethnographic data. Take for example the case of hard-core member and established graffiti writer Jay-C who discussed a recent period in his life history where he refused to conform to the counterculture's consumption norms. Despite such unorthodox consumption it was discovered that a member of the Australian Hip Hop

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culture wrote in his 30th birthday card that he "can wear a cardigan and still command respect from the biggest writers." As the in-depth interviews attained a narrative of one's Hip Hop life story, a later interview with Jay-C revealed that this had not always been the case. Before he was well respected for his graffiti skills, Hip Hop knowledge and social connections, Jay-C frequently consumed symbolic cues to assert his position in the status hierarchy.

The consumption of an unorthodox style to liberate oneself from the conformity of the group, as was the case in the previous example, was a common motivation amongst those hard-core members who refused to consume the homologous style. As a primary motivation for joining the Australian Hip Hop culture was its subversive appeal, many hard-core members noted the contradiction in behaviour that conforming to consumption norms involved. Evidence of this can be seen in previously discussed interview with Lab who perceives the collective consumption habits of the soft-core members to be 'totally anti-Hip Hop' as they fail to express an individual identity. These hard-core members promoted anti-conformism and positioned individualistic expressions as a better reflection of Hip Hop's countercultural values than the homological style, as illustrated in the following quote by Elk:

> Elk: I love it when people say, "You don't look like you're into Hip Hop", I'm like "What does that look like? Who told you that? Who told you that they're the rules, and that you have to play by them?"

In contrast, other hard-core members promoted the homological style of the Australian Hip Hop culture. The existence of these individuals was acknowledged by Lab in this sections opening interview extract (p.183). As these individuals had an

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abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, they were not required to use consumption to assert their position in the hierarchy. However, as illustrated in the following quote by hard-core member Monte, they continued to consume in this manner as they felt that such consumption was an authentic expression of their self-identity.

> *Monte: Yeah, like if you're a B-boy that's part of what it's all about, you know like you rock the gear that represents who you are and the culture that you're into, and there shouldn't be any shame in that, it's all up to you… the clothing's part of the culture as far as I'm concerned.*

These hard-core members position their consumption as a more truthful representation of their countercultural views than the abandonment of the Hip Hop style for the sake of not conforming. They perceive the homological style to be an integral component of Hip Hop that helps to establish and communicate the glocal culture's legitimacy and ideology. As such, adherence to the homological style was perceived as a positive contribution to the culture's development. Henceforth, when the previously discussed hard-core members criticised an adherence to homological style, they usually responded with mild resentment and pointed out the hypocrisy in their behaviour, as they too consumed the homological style before they had reached the top tier of the status hierarchy.

The hard-core members who continued to consume the homological style undertook a mentoring role within the Australian Hip Hop community. These individuals were aware that they held highly esteemed positions in the status hierarchy, and of their ability to influence soft-core and peripheral members. As such, they felt it was their

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responsibility to ensure that their actions promoted the subculture's values and provided soft-core and peripheral members with Hip Hop knowledge. In doing so, these hard-core members reinforced the subcultural ideology, and provided soft-core and peripheral members with the embodied subcultural capital necessary to safeguard the subculture's future. Take the following interview extract from Jay-C for example:

> *Jay-C: I'm actually seen as a representative of Hip Hop culture, especially on graffiti. And I work with a lot of kids all the time, like, teenagers into graffiti and so, you know, I'm quite happy to (wear local Hip Hop brands and represent local Hip Hop), you know? Whether I like it or not, I play that role – you know what I mean? So, I might as well just do it properly, you know, because that's exactly what role I'm in.*

This finding is in direct contrast to the actions of the hard-core bikers in Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study who failed to acknowledge soft-core and peripheral members (perhaps due to an adherence of even stronger countercultural values). Rather than chastising peripheral and soft-core members, the aforementioned hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture played a mentoring role. In this way, these hard-core members were far less judgemental than the soft-core members who were often found to degrade individuals who held a lower position in the status hierarchy. For example, soft-core members often use the derogatory term 'toy' to refer to those are interested in the culture but lacked the embodied subcultural capital. While both soft-core and hard-core members perceived that the actions of such individuals would have a negative impact on the culture if left unchecked, instead of chastising, these hard-core members attempted to educate and enlighten. When describing their motivations for doing so, they acknowledged that they too once

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lacked subcultural knowledge and to not render assistance would make them a part of the problem. Hence, as opposed to seeing themselves as defenders of the faith, as did the hard-core bikers in Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study, these hard-core members saw themselves as missionaries. In doing so, they played an instrumental role in the ongoing development of the subculture's values and the advancement of many individuals within the status hierarchy, yet managed to protect their position at the top of the hierarchy due to their valued contributions as esteemed mentors.

While these mentors may continue to consume the homological style, the data suggest that they do so in a manner that attempts to differentiate them from the collective. That is, these hard-core members frequently tweaked their consumption such that it was possible to make a within-group distinction and claim individuality, and yet consume in a manner that remained expressive of the collective countercultural identity. In doing so, these hard-core members managed to overcome accusations of conformity, while still representing the subculture. A similar finding was reported in Muggleton's (2000) study of the punk subculture, and its emergence within the Australian Hip Hop culture is illustrated in the following quote by hard-core member Roo:

> Roo: Self-expression definitely comes into it. Just with originality and stuff like that. Everyone just tries to be slightly original, but still (consuming) the same sort of thing, you know what I mean?

The adjustments to the homological style that these hard-core members made to ensure their individuality were generally subtle in that they were unlikely to be noticed by an outsider looking in. Examples include the consumption of extremely

rare goods, goods that exhibited indexical authenticity or the creation or modification of one's own clothing. Take the example of Alpha whose consumption clearly conforms to the homological style, yet is unique in its own way through the inclusion of a rare Kangol golf cap.

> *Alpha: Fred Perry shirt, dirty Adidas jacket, jeans, (Nike) Air Max, plain haircut, man, or a hat. Usually I wear a hat a lot. I wear golf caps.*
> *Researcher: Golf caps, hey?*
> *Alpha: That my grandfather gave me. You know. I've always loved them, man. A golf cap, to me, is just way … it's like the articulate Hip Hop style. It's the thinking man's cap. You know, it's your thinking cap. So I wear my brown Kangol cap that my grandfather gave me.*

Further evidence of hard-core members consuming the homologous style while still maintaining individuality was seen in the creation of individualised clothes. For example, one such hard-core member, Rocky, enjoyed representing his subculture through consumption, however he expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that many of the goods that he would purchase would also be worn by other people, making him less individual. Hence, he purchased a plain white T-shirt and screen-printed a silhouette of a breakdancing pose on it. Through the use of Hip Hop iconography he felt that such consumption was representative of the collective while at the same time allowed him to be recognised as a unique individual. As such, in addition to the hard-core members who abandoned the homological style, the hard-core members who continued to consume in the homologous manner were also found to value individuality in their consumption. In this way, hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture are similar to the Americans in Holt's (1998) study whose cultural

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capital resources were in the top quintile of the sample. However, in contrast to Holt's findings where those who had the least cultural capital resources were found to express their belonging to a collective through passionate and routinised consumption, the individuals in this study who had the lowest levels of subcultural capital lacked the knowledge to be able to consume in a manner that was an accurate representation of the group. Such consumption was more reflective of the soft-core members.

As was found in studies by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), the consumption of peripheral and soft-core members was influenced by the consumption patterns of the hard-core members who acted as opinion leaders. The consumption habits of the hard-core members who continued to consume the homologous style were most closely followed as the emulation of their style was more likely to be interpreted as the objectification of subcultural capital and hence increased the subcultural standing of peripheral and soft-core members. These hard-core members were aware of the influential role that they played in shaping the homological style and determining the subcultural success of brands. As such, they often experienced a feeling of guilt when they didn't consume local brands, as they weren't supporting local artists, or the local culture. The nuances in the consumption style that differentiated these hard-core members from the collective were also frequently consumed. In this way, these hard-core members play a significant role in shaping the evolution of the homological style. It also meant that the changes to the style hard-core members made to differentiate themselves from the collective lost their uniqueness over time and required frequent alterations. On rare occasions, the consumption habits of hard-core members who abandoned the homological style were also emulated. If enough members adopted an obscure style and the logical

connections could be made, such consumption began to be interpreted as an expression of the culture's values, and was adopted within the homologous style, despite this not being the original intention. For example, after respected hard-core rapper OB MC performed a number of shows in a tank top and flip-flops, such consumption became acceptable within the community and was interpreted to be symbolic of the Australianness of the glocal culture.

It should be noted that a specific group of hard-core members, the graffiti writers, abandoned the homologous style out of necessity rather than on the basis of an ideological countercultural contradiction. The majority of hard-core graffiti writers had committed the criminal act of graffiti countless times. With every act of graffiti the writer will generally leave his pseudonym as an identifiable mark that informs others of his presence and, if the graffiti is appreciated, will advance or reaffirm his standing in the subculture. However, as these pseudonyms allowed numerous acts of graffiti to be traced back to a single individual, the penalties for the hard-core graffiti artist were extremely severe. In addition, as hard-core members were generally over the age of 18, the severity of penalties was further increased. As such, hard-core graffiti writers frequently abandoned the consumption of cues that were symbolic of Hip Hop and graffiti, as they feared such consumption would aid the authorities in their desire to identify and apprehend. In contrast, soft-core graffiti writers frequently consumed the symbols regardless, and as such, their consumption was reflective of their nonchalant attitudes, countercultural values and collective self-identities. Evidence of these contrasting styles is provided in the following interview extracts. In the first extract, Alpha discusses the consumption styles of pioneering hard-core graffiti writers who he refers to as 'these dudes'. In the second extract, Valour, who is

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now a hard-core member, reflects on his consumption style as a soft-core member who hadn't yet advanced to the top tier of the status hierarchy.

> *Alpha: If you were doing graff your best plan of attack was to look as far from a graffiti writer as you could, and that's the way because the moment that they see you're wearing an Adidas Equipment jacket, or a hoodie and a pair of (Nike) Huaraches, man, you'd get locked up. You'd get sentenced. Most of these dudes looked like Bogans. They had to. You'd go to Melbourne in the 'eighties and they were wearing Ripples, like, knitted jumpers, yeah, flannelette shirts man, and these were the dudes that were doing sick, wild style burner pieces. So, the whole image thing about how you can and cannot dress at a Hip Hop show is just hilarious to me.*

> *Valour: I used to feel quite proud to walk around in my jacket with paint splotches on it. And all the pieces of clothing that I had had paint on it. Even my best clothing. Always at some stage.*

Unlike the soft-core members, the hard-core members in this study did not undertake an absolute rejection of all things mainstream that weren't imbued with Hip Hop history. The hard-core members were found to be more accepting of the products of mass culture than soft-core members. Whilst these products were still generally regarded as feminine and conformist, a highly nuanced approach to critically appraising mainstream goods was adopted, as opposed to a blanket ban. Hence, hard-core members consume mainstream fashion brands if they receive a positive appraisal and are deemed to be an authentic expression of self-identity. In this way, hard-core members were found to be similar to the Americans in Holt's (1998) study who were

high in cultural capital resources and were found to seek individuality through authenticity and connoisseurship. In particular, the consumption of mainstream music, while not particularly frequent, was far more common amongst hard-core members than amongst soft-core members, and was constructed as an authentic expression of a Hip Hop identity if the music had been positively evaluated for its quality. Hard-core members implied that their superior knowledge and skills made them connoisseurs who were better able to determine the quality of music than other subcultural members. However, more commonly, the consumption of mainstream music by hard-core DJs could be explained as bricolage as these songs were reworked into their own artistic productions and imbued with new meaning. In a similar manner, hard-core graffiti artists and MCs reworked images and references from popular culture into their artistic productions. In these cases, the consumption of mainstream goods by hard-core members was consistent with the counterculture's emphasis on subversion and self-expression.

Looking back on the first interview extract of this section (p.183), Lab suggests that the interests of many individuals broaden once they have achieved hard-core membership status. This remark is consistent with the findings of the analysis as the interests of hard-core members were found to frequently extend beyond Hip Hop. For example, upon reaching hard-core membership status, the researcher's key informant Nixon became a heavy consumer of funk music and on occasions began to DJ funk sets. As a soft-core member Nixon would never have undertaken such behaviour; however, as a hard-core member with an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, he was at liberty to experiment with new styles without harming his position in the status hierarchy. As Nixon eloquently put it:

Nixon: If you are (Hip Hop), then what you do is. But at the same time, and just as important, just because you do something Hip Hop, doesn't necessarily make you Hip Hop.

The broadening interests of hard-core members was a function of life-stage, creativity, and the additional time they had free from the full-time and enduring commitment that gaining Hip Hop knowledge and skills, and developing social relationships required. As such, many hard-core members came to enact a number of different roles, which in turn had a significant influence on their consumption. Which role was enacted and its impact on consumption was a function of the situation and one's familiarity with the role, be it for example graffiti-artist, illustrator, graphic designer or father. For example, I observed hard-core members who upon taking office jobs immediately conformed to business attire. However, as they had an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, they still maintained their position in the top of the status hierarchy. Upon becoming familiar with their new roles, some of these individuals continued to consume the symbolic cues of a their young professional identity, especially during work hours, while others abandoned the consumption of these symbols, at least as far as the corporation's consumption norms would allow. Hence, the findings provide some support for the research of Aaker (1999) and Markus and Kunda (1986) who found that individuals tend to consume products that match their situational self-concepts. They also provide strong support to the suggestion that symbolic self-completion is more likely to occur when role familiarity is low (Wicklund and Gullwitzer 1982). Hence, in contrast to previous conceptualisations of the hard-core member (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), the self-identities of hard-core members were found to be much more fluid and

malleable than those of soft-core members. Hip Hop for hard-core members had evolved from a way of life and an inextricable component of self-identity, to a sacred domain that they were free to experience at will.

As previously stated, hard-core members were at liberty to break from the accustomed behaviour without impacting on their standing within the community, providing their consumption was positioned as an authentic representation of self. This, however, was not a particularly onerous constraint as their highly esteemed positions meant that their symbolic representations were rarely critiqued but generally always perceived as authentic expressions by soft-core members. Consumption that was not representative of a Hip Hop identity was constructed as an expression of their individuality and anti-conformist values, or a truthful representation of their current situational self-concept, be it, for example, illustrator, graphic designer or father. In doing so, the hard-core members managed to protect their positions in the status hierarchy despite the apparent contradictions in their consumption behaviour. It should be noted that the hard-core members' construction of Hip Hop in such a fluid and individualistic manner might have been a consequence of the new roles that many hard-core members had adopted and their desire to maintain their position in the status hierarchy despite the conflicting demands that were placed on their consumption behaviour. Whilst the hard-core members in this study were never observed to consume brands that were perceived as black, the findings suggest that such behaviour would be one of only a small number of consumption modes that soft-core members would perceive as inauthentic and hence would harm their status. In contrast, peripheral members who lacked the embodied subcultural capital to correctly identity hard-core members

internally critiqued such unorthodox consumption, however their lowly position in the status hierarchy meant they rarely criticised others for fear of reprisal.

5.7   Summary

This section has discussed the nature of symbolic consumption with the Australian Hip Hop culture. In contrast to previous findings, the analysis revealed that one's position within the subculture's status hierarchy was based on an evaluation of one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. The consumption of objectified subcultural capital did not necessarily increase as one's status advanced. Rather, symbolic consumption was found to be used for a variety of purposes as individuals advanced up the status hierarchy.

In the absence of the embodied subcultural capital necessary to effectively fulfil the role of Hip Hop member, interested non-members enhanced their role performance through stereotypical consumption. Due to their lack of subcultural knowledge, these non-members relied heavily on images of the culture that were portrayed in mainstream media and advertising, and shopped predominantly in highly commercial stores. Such consumption demonstrated a lack of embodied subcultural capital and positioned them at the bottom of the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, such consumption provided them with access to the community and eventually led to peripheral membership so long as they avoided brands that were representative of African American Hip Hop.

Peripheral members of the Australian Hip Hop culture attempted to increase their standing within the subculture through the acquisition and expression of Hip Hop

knowledge. As such, the objectification of subcultural capital through consumption was common amongst peripheral members. In particular, consumption that demonstrated knowledge of Hip Hop history, and local Hip Hop artists, brands and stores asserted their membership and advanced their standing. However, to move beyond the second tier of the status hierarchy peripheral members were required to participate in one of Hip Hop's four elements producing artistic goods and consumption experiences.

For soft-core members, Hip Hop was an inextricable component of self-identity and this was proudly reflected in their consumption. As such, soft-core members consumed a homologous style that expressed the subculture's ideology. The subculture's values were expressed in a range of products consumed by soft-core members as well as in the stylistic features of their fashion, such as Hip Hop iconography, brands that are imbued with symbolic meaning specific to Hip Hop, bright colours, bold patterns, and retro styles that demonstrate knowledge of the subculture's history. The data also revealed nuances in the homologous consumption styles which represented members' geographic locales and the element of Hip Hop they practiced.

Hard-core members had attained an abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital and as such occupied the position at the top of the status hierarchy. The need to express one's identity through consumption was found to dissipate for hard-core members as they have established an esteemed position within the status hierarchy. As such, some hard-core members promoted anti-conformism and positioned their individualistic expressions as a better reflection of

Hip Hop's countercultural values than the homological style. In contrast, others perceived the adherence to the homological style as a positive contribution to the subculture's existence and development. These members were aware of their influential role in the community and acted as mentors shaping the homological style. Furthermore, in contrast to soft-core members, hard-core members were found to be more able and likely to enact multiple self-identities.

CHAPTER 6: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

6.1 Introduction

This study has examined the consumption practices of the Australian Hip Hop culture. In doing so, the structure of the subculture has been highlighted and the dynamics of the status hierarchy uncovered. This final chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical contributions this study has made to the academic literature. Practical implications are then discussed. The limitations of this study are highlighted, and directions for future research are proposed. The thesis concludes with a summary of the research project.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

The findings presented in Chapter 5 have been summarised and are presented in Figure 4. These findings make several contributions to consumer research. First, the identification of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital as determinants of status enhances our understanding of status conferral within subcultures of consumption. Specifically, within the Australian Hip Hop culture, one's position in the status hierarchy is determined by an appraisal of one's subcultural knowledge, skills, and social network. This discovery supports previous findings that subcultural capital confers within-group status amongst subcultural participants (Kates 2002; Thornton 1995a; 1995b). However, this study enhances our understanding of status conferral by identifying embodied subcultural capital as the only capital to have a consistently positive relationship with one's position in the status hierarchy. While members of the Australian Hip Hop culture used objectified
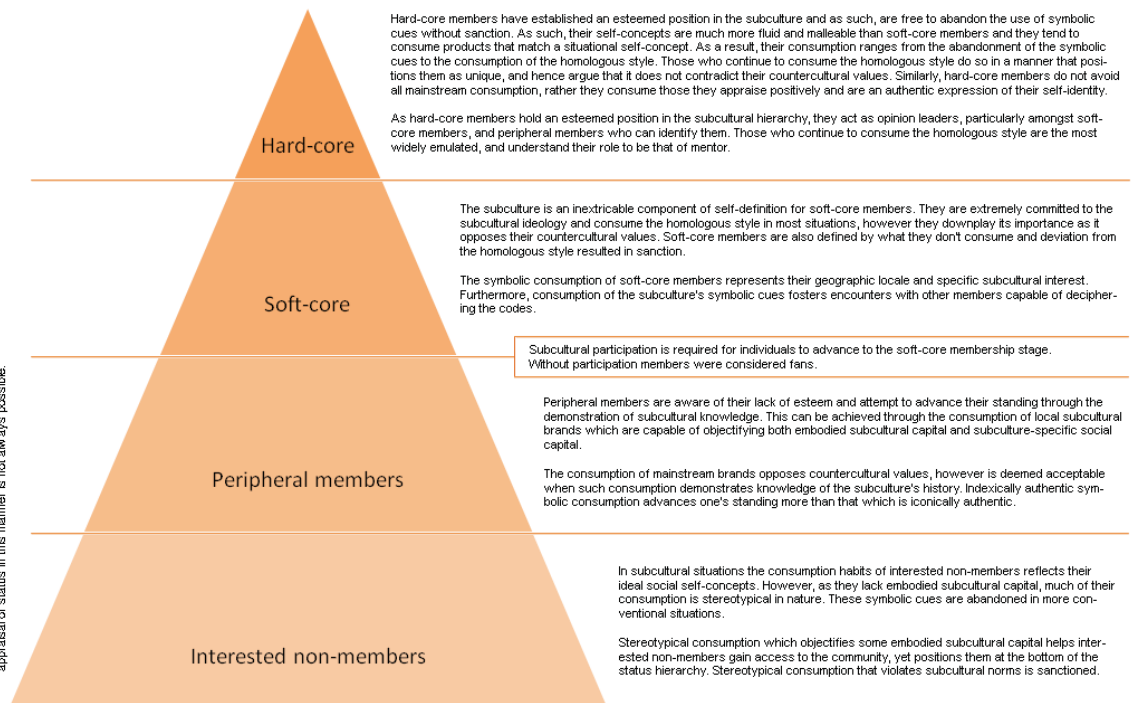
Figure 4: Summary of Findings

High Status

An individual's position on the status continuum is determined by an evaluation of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital

An individual's position in the subcultural status hierarchy is better theorised along a continuum, as approximations of their subcultural knowledge, skills and social connections vary depending on who is making the assessment and are revised as new information comes to hand.

Production is preferred to consumption as a means of determining an individual's embodied subcultural capital. However, due to the intermittent nature of production compared to the ever-present nature of consumption, appraisal of status in this manner is not always possible.

Hard-core

Hard-core members have established an esteemed position in the subculture and as such, are free to abandon the use of symbolic cues without sanction. As such, their self-concepts are much more fluid and malleable than soft-core members and they tend to consume products that match a situational self-concept. As a result, their consumption ranges from the abandonment of the symbolic cues to the consumption of the homologous style. Those who continue to consume the homologous style do so in a manner that positions them as unique, and hence argue that it does not contradict their countercultural values. Similarly, hard-core members do not avoid all mainstream consumption, rather they consume those they appraise positively and are an authentic expression of their self-identity.

As hard-core members hold an esteemed position in the subcultural hierarchy, they act as opinion leaders, particularly amongst soft-core members, and peripheral members who can identify them. Those who continue to consume the homologous style are the most widely emulated, and understand their role to be that of mentor.

Soft-core

The subculture is an inextricable component of self-definition for soft-core members. They are extremely committed to the subcultural ideology and consume the homologous style in most situations, however they downplay its importance as it opposes their countercultural values. Soft-core members are also defined by what they don't consume and deviation from the homologous style resulted in sanction.

The symbolic consumption of soft-core members represents their geographic locale and specific subcultural interest. Furthermore, consumption of the subculture's symbolic cues fosters encounters with other members capable of deciphering the codes.

Subcultural participation is required for individuals to advance to the soft-core membership stage. Without participation members were considered fans.

Peripheral members

Peripheral members are aware of their lack of esteem and attempt to advance their standing through the demonstration of subcultural knowledge. This can be achieved through the consumption of local subcultural brands which are capable of objectifying both embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital.

The consumption of mainstream brands opposes countercultural values, however is deemed acceptable when such consumption demonstrates knowledge of the subculture's history. Indexically authentic symbolic consumption advances one's standing more than that which is iconically authentic.

Interested non-members

In subcultural situations the consumption habits of interested non-members reflects their ideal social self-concepts. However, as they lack embodied subcultural capital, much of their consumption is stereotypical in nature. These symbolic cues are abandoned in more conventional situations.

Stereotypical consumption which objectifies some embodied subcultural capital helps interested non-members gain access to the community, yet positions them at the bottom of the status hierarchy. Stereotypical consumption that violates subcultural norms is sanctioned.

Low Status

subcultural capital to gain access to the group, assert their membership, and express their identities, objectified subcultural capital did not have a consistently positive relationship with status. Specifically, the consumption of objectified subcultural capital for hard-core members was found to vary depending on the individual and the situation, and ranged from the complete abandonment of objectified subcultural capital through to the consumption of a homologous yet distinctive style. Hence, in contrast to previous findings (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), a strict adherence to the subculture's consumption values was not a necessary requirement for hard-core members. This finding enhances our understanding of status conferral within subcultures of consumption and stresses the importance of symbolic consumption to the earlier stages of subcultural membership. This theoretical contribution has a number of practical implications that are discussed in section 6.3.

In addition, the findings of this study further our understanding of status conferral within a subculture of consumption through the inclusion of the determinant subculture-specific social capital. Specifically, the findings revealed that the standing of an individual's social connections and ability to influence them had an influence on the individual's position in the status hierarchy. This is a particularly pertinent finding as this is the first study to identify subculture-specific social capital and examine its relationship with one's position in the status hierarchy. The findings suggest that the status hierarchy of a subculture of consumption may be better theorised as being determined by both embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. Hence, this study contributes to knowledge in consumer research by identifying and addressing the need for a revised theoretical perspective on status conferral within subcultures of consumption. While further studies should be

conducted to ensure the revised model of status conferral holds across other subcultures of consumption, scholars and practitioners alike would be well advised to examine embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital when attempting to identify an individual's position within a subcultural status hierarchy. This theoretical contribution has a number of practical implications that are discussed in section 6.3, as a well-connected and influential subcultural member is capable of shaping the subculture's consumption values.

The identification of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital as determinants of subcultural status differ from previous findings which report status to be determined by one's devotion to the subcultural ideology expressed through a commitment of time, effort and resources (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). However, it is possible that these previous studies have misinterpreted their findings as the current study found commitment and subcultural capital to be correlated amongst non-members, peripheral members and soft-core members. A near full-time commitment was necessary for members as they climbed the subcultural hierarchy, as much time, effort and resources were required to increase their subcultural skills and knowledge, and to develop and nurture social relationships with other Hip Hop members. In contrast, hard-core members had already obtained much embodied subcultural capital and the amount of time, effort and resources required to keep these skills and knowledge up-to-date was less substantial. Similarly, their social networks were well established and their maintenance required a less significant time contribution by comparison. Hence, hard-core members' abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture specific-social capital exonerated them from the full-time subcultural commitment required for gaining Hip Hop knowledge

and skills, and developing social relationships. This is an important theoretical distinction that enhances our understanding of status within a subculture of consumption and provides a more accurate definition of a hard-core member. This study's contribution of a more accurate definition of a hard-core member has a number of practical implications for marketers that are discussed in section 6.3.

This study found that one's position in the subcultural status hierarchy is more fluid, contested and negotiated than proposed by Fox (1987). While Fox's categories were found to exist within the Australian Hip Hop culture, one's position in the hierarchy was better viewed along a continuum, as approximations of one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital varied depending on who was making the assessment and were revised as new information came to hand. The theorisation that one's position in the status hierarchy is based upon numerous and ongoing evaluations of one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture specific social capital supports Kates' (2002) assertion that a fixed, rigid structure may not reflect the reality of the subcultural status hierarchy. However, this new theorisation supports Kates' assertion without totally abandoning Fox's (1987) much supported framework (e.g. Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and as such allows researchers to continue to make comparisons with previous studies. Hence, scholars and practitioners alike should theorise subcultural status in light of this continuum as it provides a more truthful account of an individual's position in the status hierarchy, yet allows upcoming projects to build upon previous knowledge. In the remainder of this section the contributions to knowledge this study has made which enhance our understanding of the characteristics and symbolic consumption practices of interested

non-members, peripheral members, soft-core members and hard-core members are discussed.

Despite Fox's (1987) findings that they are the largest group interested in the subcultural activity, all subsequent research of subcultures of consumption have ignored the characteristics and consumption practices of interested non-members (e.g. (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Kozinets 2002a; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). As such, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge by being the first to provide insight into the consumption practices of non-members with an interest in the culture. The findings show that in subcultural situations the consumption habits of interested non-members reflect their ideal social self-concept in that they were heavy consumers of the visible signs of the culture. However, a lack of embodied subcultural capital meant that the visible signs adopted and consumed were often stereotypical in nature. Members perceived such stereotypical consumption as inauthentic and demonstrating a lack of embodied subcultural capital, positioning the consumer at the bottom of the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, stereotypical consumption provided non-members with access to the community and an opportunity to gain embodied subcultural capital, providing their consumption was not perceived to be symbolic of African American Hip Hop. In contrast, consumption that was not symbolic of Hip Hop, or was perceived to be symbolic of African American Hip Hop, was sanctioned and inhibited access to the community and impeded one's progress toward membership. Hence, interested non-members should be conceptualised as heavily dependent on stereotypical consumption as it provides them with access to the community. However, subcultural norms guided by the values of the subculture dictate which stereotypical symbols provide access to the

community and which are sanctioned. The consumption of symbols that were not sanctioned enhanced a non-member's performance of an unfamiliar role. However, such consumption is frequently abandoned in more conventional situations. In this way, the consumption practices of interested non-members are practical in nature. The theoretical contribution outlined above has implications for marketing practitioners as discussed in section 6.3.

A number of previous studies have investigated the consumption practices of peripheral members (e.g. Donnelly and Young, 1988; Irwin, 1973; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). This study supports previous findings and uncovers new insights. Specifically, supporting Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study of new bikers, the peripheral members in this study were aware of their low levels of esteem and attempted to advance their standing through the use of symbolic consumption. However, this study advances our understanding of the use of symbolic consumption by peripheral members, as it identifies consumption that objectifies embodied subcultural capital as the only form of consumption to have a positive effect on status and allow them to assert their membership. Hence, peripheral members quickly distanced themselves from stereotypical consumption: while it provided access to the community, it also demonstrated a lack of embodied subcultural capital and positioned the consumer at the bottom of the status hierarchy. In contrast, consumption that demonstrated one's knowledge of the subculture was highly valued and advanced one's subcultural standing. Peripheral members obtained such knowledge through listening to, questioning and observing other members, and actively studying representations of the subculture that were available in niche media. An understanding of how embodied subcultural capital is gained provides a useful

insight for marketers pursuing subcultural influence within a consumption-oriented subculture and is discussed further in section 6.3.

For peripheral members of the Australian Hip Hop culture, the consumption of local Hip Hop brands demonstrated knowledge of local artists and community centres, which increased their standing in the subcultural hierarchy and communicated the anti-mass values of the counterculture. As anti-mass values are common within countercultures (by definition countercultures are opposed to the dominant culture, and hence, have frequently been found to oppose the mass culture) (e.g. Willis 1978; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995b), it is likely that peripheral members of other countercultures demonstrate their knowledge of hard-core members and local community centres through the consumption of niche brands in an attempt to advance their membership. The practical implications of this theoretical contribution are discussed in section 6.3.

While the consumption of peripheral members was more closely aligned to the counterculture's anti-mass values than the consumption of non-members, the consumption of some mainstream brands was deemed to be acceptable as it demonstrated knowledge of the culture's history and in doing so, advanced their standing in the status hierarchy. This is a significant finding as it suggests that despite the anti-mass values of many countercultures, peripheral members will consume mainstream brands that demonstrate knowledge of the counterculture's history. Furthermore, the research found that of the mainstream brands that demonstrated knowledge of the counterculture's history, the consumption of those that were indexically authentic enhanced status more than those that displayed iconic

authenticity, as re-releases and the emergence of eBay had profaned the sacred through diminishing exclusivity. An understanding of how mainstream brands can be perceived as authentic and utilised to enhance one's status within counterculture's with anti-mass values is a significant theoretical contribution with practical implications that are discussed in section 6.3.

The findings of this study show that members of the Australian Hip Hop culture who failed to participate in one of the culture's four elements were considered fans and rarely moved beyond the second tier of the status hierarchy. Peripheral members who participated in one of the four elements produced artistic goods and consumption experiences that were evaluated on the basis of the skill and knowledge demonstrated, and extraordinary experience delivered. Proficiency in the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences enhanced one's standing in the subculture and was a requirement for soft-core membership. This requirement was partly due to the ease with which Hip Hop knowledge could now be obtained; a result of the proliferation of information available online which had decreased its currency as a marker of distinction. Furthermore, subcultural participants preferred to assess an individual's embodied subcultural capital through production rather than consumption, as the former was constructed as self-expressive art, which better fit the subculture's anti-mass values. However, due to the intermittent nature of production compared to the ever-present nature of consumption, the appraisal of status in this manner was not always possible. This study suggests that the Australian Hip Hop culture can be conceptualised as a subculture of production as much as a subculture of consumption. As such, as an analytic category, the theorisation of subcultures of consumption may have overemphasised the role of consumption and underestimated the role of

production in previous studies. As stated in section 6.5, it is recommended that future subcultural studies investigate the influence of both consumption and production by members on their standing in the status hierarchy.

The findings in this study enrich our knowledge of soft-core members and the manner in which they enact their identities. In particular, this study found that for soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture, the subculture becomes an inextricable component of self-definition. Furthermore, soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture were committed to the subcultural ideology and spent much of their time, effort and resources acquiring knowledge and skills, and developing social relationships. As such, unlike other members who partook in identity play, there was a strong congruence between the self-concept of soft-core members, and the product and brand images they consumed, in a variety of situations. This finding is in contrast to those reported in previous studies where self-concepts embedded in the collective and exemplary of the group were limited to hard-core members (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This is a significant finding as it better describes the characteristics of soft-core members, at least in the case of the Australian Hip Hop culture. As this research project was limited to a single case, future studies should investigate the characteristics of soft-core members in other consumption-oriented subcultures. If an individual's position in the subcultural status hierarchy is also found to be based on an individual's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, then it is likely that previous studies have incorrectly coded soft-core members as hard-core members as they have used commitment as a determinant of status. If future studies support the current findings then the description of a soft-core member should be reconceptualised in light of this theoretical contribution.

Furthermore, this study found that conformity to a homologous style was best exemplified in the consumption habits of the soft-core members. This is contrast to previous findings where a strong commitment to the subculture's consumption values was restricted to hard-core members (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture downplayed the importance of consuming the homologous style as it protected them against accusations of conformity, superficiality, and femininity; ill-respected traits within this countercultural male enclave. As an aversion to conformity and superficiality is common amongst countercultural participants (Willis 1978; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995b), it is likely that members of other countercultures would also downplay the importance of consuming a homologous style, despite their adherence to it, and its ability to advance their standing in the subcultural hierarchy. Future studies that do not incorporate observational techniques should take particular note, as soft-core members are unlikely to disclose, or will certainly de-emphasise, such behaviour. Along similar lines, it is likely that members of other male enclaves will also downplay the significance of their consumption habits for fear of emphasising feminine traits. As such, it is recommended that future studies triangulate their data with observational techniques to overcome these issues.

In addition, this study advances our understanding of soft-core members by being the first to identify the importance of avoiding certain products, brands and consumption styles in establishing and communicating an inherent subcultural self-concept. For soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture, consumption that is perceived to be an inauthentic expression of self-identity, and non-reflective of the cultural

values, is considered inappropriate and therefore is avoided. Hence, soft-core members avoid the consumption of mainstream brands that are in opposition to the subculture's anti-mass values, and black brands that are perceived to be an inauthentic expression of one's self and subcultural identity. Failure to follow these cultural norms results in sanction, and a loss of status within the subcultural hierarchy. As such, this study highlights the importance of both consumption and anti-consumption in communicating one's subcultural identity, and establishing an esteemed position in the status hierarchy. Hence, this study adds to the growing body of anti-consumption literature (e.g. Hogg, Banister, and Stephenson 2009; Lee, Fernandez, and Hyman 2009a; Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009b), and suggests that researchers and practitioners alike should consider the role of products, brands and styles in not only enhancing one's subcultural standing, but also diminishing it.

This study's findings support Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) assertion that soft-core members use consumption to express their subcultural affiliation. However, this study also revealed that many expressions of subcultural affiliation were only recognised by other individuals who had the embodied subcultural capital necessary to identify them. Such symbolic consumption within the Australian Hip Hop culture fostered encounters with unfamiliar members, provided members with the opportunity to further their subculture-specific social capital, and supported the glocal culture by providing members with a visual reminder of its existence and size. This finding suggests that soft-core members of other consumption-oriented subcultures may rely on symbols that those lacking in embodied subcultural capital will not discern to establish and nurture the existence of the subculture and enhance their status. Interestingly, in this particular study, many of the subcultural symbols capable of

doing so were born out of a utilitarian function. The practical implications of this finding are discussed in section 6.3.

In addition to expressing their subcultural affiliation, this study revealed that soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture also use consumption to represent their geographic locale, and their participation in a specific element of the subculture. Symbolic representations of their geographic locale were made to support the glocal culture, and emphasise the importance of place, and the tribal nature of Hip Hop. Expressions of their participation in an element of Hip Hop culture allowed soft-core members to better communicate their self-identities as they were constructed as DJs, MCs, breakdancers and graffiti writers, rather than generic Hip Hop members. This is an important insight as it reveals that self-identification within the Australian Hip Hop culture occurs at a more micro level for those who participate in the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences, and this identification has a significant influence on the consumption practices of soft-core members. Future studies should investigate whether soft-core members identify on a more micro level than peripheral members in other consumption-oriented subcultures. For example, it seems likely that peripheral members of the motor racing subculture would identify on a more macro level, than soft-core members who participate in say, rally car racing.

This study furthers our understanding of hard-core members of consumption-oriented subcultures in a number of ways. First, in contrast to soft-core members who understood Hip Hop in collective terms, illustrated in their shared values and homologous style, hard-core members understood Hip Hop in individualistic terms, such as being true to oneself, and doing what one wants regardless of the pressure of

others. As such, hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture did not feel the pressure to conform to the group's established cultural norms. Rather, their behaviour is constructed as a genuine representation of their self-identities and a true marker of authenticity. As a result, the consumption practices of hard-core members were particularly diverse as perceived truthful representations of self-identity ranged from those that closely paralleled the homologous style to those that were not at all symbolic of Hip Hop. Such diverse representations were possible as hard-core members had established an esteemed position in the subculture and as such, were free to abandon the use of symbolic cues. Hard-core members who abandoned the use of symbolic cues often did so to liberate themselves from cultural norms, and in this way felt that their behaviour was a better expression of the subculture's anti-conformist values. This study is the first to uncover the diverse consumption practices of hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. It also provides insight into the motivations behind such diverse consumption behaviour and how these hard-core members manage to avoid sanctions for failing to conform to subcultural norms. In doing so, this study advances our knowledge of consumption-oriented subcultures and suggests that hard-core members of other subcultures of consumption may not necessarily conform to the group's consumption norms. Hence, the findings suggest that diverse consumption practices amongst hard-core members would most likely be found in subcultures that value self-expression and anti-conformism, commonly held traits within countercultures (Willis 1978; Muggleton 2000).

Furthermore, the findings support earlier subcultural research studies where, as a result of their esteemed position, hard-core members were found to act as opinion leaders in the community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; Fox 1987;

Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Within the Australian Hip Hop culture the values, opinions and behaviour of hard-core members were particularly admired by soft-core members. Peripheral members who could identify the hard-core members also turned to them for guidance; however, their primary motivation for doing so was to advance their subcultural standing, rather than out of reverence. The consumption practices of hard-core members who continued to consume the homologous style were the most widely emulated, as they were the easiest to identify, and their consumption was perceived as an expression of the subculture's values. These individuals were aware of their ability to influence soft-core and peripheral members and felt it was their responsibility to ensure that their actions promoted the values of the subculture and provided soft-core and peripheral members with Hip Hop knowledge. In doing so, the consumption practices of these hard-core members reinforced the subcultural ideology, and provided soft-core and peripheral members with the embodied subcultural capital necessary to safeguard the subculture's future. This finding is in direct contrast to the actions of the hard-core bikers in Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study who were described as defenders of the faith as they failed to acknowledge soft-core and peripheral members. In contrast, the hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture who adopted the homologous style could be best described as missionaries who promoted the sacred lifestyle, and influenced what other members consumed and perceived as sacred. From a marketing practitioner's standpoint, the identification and utilisation of these hard-core members would be particularly advantageous for a brand attempting to make inroads within the Australian Hip Hop culture and is discussed further in section 6.3. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that hard-core members of other subcultures of consumption may act similarly and hence, as discussed in section 6.5, their actions deserve future

research, as they too could be undertaking a mentoring role that would be useful for marketing practitioners.

The findings of this study also contribute to our understanding of how subcultural styles evolve. Hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture who continued to consume the homologous style did so in a way that differentiated them, yet positioned them as a member of the collective. Examples of behaviour that positioned oneself as unique, but still conformed to the homologous style, include the consumption of extremely rare goods, goods that exhibited indexical authenticity and the creation or modification of one's own clothing. Soft-core and peripheral members frequently emulated these particular nuances in the consumption style, which rendered them less unique, and meant that hard-core members were required to make further alterations to maintain their individuality. As a result of this ongoing process of innovation and emulation, the homological style continually evolves, and, as discussed in section 6.3, provides marketing opportunities for brands looking to establish themselves within the Australian Hip Hop culture. On rare occasions, the consumption habits of hard-core members who abandoned the homological style were also emulated. If enough members adopted an obscure style and logical connections could be made, such consumption began to be interpreted as an expression of the subculture's values, and was adopted within the homologous style, despite this not being the original intention. It was on these occasions that more radical shifts in the homological style occurred. This study is the first to provide insight into the evolving nature of homological style within a subculture of consumption. As discussed in section 6.5, future studies should examine whether similar findings are found within different contexts.

This study also enriches our understanding of countercultural consumption. Generally, countercultures have been opposed to mass culture and as such have avoided the consumption of mainstream goods (e.g. Willis 1978; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995a). However, hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture did not avoid all things mainstream, despite their opposition to mass culture. Instead, they evaluated mainstream goods and consumed those that were awarded a positive appraisal and were deemed to be an authentic expression of self-identity. This finding is a significant contribution to the theorisation of countercultural consumption and implies that the influential hard-core members will endorse mainstream brands that receive a positive evaluation.

In contrast to previous conceptualisations of the hard-core member (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), the self-identities of hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture were found to be much more fluid and malleable than those of soft-core members. Free from the full-time commitment of obtaining embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, hard-core members were capable of enacting multiple roles without impacting on their position in the status hierarchy. In doing so, the consumption of hard-core members varied considerably as they tended to consume products that matched their situational self-concepts. In addition, consumption that was stereotypical of a new role was most frequently consumed when role familiarity was low. Hence, for hard-core members, the Australian Hip Hop culture was a sacred domain that they were free to experience at will, without impacting on their position in the hierarchy. The conceptualisation of a hard-core member whose position at the top of the hierarchy affords them the

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freedom to experiment with new roles is a significant contribution to our understanding of the hard-core member.

The findings presented in this study also enhance our understanding of the Australian Hip Hop culture, a rapidly growing consumption-oriented youth subculture. With the exception of an honours thesis (Masters 2002), the last in-depth investigation of the Australian Hip Hop culture was undertaken between August 1992 and October 1994 (Maxwell 2003). As such, a detailed examination of this rapidly growing youth subculture was long overdue. In addition, this study adds to the growing body of literature on Hip Hop outside of the USA (see for example the extraordinary range of studies presented in Mitchell's (2001) book 'Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop outside the USA'). The findings presented in this study support Masters' (2002) and Maxwell's (2003) findings that Hip Hop in Australia is a glocal subculture that has combined elements of US Hip Hop with the local culture. In addition, it supports a range of other studies that have examined the glocalisation of Hip Hop outside of the USA (Bennett 1999a; Condry 2001; Hesmondhalgh and Melville 2001; Morelli 2001; Pennay 2001; Swedenburg 2001; Wermuth 2001). The conceptualisation of Australian Hip Hop as a glocal subculture that is unique from the US version has several implications for marketers, as discussed in section 6.3. In addition, this study contributes to our understanding of Australian Hip Hop by finding it to be a countercultural male enclave where participants claim Hip Hop authenticity despite their ethnic backgrounds. While previous investigations have touched on these issues (Masters 2002; Maxwell 2003), this study is the first to specifically examine the countercultural and masculine nature of Australian Hip Hop. In addition, while Maxwell (2003) does provide an examination of how members of the Australian Hip

Hop culture manage to claim Hip Hop authenticity through performance (despite not being African American), this study is the first to emphasise the role of symbolic consumption in overcoming one's race and claiming Hip Hop authenticity. As such, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the nature of the Australian Hip Hop culture.

6.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have numerous practical implications. First, the current study illuminates our understanding of non-members who have an interest in a subculture of consumption. From a marketer's perspective such insights are extremely valuable, as this group has been found to make up the largest proportion of individuals interested in the subcultural activity (Fox 1987). The evidence suggests that interested non-members use the symbolism within consumption to gain access to the subcultural community. However, as interested non-members lack embodied subcultural capital, they tend to consume brands that are stereotypical of the subculture, as presented in the mainstream media. As such, marketers who desire to target this large consumer group would be well advised to promote their brands in mainstream media, using subcultural identities that are recognised by mass cultural participants, and to distribute their goods in mainstream stores. Using an example from the current study, the brand Ecko has been successfully positioned as a Hip Hop brand amongst interested non-members through the endorsement of commercial hip hop artists and its distribution in mainstream retail outlets. While the symbolism in such mainstream consumption positioned these non-members at the bottom of the status hierarchy, it did provide them with access to the community, and as such was heavily consumed. As interested non-members are motivated by an ideal social-self, being that of a

subcultural member, marketers must ensure that the symbolism within their brands allows these individuals to gain access to the group for their brands to succeed. As such, marketers must be aware of the subculture's consumption norms as brands that do not provide access will be avoided, as their consumption will result in sanction. In the current study, mainstream brands that were perceived as black and associated with the 'Homie' culture were avoided as their consumption resulted in sanction and failed to provide interested non-members with access to the community. A problem for marketers is that it is difficult to ensure that one's brand will not be perceived to violate such consumption norms. For example, while the marketers of Ecko can ensure that the symbolism within their Australian promotional material does not imply the brand is designed to represent the African American race, they cannot stop the consumption of the brand by African American Hip Hop celebrities, or members of the 'Homie' culture, who also give the brand meaning.

While this strategy of targeting interested non-members has its advantages, marketers should be aware of the following caveats. First, while interested non-members were found to be the largest group of subcultural enthusiasts, they were also the least committed to the subculture, and as such were the least likely to consume subcultural brands in a variety of situations and over an extended period of time. In the current study, after a relatively brief period, non-members either lost interest in the subculture and abandoned subcultural consumption for another passing fad, or they became heavily involved with the subculture and consumed brands that were imbued with subcultural capital and hence advanced their standing. As such, the individuals within this target market are relatively transient, and marketers would need to continually inform newcomers of their brand and its symbolism; a much more expensive process

than encouraging a stable group of existing consumers to re-buy. Second, while the strategy discussed in the previous paragraph would appeal to interested non-members, and they are an attractive market due to their size, this approach is unlikely to appeal to the peripheral and soft-core members who generally shun mainstream brands. Hence, masked branding (the process of deliberately hiding the brand's true origin to avoid stimulus generalisation) (Solomon 2007) would need to be employed for an organisation to have brands succeeding across all groups within the subcultural hierarchy. In doing so, it would be possible for a marketer who understands how subcultural status is awarded to take an active role in socialising interested non-members and satisfying their needs as they evolved up the status hierarchy.

The findings of this study also have implications for marketers who are targeting peripheral members of consumption-oriented subcultures. In the case of the Australian Hip Hop culture, peripheral members quickly distanced themselves from stereotypical consumption, as while it provided access to the community, it demonstrated a lack of embodied subcultural capital and positioned the consumer at the bottom of the status hierarchy. Hence, the findings of this study suggest that peripheral members consume subcultural brands to assert their membership and advance their status through a demonstration of subcultural capital. As such, marketers targeting peripheral members must imbue their brands with subcultural capital. While in no way a simple task, marketers can ascribe brands with subcultural capital through making associations with hard-core members, sponsoring subcultural events, advertising in niche media, distributing in subcultural-specialist stores, and demonstrating brand presence at seminal moments in the subculture's history. Within the glocalised and countercultural Australian Hip Hop community, brands that were most successful in

achieving this were most commonly owned and designed by hard-core members of the subculture, and distributed in Hip Hop stores that acted as local community centres. The consumption of these brands demonstrated knowledge of hard-core members and community centres, and expressed the anti-mass values of the counterculture. As a result, such consumption increased the peripheral members' standing in the subcultural hierarchy. This finding suggests that non-mainstream brands that are developed and championed by hard-core members of the subculture will appeal to peripheral members of consumption-oriented countercultures. As such, opportunities exist within consumption-oriented countercultures for hard-core members to establish brands that will be popular amongst peripheral members, as their involvement implies they will be laden with subcultural capital. Furthermore, marketers of subcultural-specialist stores should stock these non-mainstream brands and position their retail outlets as local community centres where subcultural participants can meet, linger and exchange information, if they are to imbue the store with subcultural capital, and hence appeal to peripheral members.

While peripheral members abandoned stereotypical consumption, the current study found that this did not extend to all mainstream brands associated with the subculture. Rather, peripheral members consumed certain makes and styles of mainstream brands that demonstrated an understanding of seminal people, places and events in the subculture's history as such consumption increased their standing in the subcultural hierarchy. Hence, opportunities do exist for the marketers of mainstream brands to appeal to peripheral members through reinforcing associations between certain makes of their brands and seminal people, places and events in the subculture's history. While this presents opportunities for brands with legitimate associations, it is not

advisable for brands to imply an association when this is not the case. Heineken, for example, aired an advertisement that implied their brand was associated with a seminal event in Hip Hop history, the invention of the DJ scratch, when no such association existed. In response, hard-core members of the culture expressed their outrage on website forums, calling for a consumption boycott (Arthur 2006a). In contrast, specific makes of mainstream brands that have a bona fide association with Hip Hop history, such as the Adidas Superstar which was immortalised in the Run DMC tribute 'My Adidas', have remained ever popular amongst peripheral members. However, the marketers of such mainstream brands would be well advised to limit the distribution of these specific makes as an abundance of re-releases and an extensive distribution strategy profanes the sacred through diminishing exclusivity. By maintaining exclusivity, marketers of mainstream brands can ensure the specific makes associated with the subculture are perpetually perceived as sacred and appealing to peripheral members as their rarity demonstrates unique knowledge of the subculture's history. In addition, as this study provides insight into how subcultural knowledge is gained, marketers of brands that have an association with the subculture's history can use these avenues to reinforce and promote this relationship. Specifically, niche media, seeding, and word of mouth strategies will reinforce and promote these relationships without diminishing the value of the subcultural knowledge through unduly enhancing the ease with which the knowledge can be obtained. A long-term strategy for mainstream brands that have yet to form an association with seminal people, places and events in the subculture's history is to sponsor pertinent subcultural events and endorse hard-core members who are likely to be perceived as seminal in the future. Within the Australian Hip Hop culture, DC, a mainstream brand with very few associations to Hip Hop history, has successfully

executed this strategy. DC currently endorses the most successful Australian Hip Hop group to date, the Hilltop Hoods, and collaborated with the group to release a signature line of DC shoes in 2008. This strategy has entrenched the DC brand into Australian Hip Hop folklore, associating the brand with seminal people and imbuing certain makes with subcultural capital, and, as such, is consumed by peripheral members, despite the brand's mainstream appeal.

Furthermore, this study found subcultural production was a necessary criterion for an individual to move beyond the second tier of the status hierarchy. The practical implication of this finding is that marketers can now more easily differentiate between peripheral and soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture. This knowledge is particularly advantageous as there are stark differences between the two groups and distinct marketing campaigns would need to be executed to successfully appeal to each target market. While these findings cannot be generalised beyond the scope of the case, it is likely that the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences is a requirement for soft-core membership in other subcultures that revolve around music and entertainment. As such, marketers should consider using the production criterion when differentiating between fans and members of music and entertainment focused subcultures.

The findings of this study provide guidance to marketers who are targeting soft-core members of consumption-oriented subcultures. In the case of the Australian Hip Hop culture, there was a strong congruence between the self-concept of soft-core members, and the product and brand images they consumed across a wide variety of situations. As Hip Hop was found to be an inextricable component of the soft-core member's

self-definition, their consumption frequently expressed their subcultural values and affiliation. Hence, marketers should tailor their brands and products in a manner that allows soft-core members to express their subcultural affiliation through consumption. In contrast, soft-core members avoided the consumption of products and brands that opposed the countercultural and masculine values of the subculture. Specifically, soft-core members tended to avoid brands that were perceived to be mainstream. Hence, it is recommended that a targeted strategy be used to appeal to soft-core members, such as advertising on the web forum www.ozhiphop.com, as a mainstream approach is likely to be met with resistance. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that while soft-core members conformed to the homologous style, members downplayed this adherence as it contradicted their countercultural values. Hence, it is recommended that market researchers triangulate their data with observational research to ensure a valid description of soft-core members' consumption habits ensues.

The findings of this study also showed that soft-core members expressed their identities through the consumption of products, brands and styles that represented their particular role within the Hip Hop culture. Specifically, as soft-core members constructed their identities as MCs, DJs, breakdancers and graffiti-writers, not as generic Hip Hop members, they frequently consumed products, brands and styles that were capable of communicating this construction to others. A practical recommendation for marketers is to specialise in targeting one of the four elements with a unique brand capable of communicating an individual's participation in, and identification with, that particular element. The use of Hip Hop iconography in design and promotion would be necessary to imbue these brands with symbolic meaning. As such, a thorough understanding of the symbolism within the Australian Hip Hop

culture is crucial for marketers seeking to implement a successful campaign. Furthermore, associations and endorsements from hard-core members respected for their DJing, MCing, breakdancing or graffiti-writing skills would be critical in establishing the brand's authenticity and legitimacy as a marker of subcultural capital.

In addition, this study found that soft-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture frequently consumed Hip Hop brands that represented their nationality and/or specific geographic locale. Soft-core members felt that such consumption choices expressed their self-identities and supported the glocal culture better than the consumption of US Hip Hop brands. This finding has serious implications for marketers of US Hip Hop brands, and suggests that they will rarely be consumed by soft-core members unless they are capable of communicating an Australian Hip Hop identity, or are seen to be supporting the glocalised culture. While this is a difficult task, marketers of US Hip Hop brands can achieve this through collaborating with local graffiti artists, endorsing local hard-core members, sponsoring local Hip Hop events, and distributing their products in retail outlets that act as local community centres. While this finding presents problems that must be overcome for the marketers of US Hip Hop brands, it fosters a fertile environment for local Hip Hop brands, and provides opportunities for new brands, particularly those established by esteemed subcultural members. Given the competitive and glocal nature of the Australian Hip Hop culture, soft-core members are likely to consume brands capable of demonstrating subcultural capital and representing their geographic locale. As such, new and local Hip Hop brands would be well advised to promote their local origins and connections to seminal people, places and events in the subculture's history. Take for example the Australian Hip Hop brand Burn. The brand name itself is a word play derived from the second

syllable of the city Melbourne when spoken with an Australian accent. However, for soft-core members the brand represents Melbourne Hip Hop generally, and more specifically, a Melbourne crew of hard-core graffiti writers. Hence, for the soft-core member, consumption of the Burn brand not only demonstrates embodied subcultural capital, but also represents their affiliation with Melbourne Hip Hop. However, it should be noted that for soft-core members a part of the appeal of the Burn brand is that its symbolism is not widely understood beyond the circle of subcultural membership. As such exclusivity increases the esteem of those 'in the know' and assists individuals in correctly identifying other members, the marketer must carefully manage the process of increasing the sales volume to levels that will ensure the brand's long-term viability without diminishing the appeal of the brand amongst soft-core members.

The findings of this study suggest that hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture are unlikely to be a profitable market due to their limited numbers, and their lack of reliance on symbolic consumption due to their abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. Nevertheless, hard-core members were found to play an influential role in the diffusion of subcultural style, acting as opinion leaders capable of imbuing Hip Hop brands with credibility and mystique. Specifically, soft-core members frequently emulated hard core members' consumption behaviour as a demonstration of subcultural capital. Furthermore, peripheral members who were capable of identifying the hard-core members also turned to them for consumption guidance. Hence, as previously stated, marketers who are targeting soft-core and peripheral members should engage hard-core members to endorse their brands. Specifically, hard-core members who continue to consume the

homologous style should be targeted. Not only are these hard-core members the most widely emulated, they are also aware of their ability to influence the soft-core and peripheral members, and actively promote the Hip Hop culture and its ideology through their consumption habits. Hence, if a brand is closely aligned with the values of the subculture, then these hard-core members will play an active and influential role in disseminating it. Furthermore, while these hard-core members generally regarded mainstream brands as feminine and conformist, a highly nuanced approach to critically appraising mainstream goods was adopted rather than a blanket approach. As such, these hard-core members will consume and endorse mainstream brands if they are appraised positively and are deemed to be an authentic expression of self-identity.

Before marketing practitioners can engage hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture to endorse their brands, they must first be identified. The findings of this study provide invaluable knowledge to marketers to assist them in successfully completing this task. Specifically, marketing practitioners would be well advised to examine an individual's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital when attempting to identify their position within the subcultural status hierarchy. An appraisal of an individual's membership status on these traits would be more accurate than an assessment based on one's commitment to the subculture as the findings suggest such a criterion would be more likely to identify soft-core members. While the findings of this study cannot be generalised beyond the scope of the case, if future research studies suggest the findings are generalisable, then marketing practitioners targeting other consumption-oriented subcultures should also examine an individual's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital when

attempting to identify their position within the subcultural status hierarchy. While the findings of this study suggest that embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital should be used to identify hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture, further data would be necessary to distinguish between those hard-core members who continue to consume the homologous style and those who abandoned the homological style. This data could be collected in a number of ways; however the use of observational methods seems particularly appropriate.

Once marketing practitioners have identified hard-core members who consume the homologous style, they must be persuaded to endorse the brand. This can happen organically and at very little cost to the organisation if the values of the brand are closely aligned to the subcultural values, the product receives a positive appraisal from the hard-core member, and consumption is deemed to be an authentic expression of the hard-core member's self-identity. Furthermore, while hard-core members who consumed the homologous style did so to promote the subculture and express their membership, they were also found to consume in a manner that demonstrated a within-group distinction and communicated a unique identity. As such, new lines of Hip Hop brands should be initially targeted directly at these hard-core members. Providing they satisfy the aforementioned criteria, new lines of Hip Hop brands will have great appeal to hard-core members who consume the homologous style as they provide a means for consumption that is simultaneously expressive of the subculture, yet distinguishes them as unique. As soft-core and peripheral members frequently emulate the nuances in the consumption style that differentiates hard-core members, the targeting of new lines to this group will aid the diffusion of the brand. As consumption by soft-core and peripheral members renders these lines less unique,

they will eventually be abandoned by hard-core members in favour of a more distinctive alternative. Hence, marketing practitioners must continually release new lines to ensure the popularity of their brand within this consumption system of ongoing innovation and emulation. Marketers of new brands looking to enter the subcultural realm can also take advantage of this consumption system by targeting hard-core members who consume the homologous style. However, as new brands are unlikely to have established an identity that is clearly expressive of the subcultural values, further incentives may be necessary to encourage hard-core members to initially consume these products. Within the Australian Hip Hop culture, the provision of these brands to hard-core members for free would be a sufficient incentive to encourage all but the most highly influential members to act as endorsers, providing the values of the brand weren't perceived to be in opposition to the subcultural values. This practice and the provision of financial incentives to the most influential of hard-core members is a recommended strategy for not only new brands, but also for established Hip Hop brands that must defend their position against the aggressive tactics of competitors in the market.

6.4   Limitations

As with any research project, this study has a number of limitations. First, a major limitation of all ethnographic studies is that generalisation cannot be made beyond the context of the case. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be generalised beyond the Australian Hip Hop culture. Although the Australian Hip Hop culture may be considered both niche and exotic, subcultures of consumption are ubiquitous in contemporary culture, and it is probable that the theoretical contributions and practical implications presented within this study may enhance our understanding of, and

practical decision making within, other consumption-oriented subcultures. As such, future studies should investigate the nature of the status hierarchy and the role of symbolic consumption in other subcultures of consumption to enhance the transferability of the findings. Specific suggestions for future studies are presented in section 6.5.

Furthermore, the nature of ethnographic research meant that the findings of this study relied heavily upon a small and opportunistic sample of Australian Hip Hop members. While the netnography investigated Hip Hop members located throughout Australia, and interstate research trips were also undertaken to enhance the credibility of the findings, the vast majority of observational research and in-depth interviews were held in Adelaide with a limited number of Hip Hop enthusiasts who were primarily white and of middle-class backgrounds. As such, while the findings presented in this study are possibly representative of the entire Australian Hip Hop culture, different interpretations may have been made if the researcher had conducted the majority of observational research and in-depth interviews in a different site, for example amongst the Hip Hop enthusiasts in the ethnically diverse and working-class suburbs of western Sydney. However, as the observational data and in-depth interviews were triangulated with the netnographic research and data collected on interstate trips, the credibility of the findings is strengthened.

A further limitation of this study is that those subcultural participants who were aware of the researcher's presence may have presented an ideal rather than an actual self. Furthermore, analysis of the field notes revealed that interview subjects and key informants desired to present the Australian Hip Hop culture in a very positive light.

Specifically, they were concerned that the research may focus on the negative and stereotypical characteristics of the subculture as was common in journalistic interpretations that appeared in the mainstream media. However, as the researcher became aware of this tendency early in the piece, in part due to the reflexive research approach, later analysis took this insight into consideration. Furthermore, as the researcher undertook a prolonged ethnographic investigation, it was virtually impossible for subcultural participants to promote an idealised subculture and self-identity throughout all interactions. Finally, triangulation of data recorded from participants who were aware of my researcher status against the other observational and netnographic data negated the impact.

While there were many advantages of observing the data as an insider rather than someone external to it, there are a number of limitations because of this. Specifically, as the researcher was a part of the data set, the data collected were undoubtedly influenced by the researcher's personality and background. In particular, the researcher's ethnicity and nationality (being white and Australian), liberal values, and upper-middle class background, influenced whom he associated with, how interactions unfolded and his interpretation of the events. While the reflexive approach adopted identified how data were affected by the researcher's presence, it is unlikely that identical findings would be produced if an alternative researcher replicated the study. Specifically, the personality and background of the alternative researcher would influence both the data uncovered and the interpretations made. As such, despite the extensive description of the methods used, a replication of this study would be unlikely to yield absolutely identical findings. Furthermore, as settings and people change, subcultures evolve over time. Hence, the interactions that occurred

during this ethnographic period will never occur in the precisely the same way again, and, as such, a limitation of this study is that it is impossible to fully guarantee the dependability of the findings through replication.

An additional limitation associated with observing data as an insider rather than someone external to it is the risk of 'going native'. While researcher introspection was conducted to avoid this, the researcher found that it was necessary to remove himself from the field completely before the analysis was finalised. The researcher's major concern with the analysis prior to his final removal from the field was an over-identification with the subculture, and, specifically, the reporting of the subcultural characteristics in an overly positive light. As previously stated, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture wanted to dispel the stereotypes presented in the Australian Hip Hop culture. As the researcher had obtained full membership status in the final years of the ethnography, researcher introspection revealed that the analysis was also presented in an overly positive light. Through consulting with other academics, and by removing himself completely during the final stages of analysis (and, for the record, beyond), the researcher was able to provide a more balanced description of the subcultural characteristics.

An advantage of ethnographic research is that the researcher gets to see the world as the subcultural participants see it. However, it must be acknowledged that the interpretation of Australian Hip Hop's cultural values lies inherently within the individual. That is, while individuals may be members of the same culture, slight differences in perceptions of cultural values will exist, as no universal doctrine is explicitly stated. As such, a limitation of this study lies in the researcher's

interpretation of Australian Hip Hop's cultural values. While the values observed by the researcher and experienced throughout the research are broadly consistent with previous studies of Hip Hop culture (Rose 1994), and more specifically Hip Hop culture in Australia (Maxwell 2003), it is unlikely that they will be entirely consistent with the interpretations of every member of the culture. As a way of ensuring the credibility of the data, a member check with the key informant Nixon was conducted. The outcome of this process revealed that Nixon's perception of the phenomenon under investigation was, in most cases, extremely consistent with the researcher's. As previously noted, the one significant exception was the researcher's interpretation of the Australian Hip Hop culture as male enclave where women were excluded. Nevertheless, the researcher persisted with the original interpretation as analysis of the discrepancy determined, and was openly acknowledged by Nixon, that his perception of the subculture was somewhat idealistic. Specifically, Nixon acknowledged that there was an absence of women with the subculture, and felt that if this was a result of preclusion, then it was a weakness of the subculture that contradicted its egalitarian values. He also noted that he wanted more women to be involved and hoped other members did also, but was aware that this may have been influenced by his idealism and desire to present the subculture in a positive light. As such, while this discrepancy is acknowledged as a limitation, the researcher is confident that his interpretation is a true reflection of the phenomenon.

The researcher's reliance on Nixon as a key informant and sole member checker presents an additional limitation of this study. Specifically, it is possible that Nixon's central role in the thesis led the researcher to agree with his interpretation that subcultural status is determined by an individual's Hip Hop skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, it is likely that the researcher would have been receptive to such an interpretation as his formal education and academic career have developed a mindset which values the pursuit of knowledge and perceives it to be a fair marker of distinction. Nevertheless, triangulation of data from various sources and reflexive analysis ensured that the findings were a true representation of the phenomenon.

A further limitation of the current study lies in the coding and analysis of the informants as either an interested non-member, a peripheral member, a soft-core member or a hard-core member. Such a categorisation was necessary to effectively analyse the data and determine the nature of status and role of symbolic consumption within the Australian Hip Hop culture. However, the reliance on a single researcher's interpretation of one's position in the hierarchy is a limitation of the study. Furthermore, as the research was conducted over a four-year period, the positions each individual held in the status hierarchy evolved over time as they advanced their Hip Hop knowledge and skills, and developed relationships with other Hip Hop members. As such, it was necessary for the researcher to assign different codes to the informants depending on when the data were collected. As contact with some of the informants was extremely intermittent, the coding of their current position in the status hierarchy often relied upon limited data. While this process mirrors the subcultural participants' actual assessments of another's position in the hierarchy, a more objective measure of one's standing at a specific point in time would be useful for researchers, and is a proposal for future studies discussed in section 6.5.

Another limitation of this study was a consequence of the nature of questioning within the semi-structured in-depth interviews. Specifically, members of the Australian Hip

Hop culture were asked a question that provided the researcher with a narrative of their 'Hip Hop life history'. Whilst the answers to this question provided the richest and most detailed narratives, the data obtained were analysed with some caution. As informants recalled consumption experiences from years in the past, it is more than likely their recollections of consumption motivations and symbolism were somewhat clouded. Furthermore, it was felt that many of the informants over-simplified their subcultural evolution, over-emphasising interesting episodes and artefacts, while deemphasising others, particularly when they reflected negatively on the informant. Hence, alternative sources of data were used to triangulate the emerging themes and overcome this limitation in the data collection.

An additional limitation of this study was a consequence of the laddering technique that was utilised during the semi-structured in-depth interviews, and to a lesser extent, throughout some of the informal conversations. At times throughout the data collection, the process of continually asking 'why is that important to you' was found to frustrate the informant and damaged rapport. In these cases, the laddering technique was abandoned until the harmonious relationship had been re-established. In other cases, it was sensed that because of their strong desire to help, informants provided an answer when probed via laddering, even though they weren't confident of their response. While this limitation may have resulted in the collection of some invalid data, and may explain some of the 'negative' cases existent in the interview transcripts, triangulation with other data sources provides assurance that the findings presented in this thesis are credible.

The limitations of the netnographic research should also be acknowledged. Specifically, it is possible that the virtual interactions that took place on the web forum www.ozhiphop.com did not reflect the real world interactions of the subcultural members. For example, the analysis revealed the bravado of interested non-members was much stronger in the virtual world than at actual events, as sanctions could only be limited to written insults. Furthermore, as alternative monikers were utilised online, it was difficult for the researcher to recognise and contrast a member's online and offline contributions. Nevertheless, while these limitations exist, the netnographic data was triangulated and supported by the ethnographic research.

6.5   Future Directions

While the findings presented in this study have made a number of theoretical and practical contributions, our understanding of the nature of symbolic consumption within consumption-oriented subcultures is still incomplete. As such, more research should be conducted to further illuminate this field. The current study identified embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital as determinants of status within the Australian Hip Hop culture. In addition, individuals' use of symbolic consumption as they evolved from an interested non-member, through to a hard-core member of the Australian Hip Hop culture was revealed. However, as an ethnographic method was utilised, these findings cannot be generalised beyond the context of the case. Therefore, future studies should examine status conferral and symbolic consumption within other consumption-oriented subcultures. If similar findings are revealed, the transferability of the theoretical contribution will be enhanced. To increase the ease with which comparisons can be made, the initial research studies should also adopt a similar ethnographic methodology. While replication of the

ethnographic methodology will provide the rich, descriptive detail necessary to illuminate status conferral and symbolic consumption within an alternate subculture of consumption, it has a number of limitations. Specifically, as small and opportunistic samples are often relied upon, it is possible that the findings uncovered will lack internal validity. As such, a future avenue for research is to quantitatively determine an individual's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, and to correlate this with their position in the status hierarchy. As quantitative studies can more efficiently gain empirical evidence from a sizable proportion of the case population, supporting results would reassure the researcher of the internal validity of existing interpretive findings. However, it must be acknowledged that a quantitative approach also has its limitations. For instance, as one's position in the status hierarchy is based on an individual's subjective assessment of one's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, an objective measure would not acknowledge the differences in perception between the assessments of different individuals. Nevertheless, an objective measure of one's position in the subcultural hierarchy has a number of practical benefits for researchers and practitioners alike, and is hence, an extremely worthwhile research pursuit.

As previously stated, future studies should examine the nature of status conferral and symbolic consumption within other consumption-oriented subcultures to enhance the transferability of the findings. It is suggested that the initial cases investigated should be similar in nature to the Australian Hip Hop culture; specifically non-brand focused countercultural male enclaves. This would allow for an easier comparison between the research findings, and enhance the probability of supporting results. If the findings are replicated, then more diverse subcultural settings should be investigated to determine

how broadly the contributions should be extended. While the current case investigated a neo-tribal subculture of consumption that had both a virtual and real-world existence, future studies could also investigate the nature of status conferral in subcultures that are based entirely online.

In addition to furthering our understanding of status and symbolism within a subculture of consumption, the findings of the current study also touched on a number of topics that warrant future research. First, the role of anti-consumption in communicating an inherently subcultural self-concept and demonstrating one's position in the status hierarchy deserves further investigation, and would contribute greatly to this developing research area (e.g. Hogg et al. 2009; Lee et al. 2009a; Lee et al. 2009b). Second, further investigation into the sacred lifestyles and consumption patterns of subcultural members would enhance our knowledge of this under-researched area, and potentially uncover insights for marketers looking to develop iconic brands. Third, while authenticity and consumption has been previously investigated in a number of marketplace cultures (e.g. Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh et al. 2006), our understanding of its role in a world where even the most exclusive products, knowledge and consumption experiences are becoming increasingly accessible via the internet is limited. Fourth, as this study is the first to identify the determinants behind the evolving nature of homological style within a subculture of consumption, future studies should examine the determinants of homological style more explicitly and examine whether similar findings exist within different contexts. Finally, the results of this study suggest that proficiency in the production of artistic goods and consumption experiences not only enhances one's standing in the Australian Hip Hop culture, but is also a requirement for soft-core

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membership. As such, it is recommended that future subcultural studies further investigate the nature of consumer production within consumption-oriented subcultures and how such production influences an individual's self-identity and their position in the status hierarchy.

This chapter began by acknowledging the theoretical contributions this study has made to the academic literature. The practical implications were then discussed. The limitations of this study were highlighted, and directions for future research were proposed. The thesis now concludes by highlighting the significance of the research project.

6.6   Conclusion

This research project has examined the consumption practices of a subculture of consumption, and in doing so has made a number of significant contributions to the academic literature. Specifically, the findings have uncovered the structure of the Australian Hip Hop culture, a subculture firmly rooted in the consumption and production of products and services. This thesis proposes a more fluid, contested and negotiated framework for assessing the structure of consumption-oriented subcultures. As such, this study contributes to the body of knowledge that examines structure within marketplace cultures (e.g. Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and provides a valuable insight to marketing researchers and practitioners.

Furthermore, the findings have uncovered the determinants of status conferral within the Australian Hip Hop culture. These determinants, being an individual's embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, contrast with the more

commonplace assertion that subcultural status is determined by an individual's level of subcultural commitment (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). As such, in regards to status conferral, the findings challenge the orthodoxy and advance the work of Thornton (1995a) and Kates (2002). The identification of the determinants of status conferral has a number of implications for marketing professionals. The implications have been outlined along with directions for future research to further advance the body of knowledge.

In addition, this study advances our understanding of the evolving nature of symbolic consumption within a consumption-oriented subculture. Specifically, the findings enhance our understanding of the relationship between an individual's self-concept and the symbolism within their consumption. In doing so, this study contributes to the body of knowledge that examines the expression of countercultural values (e.g. Willis 1978; Hebdige 1979; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), authenticity (e.g. Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh, Peters, and Shelton 2006), and masculinity (e.g. Holt and Thompson 2004; Sherry et al. 2001), in addition to one's consumption of the sacred (e.g. Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989), as individuals develop their consumer identity projects.

Finally, this study advances our understanding of the Australian Hip Hop culture, a rapidly growing consumption-oriented youth subculture. The Australian Hip Hop culture was found to be a glocalised, countercultural male enclave where members had to overcome their race to claim authenticity. As such, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge examining Hip Hop in Australia (e.g. Maxwell 2003), and outside of the USA (Mitchell 2001).

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Status within a Consumption-Oriented Counterculture: An Ethnographic

Investigation of the Australian Hip Hop Culture

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APPENDIX B – ADVANCES IN CONSUMER RESEARCH ARTICLE (2008)

Chalmers, T.D. and Arthur, D. (2008) Hard-core members' of consumption-oriented subcultures enactment of identity: the sacred consumption of two subcultures.
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APPENDIX C – QUALITATIVE MARKET RESEARCH ARTICLE (2006)

Date: Friday 23rd August 2002

Description of Event: Culture of Kings II Album Launch - All Ages Show

Location: The Tivoli, 265 Pirie Street

I met up with Nixon, Mulray, Sam, Dave and a few of their mates at the Crown and Anchor before the show. There was a feeling of excitement amongst the group as they had all heard the album and were very impressed. One of the pre-show conversations revolved around MC Layla who was one of only two women to appear on the album's 42 tracks. Her delivery is very forceful, her lyrics are angry and the beats are very hard. To quote Dave "She has bigger balls than you do".

When we arrived at the Tivoli, there was a line up of close to 500 people. This was because they had only just started letting people in, but it was amazing to see that many Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts all in the same place. From all accounts this was the largest Australian Hip Hop show Adelaide had ever seen. It had been sold out for quite some time.

As we waited for the people to filter into the venue, a number of individuals in the line started to break into a cypher (taking turns to freestyle rap over a beat created by a beatboxer). Everyone was really enjoying themselves listening to the makeshift lyrics and humourous punch lines. They were really creating their own entertainment. Much of the conversation revolved around how many people were there. There was also a feeling of pride amongst the crowd. A feeling that "We built this!"

Once inside the Tivoli it was immediately apparent who the event sponsors were. There were banners for the following brands, stores and magazines situated around the stage: Materialism (www.materialism.com.au), Ecko (www.ecko.com), Clinic 116 (Hip Hop record store) and Onion Club Culture magazine (www.onion.com.au).

During the night a stranger pointed at me to get my attention. I immediately noticed that we were wearing identical Ecko hoodies and this is why he got my attention. I went over and had a chat to him. His name was Adam, and he was a 16-year-old breakdancer. He asked me where I got the hoodie and so I told him Street Core Clothing. He nodded and told me he used to work there. I asked him what Hip Hop meant to him and he immediately responded with 'It's not about making out you're black, it's about building our own culture.' I was a little surprised that he used the word culture here without any prompting from me. I figured he was highly involved in the area as he knew all about the musicians, and is a member of 'a crew'. I told him about my project and he seemed very interested to cooperate. His number is 0415XXXXXX.

The rest of the show was a lot of fun. Nixon kept me informed about who each of the performers were and which ones, in his opinion, were the best. I took a number of photos of the performers so I can analyse what they were wearing. The show finished relatively early, as it was an all-ages gig.

APPENDIX E – PROFILE OF INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

As discussed in section 3.12, the researcher assured the informants that their responses would be treated confidentially and reporting would mark them unidentifiable. As such, to protect the privacy of informants, all subjects have been given a pseudonym. While it was common for Australian Hip Hop members to already have a pseudonym (one that they used as a stage name, or to protect them from the law), new names were given on all but one occasion as for many members these pseudonyms could be easily traced back to their original identity. The one pseudonym that was not altered was that of my key informant, who insisted that he be known by his stage name throughout the report.

Nixon:

Nixon was the researcher's key informant. He was 21 years old, unemployed and living with his upper-middle class parents when the ethnographic research began. At the time, Nixon's lack of employment and living situation was a lifestyle choice made so he could devote more time to his subcultural passion. Throughout the four-year ethnography Nixon worked in a number of part-time jobs, before eventually turning to full-time employment and moving into a share house. While the amount of time he devoted to the subculture waned, his love and enthusiasm for Hip Hop never decreased. Throughout the ethnographic period Nixon performed as a solo DJ at numerous Hip Hop events, eventually supporting a number of high-profile acts, and as the DJ for various hip hop crews, either live or in the studio. During this period Nixon's subcultural skills, knowledge, social network, and status advanced considerably. The researcher formally interviewed Nixon on two occasions, however

informal conversations were held on numerous occasions and were documented in the field notes. Nixon's central role in the ethnographic data should be acknowledged, as it was through this association that the researcher either directly or indirectly gained access to many other subcultural members.

Ali-One:

Ali-One was one of only two females interviewed for this study of the predominantly male Australian Hip Hop culture. Ali-One participated in the Australian Hip Hop culture as an MC, and was introduced to the researcher through Nixon who occasionally performed as a DJ in her hip hop crew. Ali-One was 28 at the time of interview and was one of four informants who identified with an Australian national identity, and a non-white ethnicity: in her case Papuan.

Alpha:

At the time of interview Alpha was 25 years old and a highly esteemed MC, particularly for his ability to freestyle and battle, but also for his recorded music. In addition, Alpha was an avid record collector and a funk DJ. Alpha was never shy to speak his mind and this, in addition to his love and enthusiasm for the culture, was evident in the interview transcript and ethnographic data.

Barber:

Barber was a 17-year-old aspiring DJ at the time of interview. I met Barber at the local Hip Hop store that was co-owned by Step. This store was a place where Barber had taken DJ lessons and liked to hang out. My interactions with Barber were limited to a single interview.

Dannon:

While Dannon rapped in a band, he wasn't considered, nor did he consider himself, a member of the Australian Hip Hop culture. MCing for Dannon was a fun pastime and a musical outlet for expression. His lack of subcultural knowledge was evident throughout the interview transcript and ethnographic data.

Elk:

Elk was the editor and founder of an Australian Hip Hop magazine, and the host of a Hip Hop radio show in Sydney. Elk also works in the marketing industry and his insights into the consumer aspects and commercialisation of Australian Hip Hop were invaluable. Elk was one of four informants who resided in Sydney.

Flame:

Flame was a Sydney DJ, graffiti artist, regular contributor to an Australian Hip Hop magazine, and the founder of one of the world's first, though now defunct, Hip Hop magazines. An important figure in Sydney Hip Hop, Flame was also a central character in Ian Maxwell's (2003) thesis on the Australian Hip Hop culture.

Hyena:

At the time of interview Hyena was a 17-year-old aspiring MC and was completing his last year of high school. As such, Hyena was able to provide insight into the perception of Australian participation in Hip Hop within a high school environment. I met Hyena at the Australian Hip Hop store that is co-owned by Step where he was socialising with friends.

J-Know:

J-Know was 27 years old at time of interview and could be best described as an Australian Hip Hop fan. While Hip Hop's cultural values appealed to J-Know, he never participated in any of the subculture's four elements during the ethnographic period.

Jay-C:

Jay-C was a nationally recognised, and to a lesser extent internationally recognised, graffiti artist. As a 30 year-old he was considered a respected elder and community leader, promoting the subculture's positive sides and using graffiti to give kids from disadvantaged backgrounds an outlet for expression and something to believe in.

John:

John was 19 years old at the time of interview and performed as an MC in a group with Keaton. While he participated as an MC, John didn't identify with Hip Hop culture, and wasn't perceived as a member. The interview revealed that he lacked subcultural knowledge, and perceived himself to be a musician rather than a subcultural enthusiast.

Keaton:

Keaton was 18 years old at the time of interview and was an MC in a group with John. The researcher came to know Keaton and John through Nixon as he acted as the DJ in their crew for a short period. At the time of interview he considered himself more of a musician than a Hip Hop member (primarily due Hip Hop's negative connotations),

however as the ethnography progressed, he gained more subcultural capital and Hip Hop became a central component of his self-identity.

Lab:

Lab was one of Adelaide's most well respected graffiti artists and was also the designer and owner of one of the most well recognised Adelaide Hip Hop labels. He was also the co-owner of a store that sells Hip Hop fashion, paint, books and magazines, and acted as a meeting place for graffiti artists. Lab's fashion was clearly influenced by the punk culture.

Leo:

At the time of interview Leo was a respected MC and the owner and designer of a Melbourne Hip Hop brand. He was one of two informants who resided in Melbourne, and he identified as a non-white Australian of Pacific Island decent. An abundance of subcultural knowledge was demonstrated during the interview, which was the researcher's one and only encounter with the subject.

M-One:

The researcher met M-One at a Hip Hop conference in Sydney. One of only two females interviewed in the predominantly male Australian Hip Hop culture, M-One was 29 at the time of interview and the host of a Hip Hop show on community radio. It was this association that provided the researcher with the opportunity to co-host a Hip Hop radio show.

Matrix:

Matrix was 19 at the time of interview and was an aspiring MC and producer in a Hip Hop crew with Ali-One. The shortest of the interviews by a long margin (11 minutes), Matrix found it difficult to elaborate his thoughts.

Monte:

At the time of interview, Monte was 25 years old and the owner and editor of an Australian Hip Hop magazine. As a practitioner of Hip Hop he was a breakdancer, and had dabbled in graffiti, but as he grew older he had began to concentrate on diffusing the culture via his magazine. Monte was the other one of two informants who resided in Melbourne.

Mr Z:

Mr Z was a non-white Zimbabwean Australian who was 21 at the time of interview. He was an MC in a hip hop crew with Ali-One and Matrix, but also collaborates with other MCs. Originally from the Northern Territory he was able to provide a number of insights into his interpretation of why Hip Hop appeals to Aboriginal youth.

Mulray:

At the time of interview Mulray was a 24 year-old MC, graffiti artist, and promoter of a weekly Hip Hop night in the Adelaide CBD. I met Mulray through my key informant Nixon and he became a key source of ethnographic data, allowing me to observe him partake in graffiti, and hang out with his Hip Hop friends. During the ethnographic period Mulray became more heavily involved in the fashion industry, founding a Hip Hop label and opening a fashion store.

Nate:

Similar to Dannon, Nate acted as an MC for a band, but he wasn't considered, nor did he consider himself, a member of the Australian Hip Hop culture. His lack of subcultural knowledge was evident throughout the interview transcript and ethnographic data.

OB MC:

A respected stalwart in the Australian Hip Hop scene, OB MC identified as a Greek Australian, and was one of the first rappers to have a hip hop track broadcast nationally. He was 32 years old at the time of interview, and was also the founder of an Australian Hip Hop web forum.

Roo:

Roo was a graffiti artist that the researcher became acquainted to through Mulray. He was 25 years old at the time of interview and was half Papuan. However, he did not identify very strongly with his Papuan ethnicity, and noted that he identified more with Hip Hop than Papuan culture.

Rocky:

At the time of interview, Rocky was a 21-year-old breakdancer and a member of a prominent Adelaide breakdancing crew. The researcher was introduced to Rocky via Step who ran a local Hip Hop store that provided learning clinics for people interested in learning one of the culture's four elements. Rocky was one of the breakdancing instructors.

S-One:

A practitioner of a number of varieties of visual arts, S-One was also a well-respected graffiti artist. In addition, he was the designer and co-owner of a Hip Hop label with Valour. At the time of interview S-One was 26 years old.

Step:

At the time of interview Step was a part owner of Hip Hop store and clinic in Adelaide, a solo DJ, and a DJ for a hip hop/funk fusion band. Step was passionate about Hip Hop and skateboarding from a young age and had left school early to pursue a career doing what he loves. As his store acted as a local community centre, Step played an instrumental role in introducing the researcher to a number of the interview subjects, and kept the researcher informed of upcoming Hip Hop shows.

Toad:

At the time of interview Toad produced hip hop beats and played the keyboard for a band that made hip hop music. At the time of interview he demonstrated little subcultural knowledge and did not consider himself to be a member of the Australian Hip Hop culture. However, during the ethnographic period the field notes revealed that Toad increased his subcultural knowledge and began to identify more with a Hip Hop identity.

Anguish:

Anguish was 26 at the time of interview and was an MC in one of Australia's most well respected and commercially successful Hip Hop groups. As a number of the

group's songs make reference to brands (for example Adidas and Chivas Regal), this interview provided interesting insight into the motivations behind symbolic consumption when producing artistic goods and consumption experiences.

Toto:

Toto was a popular club DJ in Sydney who the researcher was introduced to by Flame. In addition to the interview, the researcher attended one of his club shows to collect ethnographic data.

Tommy G:

Tommy G was a 20-year-old aspiring MC at the time of interview. I met Tommy G at a student radio information night. With the exception of the researcher he was the only other attendee who was interested in hosting a Hip Hop radio show. Apart from the interview the researcher's interactions with Tommy G were limited.

Valour:

Valour was the co-owner and designer of an Australian Hip Hop brand with S-One. He was 25 years old at the time of interview and was a well-respected graffiti artist in Adelaide and, to a lesser extent, throughout the world.

Appendix F – Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Guide

Ok, so I guess you're wondering what this is all about. Well, as a part of my university studies I'm conducting a research project on Hip Hop style and marketing. One of the ways I'm researching this topic is by conducting a series of interviews with people like you. These interviews are nothing to be concerned about, just an informal conversation between the two of us. I'm really interested in hearing about your experiences and opinions. There are no rules, and no right or wrong answers, so don't feel pressured to say something.

I would like to record our conversation if that is all right with you? This recording will be for my use only. It will allow me to concentrate on what you are saying instead of focusing on writing notes. However, I want to assure you that everything you say will be treated confidentially, and you will not be referred to by your real name in the final report. *Begin recording.*

First, could I ask how old you are? (Excellent, now…)

Tell me about your evolution through Hip Hop culture, from your first contact with it, to where you are now – with particular reference to the products and brands you've been consuming throughout, why you've been consuming them, and what they represent? *Common probes:*

- When was this? Ok, and what products and brands were you consuming at this point in time?

- How old were you then? Ok, and what products and brands were you consuming?

- Why were you into that brand?

- Is this person important to you? Why?

- What brands are you wearing at the moment?

- What do they represent?

I would like to know why you became interested in Hip Hop. What were your motivations? *Common probe:*

- *Paraphrase answer and wait for agreement or further explanation.*

When did you realise that Hip Hop was more than a style of music and how did this occur? *Common probes:*

- You mentioned the four-elements. Can you explain those to me?

- Do you need to participate in one of the four elements? Why is that?

Do you feel like you are a part of a group of likeminded people? *Common probe:*

- Tell me about where you fit in? Why is this case?

- That's interesting that you identify with (chosen element). Does that mean you see yourself differently to (people who practice the other elements)?

Do you think you can represent Hip Hop in other ways?

Why do you wear Hip Hop style, labels and brands?

If you are walking down the street and see a guy wearing a Materialism shirt, what do you think? *(The brand used to represent Australian Hip Hop varied such that it was perceived to be a local brand in the city that the informant was from)*

If you are walking down the street and see a guy wearing an Ecko shirt, what do you think?

If you are walking down the street and see a guy wearing a Fubu shirt, what do you think?

Do you read any Hip Hop magazines? If so, which ones, how often, and why?

Do you visit any web forums about Hip Hop? If so, which ones, how often, and why?

Do you go to many Hip Hop shows? How often do you go? Can you name one you have been to recently? Why did you go to this show?

That's it. Is there anything else you would like to say?

We're done. Let me thank you for time and insights, it's been a tremendous help. If you have any questions or think of anything else you would like to add, don't hesitate to give me a call. *End recording.*

APPENDIX G – CORE CATEGORIES AND CODES

Core Categories	Codes
Gender	Male
	Female
Four Elements	MCing
	Graffiti-writing
	DJing
	Breakdancing
	Other (beatboxing, producing, etc)
Australian Hip Hop Culture	Hip Hop's origins
	Arrival in Australia
	Global
	Local
	www.ozhiphop.com
	Hilltop Hoods
	Culture of Kings
Counterculture	The role of media
	Positioning against the other
	Hegemony
	Battle culture
Masculinity	Aggression
	Feminising the other
	Battle culture
	Gender performance
	Fantasy
Authenticity	Self-expression
	Imitation
	Iconic authenticity
	Indexical authenticity
	Existential authenticity
Diffusion	Diffusion of Australian Hip Hop
	Diffusion of subcultural values
	Diffusion of subcultural style
	The role of the media
Sacred and Profane	Sacred
	Profane
	Religion
	Addiction
	Iconic brands
	Mainstream
Self-expression	Expression of identity
	To represent Hip Hop culture
	To support the local culture
	Production of goods and experiences

Symbolic Consumption	Gaining access through consumption
	Homology
	Does Hip Hop style even exist
	Bricolage
	Iconic brands
	Relationships with brands
	Collectors
	Brand avoidance
	Signs are ambiguous
	Abandonment of symbolic consumption
	Mentoring
	Brand image
Motivations for Hip Hop membership	Oppositional
	Self-expression
	Fame
	Because they don't understand
	Friendship and reference group influence
	Fun
	Stress relief
	Escapism and freedom
	Addiction
Race	White
	Non-white
	Not a race thing
Transformation of Self	Experimentation with Hip Hop identity
	Identification and conformity
	Internalisation and mastery
Status	Interested non-member
	Peripheral member
	Soft-core member
	Hard-core member
	Within-group distinction
	Across-group distinction
Subcultural Capital	Embodied subcultural capital
	Objectified subcultural capital
	Subculture-social capital
	Economic capital
Other Cultures	Homies
	Skate culture
	Rave culture
	Underground Hip Hop culture
	Mainstream